The Influence Of Firm Created And User Created Contents On The Online Reputation Of Destination Management Companies In Sri Lanka Tourism Industry

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ARTICLE INFO	ABSTRACT
	This study systematically investigates the influence of Firm Created and User Created Contents on the Online Reputation of Destination Management Companies, with a focused examination within the Sri Lanka tourism industry. The research delves into the direct, linear connections between Firm Created Contents and the Online Reputation of Destination Management Companies in the Sri Lanka tourism sector, as well as the analogous relationships involving User Created Contents. Drawing upon a meticulously sampled dataset comprising 170 representatives from a list of 300 Safe and Secure listed Destination Management Companies in Sri Lanka, the findings provide compelling evidence of a robust linear relationship between User Created Contents and the Online Reputation of companies in the Sri Lanka tourism industry. However, the study's revelations challenge prevailing literature by underscoring the absence of a linear relationship between Firm Created Contents and the Online Reputation of Destination Management Companies within this specific context. Acknowledging the potential for negative content to significantly impact online reputation, the study emphasizes the paramount importance of safeguarding one's Online Reputation for Destination Management Companies. Consequently, gaining a nuanced understanding of the distinct impacts of both Firm Created Contents and User Created Contents holds substantial benefits for guiding strategic decision-making processes within this specific context.

Keywords: Firm Created Contents (FCC), User Created Contents (UCC), Online Reputation, Destination Management Companies (DMCs) |

1. INTRODUCTION

The online reputation is one of the most important elements in the digital economy that governs the online market opportunities for the companies. The reputation is controlled by the online contents that are created

by both the organizations and the customers. 20 years ago, internet was a read only web and only the organizations had the power to control the contents on the web using their marketing tools. However, the evolution of the Internet from web1.0 to web4.0 empowered the users to build contents and share them to others on the internet. Today, the contents are dynamic and both organizations and users can create them easily and share them to many others on the internet freely and instantly. The contents that are created by the organizations are known as Firm Created Contents (FCC) and the contents generated by the users are known as User Created Contents (UCC) on the internet.

The Internet has been transferred from just a read only web to intelligence connections (Nath & Iswary, 2015). These contents have an influential power on the internet to control not only the cognitive process of the online users who read these contents but also the online reputation of companies, products and their brands especially in the tourism industry (Guzzo, Ferri, & Grifoni , 2022). Most of the Destination Management Companies (DMCs) in Sri Lanka face unseen waves of reputation challenges due to the poor understanding about the online reputation and its importance in the digital tourism economy. Though the new technology adaptation by the DMCs in Sri Lanka is at a good position, their success in exploiting the opportunities in the online travel market is not at a satisfactory level due to the poor online reputation that they have on the online travel market (Ratnayaka, Tham, Azam, & Shukri, 2023). Thus, this study aims to understand the influence of the Firm Created and User Created Contents on the Online Reputation of Destination Management Companies in Sri Lanka Tourism Industry.

2. RESEARCH FRAMEWORK

2.1 Firm Created Contents

In the early stage of the internet, the FCC was the only content that was available on the worldwide web. The contents were written by small number of writers but accessed by large number of readers (Nath, Dhar, Basishtha, 2014). However, the evaluation of the internet from web1.0 to web4.0 has enabled the FCC to be more influential and popular tool by allowing the brands to use different content types to show the users very productive sharable information (Santiago, Borges-Tiago, & Tiago, 2022). The Firm Created Contents are more relevant to the consumers as these contents often communicate information related to the brands (Bleier, Harmeling, & Palmatier, 2018). FCC plays an effective role in generating UCC. The organizations must generate their own FCC and develop very effective communication mix to attract the consumers to generate UCC about the firm (Kaldeen, 2019). The PESO model is an ideal tool for generating effective FCC in the content marketing mix. This model enables the organizations to identify the type of contents that they need to develop and promote. This model was initially developed by Gini Dietrich and PESO stands for Paid, Earned, Shared, and Owned media. The Paid and Earned media are externally controlled and the Shared and Owned Media are internally controlled by the organizations (Landers, 2017). The FCC is very important for the organizations and ensuring no contents are created without proper PESO treatment is one of the most important requirements when generating online contents (Turgeon, 2020).

