

June 2020

Qualitative Analysis of Users' Negative Reviews on TripAdvisor: International Tourists' Reviews on Gyeongbokgung Palace in Seoul, Korea

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Recommended Citation

Hong, Jung Eun (2020) "Qualitative Analysis of Users' Negative Reviews on TripAdvisor: International Tourists' Reviews on Gyeongbokgung Palace in Seoul, Korea," *International Journal of Geospatial and Environmental Research*: Vol. 7 : No. 1 , Article 5.

Available at: <https://dc.uwm.edu/ijger/vol7/iss1/5>

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Qualitative Analysis of Users' Negative Reviews on TripAdvisor: International Tourists' Reviews on Gyeongbokgung Palace in Seoul, Korea

Abstract

With the rise of Internet, many people have shared quantitative and qualitative feedback on their travel experiences on travel websites. As the largest travel site, TripAdvisor allows users to post reviews; conduct discussions with other users; and rate destinations, hotels, restaurants, and attractions. Through thematic and discourse analysis of user reviews on TripAdvisor, this study gives tourists' negative reviews of visiting Gyeongbokgung Palace in Seoul, Korea. The study findings show that tourists evaluated the palace was not real, impressive, interesting, tourist friendly, and neither was it worth visiting. The findings of this study may be helpful in expanding research scopes in Korean tourism studies. They also provide useful resources for the Korean tourism industry and improve the quality of its services and products.

Keywords

negative reviews, online reviews, user-generated content, Korean tourism, qualitative analysis

1 INTRODUCTION

The Internet has played an important role in promoting tourism. Many people share quantitative and qualitative feedback, known as user-generated content (i.e., online reviews), on their travel experiences (e.g., destinations, attractions, hotels, restaurants, and exhibitions) on travel websites (Ayeh et al. 2013; Burgess et al. 2009). This collection of user-generated content is often turned into rankings and review scores that enormously affect the travel planning and decision-making process (Cox et al. 2009; Fotis et al. 2012; Gretzel et al. 2008; O'Connor 2008). Frequent travelers consider peer reviews to be important and tend to be significantly influenced by them (Gretzel et al. 2008). When planning their trips, these travelers mostly rely on user-generated content to come up with ideas or narrow down their choices (Ibid.). Travelers' such behavior can be explained by tourist information search behavior, which refers to travelers' tendency to search for useful and reliable information and use it in their decision-making process, including selecting the destination, lodging, activities, and transportation (Fodness and Murray 1999; Gursoy and McCleary 2003). The Internet is helpful in greatly reducing information search cost by decreasing time, costs, and the required effort to search. At the same time, because of information overload on the Internet, tourists often have difficulty in assessing the usefulness and credibility of information (Ayeh et al. 2013; Liu and Park 2015).

It seems that the majority of users consider such online user reviews more useful and reliable than information produced by sellers (Bickart and Schindler 2001). In fact, over 80% of people consider online reviews significant when making travel decisions (Gretzel et al. 2008). In academia, researchers in tourism and hospitality have also been paying attention to online reviews because they are important resources to identify and analyze tourists' behaviors, perceptions, and experiences (Xiang and Gretzel 2010; Yoo and Gretzel 2008). Some scholars have focused on quantitative elements of online reviews, such as the number, length, and ratings of reviews (Melian-Gonzalez et al. 2013; Mudambi and Schuff 2010). Others have investigated the influence of reviewers' identity and expertise on the usefulness and credibility of online reviews (Racherla and Friske 2012). The qualitative characteristics of online reviews (e.g., reviews' readability and users' affective reaction to reviews and experiences) were also explored (Liu and Park 2015; Schuckert et al. 2015).

Interestingly, negative user reviews are considered more helpful and persuasive than positive reviews because people seem to find more useful, specific, and credible information in them (Chevalier and Mayzlin 2006; Fiske 1980). According to Maheswaran and Meyers-Levy (1990), people perceive negative information as more informative, significant, and convincing than positive information. Prospect theory can be used to explain people's different perceptions of opposing information. It refers to people's sensitivity and attention to perceived loss compared to perceived gains when making decisions under risk and uncertainty (Kahneman and Tversky 1979). Lee et al. (2017) reported that negative reviews "play a more crucial role in consumers' information processing and decision-making" (762). Hoteliers also have focused on negative reviews because "even a single negative review can have powerful economic repercussions" (Vásquez 2014: 9). However, even though online users consider negative online reviews more helpful, insightful, and diagnostic, excessively negative emotional language in a review often reduces its merits (Lee et al. 2017). Lately, many online users prefer to express their negative experiences of a travel service or

product directly on a vendor's social network channel (e.g., Facebook) in addition to on travel-related websites (Pantano and Di Pietro 2013).