2.1.1 Paid & Earned Media

Though these two media are different from each other, the result of these two media are similar. Paid media includes social media ads, sponsored posts, SEO, Google AdWords, banner ads and all other paid contents. These contents often generate very good results and enhance the reputation of the companies (Landers, 2017). The algorithms that are placed in most of the online medias have the potential to get maximum reach to the paid contents (Mosley, 2022). The Earned media includes the press releases, media coverage, radio and TV interviews, influencer reviews and op-eds (Landers, 2017). These contents are created by influencers, journalists or analysts and shared to their own audience. Though the Paid media needs payments the Earned Media comes from the volunteers. These two medias have the potential to drive the traffic to the contents created through shared and owned media (Mosley, 2022).

2.1.2 Shared & Owned Media

Shared media are the contents that are shared by the organization using the social media. Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, Instagram, Dailymotion, Pinterest, SlideShare, Flickr and AuthorStream are some of the main shared medias for FCC (Landers, 2017). The Shared media is more effective when it is promoted with Paid media (Mosley, 2022). The contents that are posted in the own channels of the organization are considered as owned media. Online videos, eBooks, webinars, blog posts, shareable images, white papers, and podcasts are some of the examples for the owned media (Landers, 2017). Owned media has high level of control over the outcome it produces (Mosley, 2022).

2.3.2 User Created Contents (UCC)

Web 2.0 technology has played a pivotal role in establishing platforms that empower users to author and contribute their own content, commonly referred to as User-Created Content (UCC). UCC represents the content generated by individuals and shared on the Internet, and it wields a significant impact on consumer purchasing behavior (Bahtar & Muda, 2016). Social media and various community-oriented online platforms serve as prominent illustrations of the evolutionary progress in Web 2.0 within the digital realm. Web 3.0

technology, on the other hand, has engendered transparent, resilient, and collaborative systems on the internet, simplifying the processes of content creation, retrieval, and sharing for users (Ivanov, 2019). Web 4.0 technology has further advanced these capabilities by offering virtual assistance to users during the processes of creating, accessing, and distributing information (Khan & Javaid, 2022).

User-Created Content (UCC) bears resemblances to electronic Word of Mouth (eWOM) in that both involve individuals sharing their perspectives, convictions, and encounters regarding a product or service within the online sphere. However, it's crucial to recognize that these are distinct concepts (Thao & Shurong, 2020). Within the literature, numerous definitions and perspectives regarding electronic Word of Mouth (eWOM) have emerged. Essentially, eWOM represents the digital counterpart of traditional Word of Mouth (WOM), often colloquially referred to as "word of mouse" (Johnston, Kelly, & Kvilhaug, 2023). User-Created Content (UCC) has evolved into a pivotal component of content marketing. Given its ability to connect individuals with shared interests, UCC possesses a formidable capacity to disseminate shared experiences that can profoundly influence brands and consumer purchasing choices. Consequently, a judicious integration of UCC within the content marketing strategy is highly advisable (Lemaić, 2019). Online reviews, ratings, social media posts, and travel blogs represent key categories of User-Created Content (UCC) that exert a substantial impact on the perception and success of tourism brands.

2.3.2.1 Online Reviews & Ratings

Online reviews represent the sentiments, both positive and negative, expressed by former, current, or prospective customers regarding a product. These reviews are readily accessible to a vast online audience and have a significantly broader reach than traditional offline word-of-mouth recommendations. Furthermore, they endure and remain accessible for an extended duration. The impact of user-generated content in reviews on sales varies, contingent upon factors such as product category and its level of popularity (Moen et al., 2017). A substantial 90% of consumers engage in the practice of perusing online reviews before patronizing a business establishment, with an impressive 88% expressing a high level of trust in these reviews. Furthermore, a significant 86% of users exhibit hesitance in engaging with businesses that bear a burden of negative reviews (Saleh, 2018). It is explicitly emphasized that reviews represent a pivotal determinant in the construction and preservation of one's online reputation. Customer reviews and ratings serve as vital metrics for gauging customer satisfaction, and their ubiquity is particularly pronounced within the tourism sector today (Gayatree, 2017). Disregarding online reviews ranks among the most detrimental actions a business can take when tasked with the management of its online reputation (Kaemingk, 2020).