Some studies have used negative online reviews on TripAdvisor as their main dataset. Lee et al. (2017) collected online user reviews of more than 400 hotels in New York City on TripAdvisor. Using text mining and negative binomial regression methods, the authors analyzed more than 60,000 positive and negative reviews that users voted as helpful. The results of analysis showed whether positive or negative reviews had a stronger impact on the patterns of helpfulness votes and the extent to which negative emotional language was influential. Additionally, Dinçer and Alrawadieh (2017) qualitatively analyzed the content of 424 negative reviews posted for 14 five-star hotels in Amman, Jordan and using the inductive approach, found 11 complaint categories. Vásquez (2011) focused on the discourse of negative online reviews, examining discourse characteristics of 100 negative hotel reviews on TripAdvisor.

Although there are many studies that have explored negative online reviews on hotels, few studies have focused on cultural heritage sites (Munar and Ooi 2012; Yoo and Lee 2015). Cultural and historical tourist attraction sites are crucial to develop a destination brand image because they provide unique characteristics for a particular place (Prentice and Andersen 2007). Tourists seek for experiencing cultural authenticity by visiting heritage sites (Waller and Lea 1999). Several researchers reported that tourists have their own preconceived images of a destination's authenticity and tend to intentionally confirm their expected authenticity when they visit a site (McIntosh and Prentice 1999; Prentice and Andersen 2007). Moreover, their heritage tourism experiences often become plentiful while sharing their experiences with other people (Ibid.). Therefore, online user reviews are important to formulate both tourists' expectations and experiences of a particular site (Munar and Ooi 2012). Besides, identification of visitors' needs is a high priority in heritage tourism industry to attract existing and prospect visitors (Misiura 2006). To fill this gap, this study qualitatively examined the descriptions of international tourists' negative reviews of one popular heritage attraction site, Gyeongbokgung Palace, in Seoul, Korea. Specifically, this study answers the following research question:

- How do international tourists describe their negative evaluations of visiting Gyeongbokgung Palace in Seoul, Korea?

2 METHODOLOGY

2.1 Context of the Study

In this study, users' written reviews on TripAdvisor provide the source of the online context. Among various travel websites, TripAdvisor is considered "the most prominent stand-alone user-generated review site" (O'Connor 2008: 51). It is the largest travel site in the world and contains approximately 500 million reviews for over 7 million destinations, hotels, restaurants, and attractions (Law 2006; Miguéns et al. 2008; TripAdvisor 2019a). Users voluntarily produce most of the information posted on TripAdvisor (Miguéns et al. 2008). Users post reviews; conduct discussions with other users; and rate destinations, hotels, restaurants, and attractions. They can upload their own photos and videos to TripAdvisor, as well (TripAdvisor 2019a).

The author focused only on tourist attraction sites, specifically the “Things to do” section, which lists popular tourist attractions at a certain destination. TripAdvisor allows users to rate each tourist attraction according to one of five categories—“Excellent” (five stars), “Very good” (four stars), “Average” (three stars), “Poor” (two stars), and “Terrible” (one star)—and to write a review to share their personal experiences with other users. Only registered users can submit reviews of a site, but anyone can read the reviews without logging in. When writing a review, users need to provide information, such as an overall rating, a title, review content, purpose of visit, time of visit, and other optional information (e.g., recommended length of visit, parking, and service dog availability) (Ibid.). Reviews are primarily text-based with an option to add a photo. The review size is unlimited, but it should be more than 100 characters. Once the review is submitted, TripAdvisor moderates it using its online checking system for lack of bias, family-friendliness, and recency (Ibid.). Most reviews are posted online within 24 to 48 hours, but some reviews may be rejected, if they include inappropriate content (e.g., use of non-family friendly language and personal assaults) (Ibid.). Therefore, not all submitted reviews are publicly available. A review stays online permanently unless the author removes it (Ibid.). There is no limit on the amount of reviews that can be posted per tourist attraction. Such written reviews are a form of asynchronous communication, which means that interactions between authors and readers do not occur simultaneously. The only available interaction option between them is the option to “Thank” the author by clicking the thumbs-up icon.