2.3.2.2 Social Media and Travel Blogs

A substantial majority of individuals exhibit a strong inclination to seek input from their family members and friends regarding the products they utilize, primarily through social media platforms. These platforms have successfully captured the attention of the populace, engaging their cognitive faculties and visual senses by providing genuine insights through authentic photos shared by real individuals (Lemaić, 2019). User-Generated Content (UCC) on social media has empowered customers to receive brand information from their peers rather than directly from the company itself (Patel, 2019). Blogging represents a potent instrument within the realm of electronic Word-of-Mouth (eWOM). WordPress users contribute a substantial volume of content to the tune of 70 million blog posts monthly, while an impressive 77 million new comments are actively generated by engaged readers during the same period (Ouellette , 2022). Upon perusing blog content, a noteworthy 60% of consumers report experiencing a positive disposition and subsequently engage with a brand. Furthermore, an equally significant 47% of B2B buyers indicate that they engage with 3 to 5 blog posts as a precursor to their interactions with salespersons (Moser, 2020).

2.4 Online Reputation (OR)

Constructing a favorable brand image requires the investment of considerable time and effort, often characterized by painstaking dedication. Upholding this reputation demands ongoing commitment and diligence. In the event that reputation is compromised, the repercussions for the business can be severe. Even if a website and SEO efforts are impeccably executed, the presence of a negative comment concerning subpar customer service can pose a formidable challenge to the brand's overall reputation (Dan, 2019). In today's fiercely competitive online marketplace, reputation stands as the paramount asset, amplified by the growing reliance on reviews as a trusted source of information. When confronted with decisions that require assistance, our instinct is to seek recommendations from individuals we hold in trust, primarily relying on their personal experiences and established reputations (Swaminathan, Anderson, & Song, 2019). The recent evolution of the internet has transformed the virtual realm into more than just a meeting place for individuals; it has also evolved into a comprehensive repository of knowledge. Consequently, within the context of the tourism industry, the management of online reputation has emerged as a critical and integral facet of marketing strategy (Iglesias-Sánchez, Correia, Jambrino-Maldonado, & Heras-Pedrosa, 2020).

3. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

In the context of online reputation management, it is of paramount importance to establish the variables as a foundational step before constructing the conceptual framework. Agravante (2018) articulates that a variable represents a quantifiable characteristic that exhibits variation or change throughout an experiment, whether it involves comparing results among multiple groups, individuals, or even within a single individual over time. A variable, in this context, denotes a factor that possesses the capacity for modification in terms of its quality, quantity, and magnitude. Within the realm of destination management companies' online reputation, there exist various factors that exert influence. These factors serve as the independent variables in the study, and their impact on the online reputation forms the basis for identifying the dependent variables within the scope of this dissertation. The following figure illustrate the conceptual framework of this study.
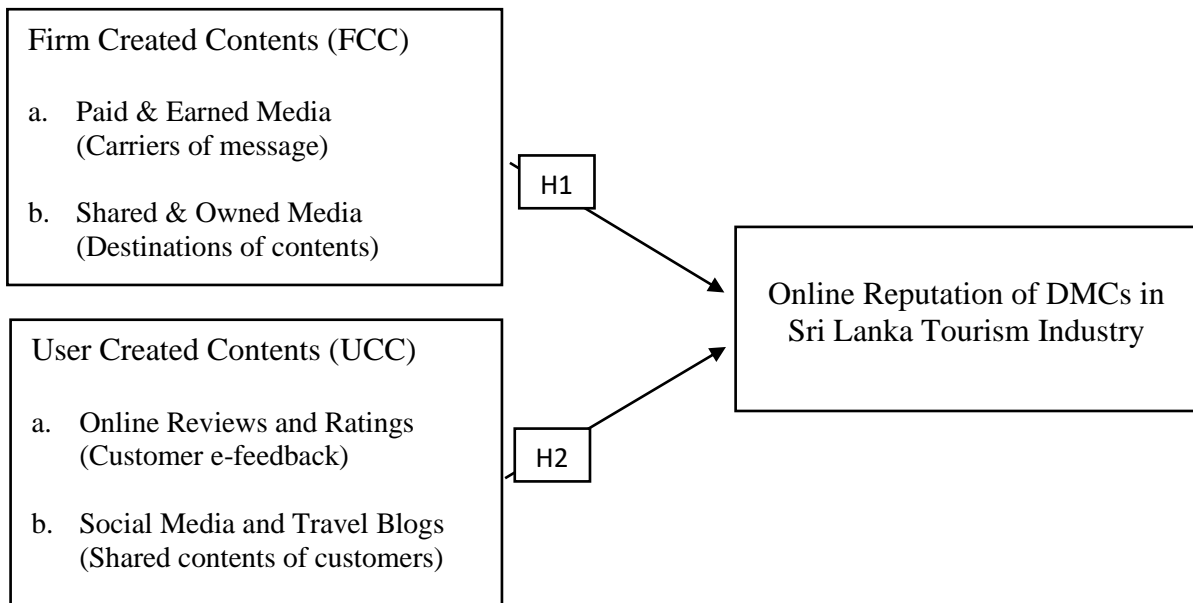
Figure 1: Conceptual Framework
Source: Authors (2023)

As depicted in Figure 1, this study incorporates two independent variables, FCC and UCC, each comprising two distinct dimensions. As per the existing literature, these two independent variables exert influence on the online reputation of Destination Management Companies within the Sri Lankan tourism industry, which constitutes the dependent variable under investigation in this study.

3.1 Sampling
For this research study, a population of 300 Destination Management Companies (Travel Agencies) registered as Safe & Secure certified agents with the Sri Lanka Tourism Development Authority, as of the list issued on April 22, 2022, was chosen. In order to achieve a confidence level of 95%, with a standard deviation of 0.5 and a confidence interval of +/- 5%, a sample size of 169 Destination Management Companies (DMCs) was determined. To ensure equitable representation of all companies within the population and facilitate a fair selection process, a simple random sampling technique was employed in this research.

3.2 Instrument Development Process
In the absence of a suitable instrument in existing literature, this study adapted a questionnaire based on empirical findings. The primary objective was to gather quantitative data to yield comprehensive insights within the study's scope. Consequently, structured Five-point Likert scale questions were incorporated into the questionnaire, aligning with each dimension and construct established in the study's conceptual framework. To ensure the reliability and validity of the adopted questionnaire, a rigorous testing process was employed. A pre-test phase was initiated using the expert review method, involving the submission of the questionnaire to five experts for their evaluation. Subsequently, three experts' feedback was considered in the refinement of this dissertation. Following the expert review, a post-test was conducted through a pilot study featuring 37 questions organized into four sections. The first section encompassed demographic inquiries, while the remaining questions were strategically designed to assess each dimension of the variables outlined in the conceptual framework. This online questionnaire was distributed to 45 randomly selected respondents from the sample, resulting in a commendable 68% response rate. The outcomes of the pilot study underscored the questionnaire's reliability, as evidenced by a Cronbach's Alpha score of .925, affirming its validity for application within this research.

3.3 Data Collection

Building upon the promising 68% response rate achieved in the pilot study, the online questionnaire was dispatched via email to a sample of 248 Destination Management Companies (DMCs), selected through the simple random sampling technique. In the wake of this survey endeavor, a total of 174 responses were garnered, resulting in a commendable response rate of 70%. Notably, three responses were excluded due to their origin outside the defined sample parameters. An additional response was omitted due to the presence of missing data. Consequently, the final count of respondents participating in this study was confirmed at 170.