Although numerous studies have used online reviews as their main dataset, the ethical guidelines for managing and treating online reviews are still somewhat vague (Vásquez 2014). Based on the Association of Internet Researchers’ (2002) guidelines, the author collected online reviews written by users who agreed to make their reviews non-confidential and publicly available when submitting them. The author did not collect identifiable information (i.e., user IDs) or interact with users. All users may be adults because users need be 18 years of age or older to use TripAdvisor’s services (2019b). Moreover, sensitive topics were not discussed on selected reviews. Therefore, obtaining informed consent was not necessary because this study falls into the pre-existing public data category (Bailey et al. 2012; Mackiewicz 2010).

2.2 Data Extraction

This study focused on one major cultural heritage site, Gyeongbokgung Palace, which is the most popular historical site on TripAdvisor’s list of “Things to do” in Seoul, Korea (Figure 1). As the main royal palace of the Joseon dynasty, a Korean dynastic kingdom that lasted from 1392 to 1910, it has played a significant role for Korea's tourism destination management (Gyeongbokgung Palace Management Office 2019; Park 2009). Gyeongbokgung Palace was built in 1395 and was the kings’ residence, as well as the seat of the government of Joseon (Ibid.). However, it was destroyed by a fire during the Imjin War¹ (1592–1598) and then systematically destroyed by Japan in the early 20th century when Korea was under Japanese rule (Ibid.). In 1990, the Korean government started its first palace reconstruction project. The project ended in 2010 with 25% of the original palace rebuilt (Ibid.). Currently, the palace is undergoing the government’s second reconstruction project, which will be completed in 2045 and will restore the

¹ Japan invaded Joseon twice: first in 1592 and second in 1597.

palace to its original design (Ibid.). The official website provides tour information, including tour course, for international visitors (Figure 2).



Figure 1. Geunjeongjeon, the main throne hall of Gyeongbokgung Palace (Source: “IMG_4442” by digitalarch is licensed under CC BY-ND 2.0.

<https://ccsearch.creativecommons.org/photos/a7196bc8-fc3d-4cb4-9716-de628221c592>).



Figure 2. A map of Gyeongbokgung Palace (Source: Gyeongbokgung Palace Management Office. http://www.royalpalace.go.kr:8080/html/eng_gbg/guide/gyeongbokgung.pdf).

The author collected user reviews on Gyeongbokgung Palace in December 2019. During the data collection period, there were a total of 10,518 reviews written in various languages for Gyeongbokgung Palace. This study only considered reviews written in English²; these totaled 6,114 at the time of data collection. To collect only negative reviews, the author first sorted out reviews using the overall rating categories (Excellent, Very good, Average, Poor, and Terrible) and then collected reviews under the “Terrible” (one star) and “Poor” (two stars) categories. There were 15 “Terrible” reviews and 53 “Poor” reviews. A total of 68 negative reviews were posted from June 2008 to June 2019. Each user’s review was used as a unit of analysis. The data was extracted manually by simply copying the information to an MS Excel spreadsheet, including the review title, content, posting date, demographic information (e.g., age, sex, and location, if available), and date of visit. Manual data extraction was possible because there were only 68 reviews. Once finishing structuring data in the Excel spreadsheet, it was imported to QSR NVivo for further analysis. The average number of words in the reviews was 65; the reviews ranged from 14 to 561 words. Among 68 reviewers, 55 reviewers shared their countries of residence: Singapore (17), China (6), United States (6), Australia (4), Canada (2), Japan (2), Malaysia (2), Philippines (2), Spain (2), United Kingdom (2), and so on. Less than half of the reviewers made their age and sex information available on their profiles³, so the author did not focus on the demographic information in the analysis.