3.4 Measures

The Likert scale questions incorporated a five-point scale, ranging from 1 = "Strongly disagree" to 5 = "Strongly agree," with a neutral midpoint at 3. The questionnaire comprised a total of 29 Likert scale questions, all of which were adapted from existing literature sources (Kim, 2014; Shandrow, 2013; Rabinowitz, 2019; Nyein, 2019). Within these Likert scale questions, 10 items were devoted to assessing User Created Contents (UCC), while 5 items were designated to evaluate the online reputation of Destination Management Companies within the Sri Lanka tourism industry. Additionally, the moderating impact of Online Reputation Management (ORM) was examined using 14 items within this study.

4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

4.1 Key Findings of the Demographic Analysis

Demographic factors encompassing Gender, Age, Education, Position, Salary, and Company Size were subjected to thorough examination within this research study. Particularly intriguing was the discovery that within the typically male-dominated Sri Lankan travel industry, female representation accounted for a substantial 44.7% of the study's participants. Among the 170 respondents, a significant 88.23% fell within the age bracket of 25-44, signifying a notable concentration of respondents in this age group. Moreover, educational attainment revealed that a substantial 57.6% of respondents held Bachelor's Degrees. Regarding professional roles, the majority (52.4%) occupied positions categorized as Junior Managers. In terms of monthly income, a significant proportion (44.1%) reported earnings falling within the LKR 101,000 – 200,000 range. Interestingly, the majority of respondents (60%) represented Small and Medium-sized Enterprises (SMEs) within the Company Size category, underscoring the prevalence of such enterprises in the Sri Lankan tourism industry. These findings collectively suggest a landscape characterized by a youthful demographic of educated junior managers, with an encouraging surge in female representation within decision-making roles in recent years. However, it's notable that many Sri Lankan companies remain SMEs in their nascent stages, offering average managerial salaries predominantly within the LKR 101,000 – 200,000 range.

4.2 SEM Analysis

Following the completion of demographic analysis, data examination proceeded through the application of structural equation modeling (SEM). Comprehensive assessments were undertaken to validate and establish the reliability of the data. This process encompassed path coefficient calculations, systematically ensuring the absence of multicollinearity and other potential data-related biases.

4.3 Assessment of the Measurement Model

The measurement model represents a pivotal step in examining the interrelationships between latent variables and their associated indicators. Constructing the measurement model involves linking all latent variables within a unified framework. The outcomes of this measurement model analysis offer insights into the correlations among the constructs, a crucial prerequisite before embarking on hypothesis testing. In this particular study, the measurement model comprises three latent variables: FCC (Firm-Created Content), UCC (User-Created Content), and DMC (Destination Management Companies). Each of these latent variables is assessed through their respective constructs. Specifically, FCC is observed via two observable variables: PE (Paid and Earned Media) and SO (Shared and Owned Media), while UCC is evaluated through RR (Reviews Ratings) and ST (Social Media and Travel Blogs) within this model. This study, therefore, serves to elucidate and quantify the relationships between FCC and its constituent measures, UCC and its corresponding indicators, and DMC in tandem with its associated constructs. Figure 2 provides a visual representation of the measurement model as conceptualized within this research.
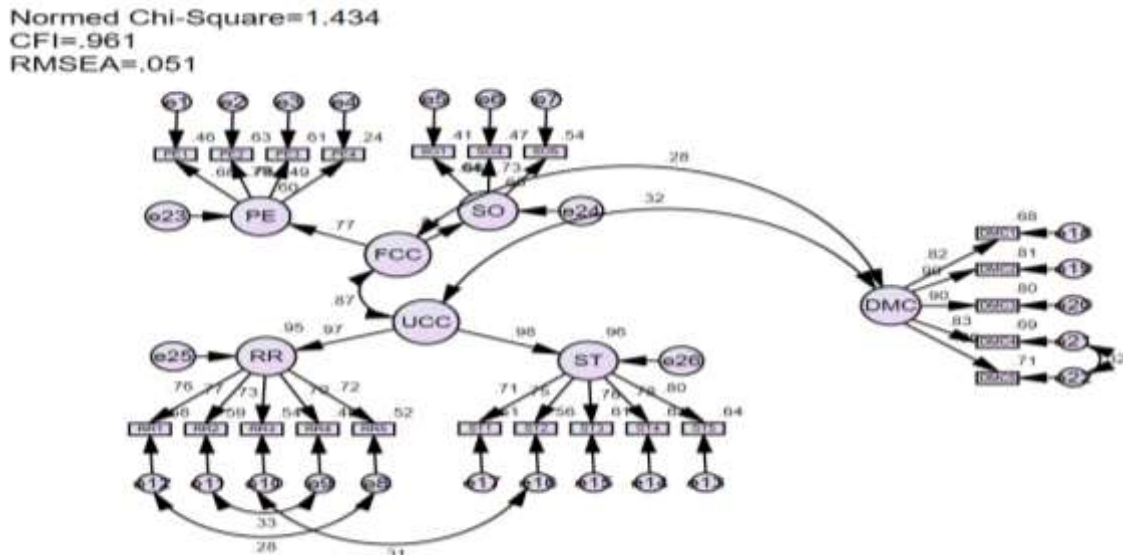
Figure 2: Measurement Model
Source: Prepared by Authors using AMOS 24 (2023)