2.3 Data Analysis Methods

In this study, thematic and discourse analysis methods were employed. First, thematic analysis was conducted to identify commonly shared patterns of negative reviews. Thematic analysis allows a researcher to code emerging categories and themes from the data based on his/her interpretation instead of on predetermined categories as in a quantitative analysis (Paulus and Wise 2019). Therefore, thematic analysis is a useful approach to examine major patterns and themes in data (Braun and Clarke 2006). Using QSR NVivo, the imported MS Excel spreadsheet was analyzed. The author read each review carefully and found repetitive content. Initially, 22 codes were developed and then grouped some of the similar codes together to form categories and eventually, themes (Braun and Clarke 2006; Caplan and Purser 2019; Maxwell and Miller 2008).

The author then moved onto discourse analysis to explore ways of discourse functioning and performance in user reviews. Discourse analysis helps identify identity, power, and social class in online communication data (Paulus and Wise 2019). In particular, this approach focuses on “the constructive and performative properties of language” (Willig 2014: 344). Using discourse analysis, the author identified different patterns of reviewers’ language use to emphasize their negative evaluations and feelings and to make their reviews more credible. Because there was no research collaborator,

² The author excluded reviews written in Korean to pay attention to international travelers’ experiences. As stated, not all reviewers shared their residential countries, and reviewers’ countries of residence do not represent their nationalities. It is also possible that Korean travelers may leave reviews in English. Therefore, in this study, the author assumed that reviews in English were written by international travelers. For reference, there were two negative reviews (in the “Poor” category) written in Korean.

³ Among 68 reviewers, only 15 people shared their age information, whereas 24 people shared their sex information.

the author ensured the quality of the research findings by repeating the analysis process multiple times and keeping a journal diary.

3 FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Based on data analysis results, this study identified five themes of tourists' negative reviews of Gyeongbokgung Palace: (1) everything is fake; (2) it is less impressive than other palaces; (3) how boring can a palace be!; (4) it is tourist unfriendly; and (5) skip it or go somewhere else. Each theme is elaborated below.

3.1 Everything is Fake

As stated earlier, Gyeongbokgung Palace was destroyed by a fire during the Imjin War and then by Japan during the era of Japanese colonialism. The Korean government has been doing extensive reconstruction work to return the palace to its original condition. However, it seems that some tourists did not like the repaired version because it did not seem historical enough. Several tourists were shocked when they *"found out that nothing, not even the main gate is original"* and thought *"everything is fake."* These travelers seemed disappointed to see the repainted, newer-looking palace because it was *"not what I want[ed] to see in a historically significant place."* They particularly felt that *"rebuild[ing] with new materials [is] taking away some of the buzz and ambiance!"* One reviewer expressed his or her disappointment with the fact that *"the whole lot was no more than 20 years old"* by stating *"I have underwear older than that!"*

This finding is in line with the previous studies. According to Lee (2013), the main purpose of tourists' visits to four historical palaces in Seoul (i.e., Gyeongbokgung, Changdeokgung, Changgyeonggung, and Deoksugung) was to learn about the Korean history. Hence, travelers' negative feelings and reactions to reconstructed historical buildings may be reasonable. The results of the current study clearly indicate that tourists expect to see genuine historical places even if they are old and damaged because they believe that *"you can't rebuild history."* After seeing the newly repainted and reconstructed buildings, some reviewers complained that *"it is just too touristy."* The reviewers probably thought that Gyeongbokgung Palace was rebuilt only to attract visitors rather than to preserve Korean history. The Cultural Heritage Administration of Korea (2015) announced that because of the rapid increase of the number of visitors to Gyeongbokgung Palace, the reconstruction project has been scaled down to avoid inconveniencing them, and the project completion date has been extended. Based on the results of this study, the government's approach may need to be changed to focus on reconstructing the palace buildings as they originally were (i.e., during the Joseon dynasty).

Furthermore, several travelers complained that they could not go inside the buildings, presumably for safety and security reasons. One reviewer even referred to the palace as the *"Do Not Enter Palace"* because of the many "Do Not Enter" signs. The reviewer felt *"a great dismay as many rooms are boarded up."* Because most buildings in the palace have been reconstructed recently, travelers could not understand the prohibition against going inside them. One reviewer specifically commented, *"Why build a complex at all if not to open it up and show it off? I could understand it if it were 500 years old, but 20, no."* If the buildings had been reconstructed to emulate their

original looks, travelers may have understood why they could not go inside them. This negative experience seems to be critical but preventable to a certain degree. One solution would be to allow visitors to see the inside of some parts of the historic royal palace. If that is not possible, there should be a clear explanation of the reason instead of just the “Do Not Enter” signs.