After drawing the measurement model, the estimates were calculated. The final measurement indices are presented in the below table.

Table 1: Summery of the Model fit of Measurement Model

Fit Indices	Accepted Value	Results
Chi – Square / df	Less than 5.0	1.434
CFI	Greater than 0.9	0.961
REMSEA	Less than 0.08	0.051

Source: Prepared by Authors using AMOS 24 (2023)

Table 1 presents the outcomes of the measurement model analysis. In light of these results, several goodness-of-fit indicators provide valuable insights. The normed chi-square value, standing at 1.434, falls comfortably below the stipulated threshold of 5.0. Furthermore, the Comparative Fit Index (CFI) exhibits a value of 0.961, surpassing the minimum threshold of 0.9. Additionally, the Root Mean Square Error of Approximation (RMSEA) registers at 0.051, a figure well below the acceptable threshold of 0.08. These statistics collectively indicate that the overall model demonstrates a commendable fit. Ensuring the reliability and validity of the instrument is paramount to substantiate the accuracy of the findings within this study, as advocated by Hair et al. (2010). To this end, convergent validity, construct validity, and discriminant validity were rigorously examined. Firstly, all constructs displayed factor loadings exceeding the minimum threshold of 0.5, substantiating convergent validity. Additionally, the Average Variance Expected (AVE) for each construct surpassed the 0.5 benchmark, further reinforcing the attainment of convergent validity (Fornell and Larcker, 1981). Moreover, the assessment of construct validity, as demonstrated in Table 1, revealed that the chi-square value, Comparative Fit Index (CFI), and Root Mean Square Error of Approximation (RMSEA) values all comfortably met their respective threshold criteria, corroborating the construct validity of this research following Awang's guidelines (2012).

Assessing the internal consistency is a pivotal aspect of evaluating the reliability of the measurement model in defining the proposed latent constructs. This evaluation hinges on the Cronbach's Alpha (α) statistic, which is further examined through the Composite Reliability (CR) and the Average Variance Expected (AVE). For robust internal consistency, it is imperative that Cronbach's alpha values exceed 0.7. Additionally, CR should be greater than or equal to 0.7, while AVE should surpass or equal 0.5, in line with Awang's recommendations (2012). Researchers advocate the use of both Cronbach's alpha and Composite Reliability (CR) to assess the reliability of each combination of constructs (Bagozzi & Yi, 1988). Below, you will find a summary table showcasing the Cronbach's alpha, CR, and AVE values of this model, illuminating its internal consistency and dependability:

Table 2: Internal consistency and dependability

Construct	Cronbach's alpha (α)	AVE	CR
Firm Created Contents (FCC)	0.803	0.577	0.904
User Created Contents (UCC)	0.925	0.554	0.925
Online Reputation of DMCs	0.936	0.680	0.914

Source: Prepared by Authors using AMOS 24 (2023)

The table presented above demonstrates the Cronbach's alpha values for all the constructs, all of which exceed 0.8, surpassing the established minimum threshold of 0.7. Furthermore, the Composite Reliability (CR) for all constructs registers above 0.9, notably exceeding the threshold value of 0.7.

Given that the AVE values for all constructs comfortably adhere to the minimum threshold, it is evident that the internal consistency of the overall measurement model is not only achieved but consistently robust.

4.5 Assessment of the Structural Model

The structural model analysis serves as a critical step in scrutinizing the theoretical model's causal relationships and correlational links among latent variables. Drawing the structural model is a pivotal process designed to assess the connections between these latent variables within this study. The structural model, in essence, quantifies the associations between constructs, as highlighted by Henseler (2017). This model comprises three key constructs that are collectively examined to gauge the overall goodness of fit. These constructs include Firm Created Contents (FCC), User Created Contents (UCC), and the Online Reputation of Destination Management Companies (DMC) within the Sri Lanka Tourism Industry. Through the application of the structural model, the study seeks to elucidate and validate their causal relationships as delineated in the conceptual framework. The model, as illustrated in Figure 3, encapsulates and presents the outcomes of the structural model fit analysis, shedding light on the intricate interplay among these latent variables.
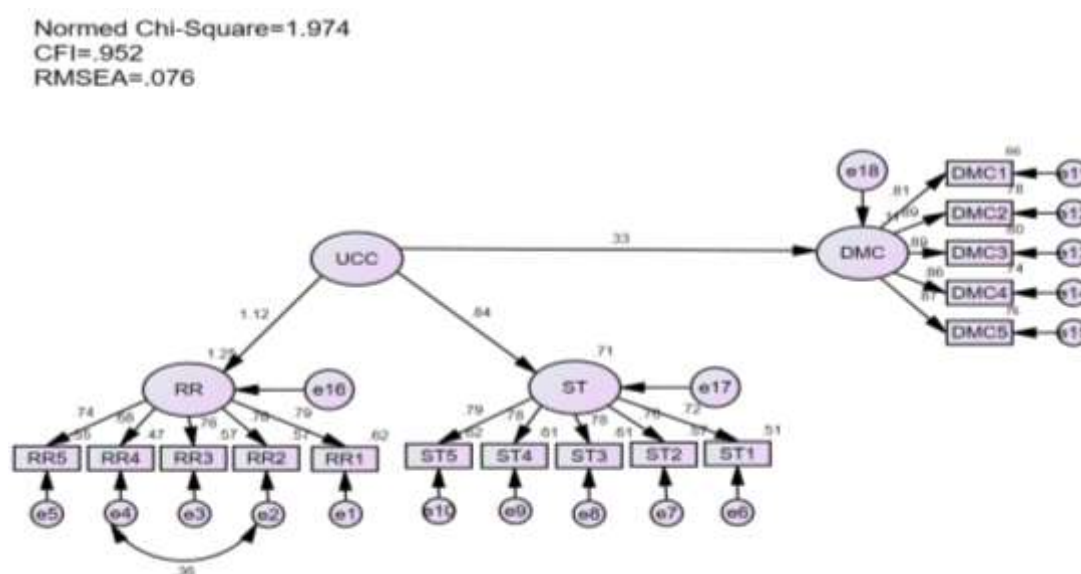

Figure 3: Structural Model
Source: Prepared by Authors using AMOS 24 (2023)

Figure 3 portrays the structural model meticulously constructed for this study. Developed utilizing AMOS 20 and grounded in data gleaned from a cohort of 170 respondents within the sample, this comprehensive latent variable model serves to articulate and delineate the intricate regression relationships among the latent constructs. Within this model, researchers have the capacity to formulate and assess hypotheses concerning the causal directionality between one latent construct and another. Following the calculation of estimates, the output page furnishes a tabulated summary of the results, as detailed in Table 3, providing valuable insights into the interrelationships and dynamics of these latent variables.