3.2 It is Less Impressive than Other Palaces

Several tourists expressed disappointment with how unimpressive Gyeongbokgung Palace seemed in comparison with palaces in other countries. The most frequently mentioned palace was the Forbidden City in Beijing, China. Tourists probably thought these two palaces were comparable because (a) they are the most representative palace in each country, and (b) as neighboring East Asian countries, Korea and China have similar cultures and histories. These reviewers called Gyeongbokgung Palace “*a sad replica*,” “*a miniature version*,” or “*a shrunk-down version*” of the Forbidden City in China. For them, the size of a palace seemed to be an important evaluation criterion.

The negative reviews often emphasized the reviewers’ visit to the Forbidden City.

- (a) “*Having seen the palace in China, the Gyeongbokgung Palace is really nothing in comparison*”; and
- (b) “*Having just visited the Forbidden City in Beijing in March 2013, this palace was not really very impressive.*”

This type of review can be described as an expression of expertise; the demonstration of a reviewer’s identity as an expert can often make for a good, credible review (Pinch and Kesler 2011). In other words, expertise is one of the main components to increase perceptions of the credibility of reviews (Mackiewicz 2010). According to Vásquez (2014), by recalling their previous travel experiences, reviewers tend to stress their travel expertise. This makes them seem to be qualified reviewers and helps attract other users (Ibid.). Reading the above two reviews may make other users see Gyeongbokgung Palace as “*nothing special*”; if they want to see an Asian royal palace, they may consider going to the Forbidden City in China instead.

In addition to the Forbidden City, some reviewers compared palaces in Europe, Japan, or Thailand with Gyeongbokgung Palace.

- (a) “*Compared to palaces in Europe, this palace is very plain and underwhelming*”; and
- (b) “*If you have seen any European, Chinese, or Japanese palaces/temples, this will be a bit of a let-down.*”

Not only are other palaces bigger than Gyeongbokgung Palace, but other countries’ “*better and more luxury royal residences*” seem to be the major reason travelers are unsatisfied with Gyeongbokgung Palace.

3.3 How Boring can a Palace be!

Some reviewers stated that Gyeongbokgung Palace was not an interesting place for various reasons. Most frequently, they complained that there was “*nothing much to see*” in the palace. One reviewer even sarcastically said, “*probably i duno [sic] how to*

appreciate wide 'empty' palace." There are several buildings in the palace, but each building's structure and external appearance are quite similar; therefore, multiple travelers are not very excited to see them.

Several reviewers also criticized a lack of activities to keep visitors engaged. At the palace, gate guard ceremonies, such as the changing of the royal guard, gate guard duty performance, and military training, are held a couple of times daily. However, it seems that some travelers did not find the ceremonies interesting because they were simply *"a group of men walking out in a line and/or walking around in circle before walking back."* Moreover, travelers who brought their children shared that their *"kids were bored inside 5 minutes."* They suggested avoiding the palace if one was on a family trip. Reviews stating specific demographics (e.g., age, nationality/ethnicity, family or solo travel) are especially helpful for users with similar demographics (Vásquez 2014). This is known as perceptual homophily, which refers to people's tendency to interact with others when they have a shared identity, interest, and mindset (Brown et al. 2007). Perceptual homophily also refers to people's tendency to trust others who are similar to them (Bruyn and de Lilien 2008). Therefore, travelers who plan to visit with their family members may trust a reviewer who went on a family trip more than other reviewers.

Lee (2013) also found that many tourists thought major historical palaces in Seoul were somewhat boring, banal, and static instead of being interesting, fun, and engaging. To make historical sites more interesting, Lee (2013) suggested developing various customized activity programs that tourists could participate in (e.g., hands-on experiences) and expanding the available programs (e.g., conducting seasonal exhibitions). These suggestions would make tourists feel more engaged and that Gyeongbokgung Palace was worth visiting.

3.4 It is Tourist Unfriendly

Several tourists pointed out that Gyeongbokgung Palace was not tourist friendly for various reasons. The most frequently cited reason was a lack of information. Tourists mentioned that not much visitor information was provided at the site. For instance, one reviewer described her or his inability to enter a particular building because she or he did not make a reservation: *"Nowhere did I see any indication that you could book, indeed had to book, in order to get inside, not even in the official booklet."* A lack of not only general tourist information but also signs and descriptions for individual buildings was mentioned: *"There is not even a single sign to explain the history";* and *"There is generally inadequate information (plaques, descriptions) to really appreciate the grounds and the replica buildings."* For this reason, several reviewers suggested that *"If you really want to appreciate the site, a tour guide is needed";* otherwise, *"it might not make any sense to you."*

Furthermore, some reviewers pointed out the wheelchair unfriendliness of the palace. Although the site does have provisions for disabled people, they do not seem to be adequate. Specifically, one reviewer mentioned, *"This is not easy for wheelchair although they provide wheelchair. The rocky uneven road made [it] difficult to push the wheelchair."* Another reviewer stated that, *"There are some ramps for handicap access, but there are also many steps."* Although only two reviewers mentioned non-inclusiveness of the palace, inaccessibility to people with a mobility disability seems to be a critical issue because it can violate basic human rights (Tao et al. 2019). Making tourism facilities accessible to everyone has been an important agenda of the United Nations World Tourism Organization (UNWTO) (2019). Thus, any types of tourism

destination sites and facilities (e.g., physical environment, commercial sites, transportation systems, historic sites, and public facilities and services) are recommended to be accessible and enjoyable by any tourists, including people with disabilities (Ibid.).

Another cited reason for Gyeongbokgung Palace seeming tourist unfriendly was the unhelpful staff members:

Our group of 5 from Europe had our last day in Seoul and we got to the palace to see the grounds. The main palace closes very early at about 5:30pm. We got to the door at 5:30 which is the last ticketing time, and the man would not let us through...The ticketing man and other man who guards the entrance were both so cold and without feeling...I led the group there and tried to explain in Korean and [sic] was rebuffed so coldly. There's no ombuds service and no customer service in Korea to help improve this kind of poor service, which is too bad since people come with the expectation to be delighted by their experience here.

Personal interactions with staff members can affect a tourist's experience enormously. Although the study did not use narrative analysis because of its small amount of applicable data, the above review would be well suited to such an analysis. According to Sparks and Browning (2010), when online users share their experience as a story, other users tend to trust their reviews more than others'.

Moreover, the presence of “*way too many tourists*” seemed to make other visitors feel uncomfortable. Visitors wearing traditional Korean clothes called hanbok are allowed free admission to the four royal palaces in Seoul. Therefore, “*the palace is now overrun by tourists that rent hanboks and are only interested in taking their posed photos, without appreciating the beauty and history of Gyeongbokgung [Palace].*” Seeing a “*bunch of people dressing the same way and taking selfies*” seems to be an unpleasant experience for others who want to learn and understand Korean history and culture. The last reason tourists considered the palace unfriendly was the inconvenience of using its restroom facilities: “*The toilet is pretty clean, but you need to walk some distance,*” and “*There is also a lack of places to rest and get a break from the sun.*”

Many scholars have investigated the attributes to make of a destination image to understand tourists' behaviors and destination selection process. They have identified various important attributes for developing a positive or negative image of a certain tourism destination (e.g., travel cost, physical environment, activities, and culture) (Baloglu and McCleary 1999; Hankinson 2005). According to Cho (1997), sufficient travel information, convenience of facilities, friendly people, and lack of crowding at a site are examples of the amenity attribute category of destination image. Several studies have emphasized the friendliness of local people in particular (Baloglu and McCleary 1999; Chen and Hsu 2000; Cho 1997). Therefore, the reasons that tourists considered Gyeongbokgung Palace a tourist unfriendly site seem to be critical attributes that make up an unpleasant image of Gyeongbokgung Palace.

3.5 Skip it or Go Somewhere Else

The results of this study show that negative reviews often contain helpful recommendations for other travelers. The first type of recommendation is related to the duration of the visit. Because of a lack of engaging activities, many reviewers suggested spending less than an hour at the palace. Second, reviewers provided information for

planning a trip according to one's length of stay. For travelers who are staying in Seoul for a short period of time, a reviewer said, "*You can pass this place.*" However, someone who is staying longer should certainly consider visiting the palace.