Table 3: Summery of the Model fit Structural Model

Fit Indices	Accepted Value	Results
Chi – Square / df	Less than 5.0	1.434
CFI	Greater than 0.9	0.961
REMSEA	Less than 0.08	0.051

Source: Prepared by Authors using AMOS 24 (2023)

Just as in the measurement model, the output of the structural model must also undergo rigorous assessment against predefined threshold values. As elucidated in the table above, the Normed Chi-Square registers at 1.434, a figure that comfortably resides within the established threshold of less than 5. Similarly, the Comparative Fit Index (CFI) stands at 0.961, exceeding the acceptable threshold of greater than 0.9. Additionally, the Root Mean Square Error of Approximation (RMSEA) value falls well below the stipulated threshold of less than 0.08. These findings mirror those obtained from the measurement model, thus affirming that the structural model demonstrates a remarkable fit, with all indicators satisfying the predefined criteria.

Consequently, it is reasonable to conclude that the structural model exhibits a robust fit of 100%. The maximum likelihood table under this study recorded the following results under this study.

Table 4: Regression Weights: (Group number 1 - Default model)

	Estimate	S.E.	C.R.	P
DMC <--- FCC	-.015	.654	-.023	.981
DMC <--- UCC	.637	.070	1.204	***

Source: Prepared by Authors using AMOS 24 (2023)

The presented table highlights critical statistical findings regarding the relationship between UCC (User Created Contents) and DMC (Destination Management Companies). Specifically, the p-value, as observed, falls within the threshold of less than 0.05. This indicates statistical significance, affirming a meaningful connection between UCC and DMC. The correlation coefficient (C.R) of 1.204, as derived from the analysis, underscores a positive linear correlation. In practical terms, this suggests that there is a notable and favorable association between User Created Contents and the online reputation of Destination Management Companies operating within the tourism industry of Sri Lanka. Conversely, the results pertaining to the relationship between FCC (Firm Created Contents) and DMC yield a higher p-value. This elevated p-value suggests a lack of statistical significance in the connection between Firm Created Contents and the online reputation of Destination Management Companies. Moreover, the corresponding C.R value of -.023 indicates a negligible or even negative relationship between these two variables. In essence, this signifies that there is no apparent positive association between Firm Created Contents and the online reputation of Destination Management Companies within the Sri Lankan tourism industry.

5. CONCLUSIONS

In conclusion, this study aimed to evaluate the impact of both Firm Created Contents (FCC) and User Created Contents (UCC) on the Online Reputation of Destination Management Companies (DMCs) within the dynamic Sri Lanka tourism industry. In today's fiercely competitive online travel market, maintaining a robust online reputation is crucial for success. However, the research findings revealed unexpected outcomes, challenging established literature and assumptions. The examination of FCC's relationship with the online reputation of DMCs in Sri Lanka yielded a negative regression coefficient of -0.15. Contrary to expectations, this result indicated a negative change in Online Reputation for DMCs with an increase in FCC. The statistical analysis, including standard error, Critical Ratio (C.R.), and p-value, led to the rejection of the hypothesis, suggesting that, without moderation through marketing mix strategies, there is no robust positive linear relationship between FCC and the Online Reputation of DMCs.

Conversely, the study found a strong and positive linear relationship between UCC and the Online Reputation of DMCs in the Sri Lanka Tourism Industry. The regression coefficient of 0.637 indicated a positive change in Online Reputation for DMCs with an increase in UCC. The statistical parameters, including standard error, Critical Ratio (C.R.), and p-value, supported the hypothesis, emphasizing the significance of UCC in shaping Online Reputation. The unexpected disparity between anticipated and observed results underscores the intricate nature of the variables involved. This outcome challenges conventional wisdom and highlights the importance of empirical research in unraveling real-world complexities. It prompts a reevaluation of assumptions and encourages further exploration into the nuanced factors influencing online reputation for DMCs. This study contributes to the evolving understanding of online reputation dynamics, paving the way for future investigations in this field.

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