Third, reviewers often mentioned alternative historical sites. Several reviewers mentioned that it was better to visit other sites in Seoul to learn about Korean history. There are two museums, the National Folk Museum of Korea and the National Palace Museum of Korea, at the site of Gyeongbokgung Palace, and the entrance fee for the palace covers the ticket fees for both museums. One reviewer specifically stated, "*You will get more history and artifacts if you go to the Palace museum to the right of the main entrance and its FREE!*" Another reviewer "*recommend[ed] going straight to the National Folk Museum first, and then making your way through the palace*" because it is easier to appreciate the palace after seeing and learning about the artifacts at the museum. Other sites were also mentioned: "*Namsangol Hanok Village⁴ was a much better place to spend your time*"; and "*I actually much preferred Changdeokgung and Deoksugung⁵ palaces though.*" Some reviewers recommended a nearby attractive place or neighborhood people could walk from Gyeongbokgung Palace:

I would not make a special visit to this palace...However if you are in the area, you should not miss the interesting local designer shops, cafes and creative houses in the intricate lane ways east of Samcheongdonggil. If you were here around dinner time, there are also numerous restaurants to choose from along this picturesque road.

Prior studies reported that when people complain about something or some place, they always provide alternative recommendations, suggestions, and advice (Murphy and Neu 1996; Vásquez 2011). According to Vásquez (2011), many tourists' complaints about hotels involve an imperative declaration, such as "I would highly recommend you stay somewhere else!" (1712). Similar expressions could be found in this study, including "*Go somewhere else*" and "*Don't go out your way to go.*" Furthermore, based on the recommendations of the reviewers, this study was able to explore how they evaluated their visits to Gyeongbokgung Palace and how valuable their advice to other fellow tourists was.

4 CONCLUSION

This study examined the descriptions for tourists' negative reviews at a popular historical site in Seoul, Korea. By focusing on one site, Gyeongbokgung Palace, this study paid special attention to identify the specific content and patterns of tourists' negative reviews on TripAdvisor. The findings showed that tourists evaluated their visits to Gyeongbokgung Palace negatively because (1) they did not see the real Korean history; (2) the palace was less impressive than palaces in other countries; (3) there were no interesting activities; (4) they felt uncomfortable and inconvenienced; and (5) it was

⁴ This is a Korean folk village where visitors can see traditional Korean houses, gardens, a performance stage, a pavilion, and a plaza.

⁵ Changdeokgung and Deoksugung, along with Gyeongbokgung, were the grand Seoul palaces of the Joseon dynasty.

not worth a visit, and it would have been better to go somewhere else. This study achieved its objective because the findings helped identify the major reasons tourists had negative feelings and experiences at a representative Korean historical site in Seoul, Korea and the various patterns of the descriptions they used to emphasize their reviews and share them with others.

However, there is room for improvement. This study only focused on one particular historical site, so its results cannot be generalized. Additionally, because of language limitations, reviews written only in English were included in this study. This limited scope of data made it impossible to examine non-English speaking tourists' negative reviews, even though tourists from various countries may have different perspectives on their visit to Gyeongbokgung Palace. It would be interesting to explore how different cultural backgrounds affect tourists' experiences and perspectives in future studies.

Analyzing what tourists like is important, but researchers and practitioners need to pay attention to what they dislike, as well. Because few studies have examined the content and discourse of tourists' written negative online reviews on cultural heritage sites, I believe this study provides a new research direction to heritage tourism studies and the heritage tourism industry. Academically, this study fills a gap in Korean tourism research due to a lack of negative user review studies focusing on major historical tourist attractions in Seoul, Korea. The findings of this research can support those of other researchers in the same context. Further, more international travelers are visiting Seoul these days, and I believe the study findings can be useful resources to attract more of them. Furthermore, the results may be useful for any stakeholders interested in the development of the heritage tourism industry in Korea (e.g., government officers in the tourism department, retailers, and travel agencies). By reflecting and adopting the results of this study, they may find ways to make tourists appreciate and learn about Korean history and enjoy their time at heritage sites in Korea. In the future, additional research should be conducted investigating tourists' negative reviews at major tourist attraction sites in Korea to attract more tourists from all over the world.

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