

Abstract

When in need of a map, over 2 billion people consult Google Maps. Besides cartography, this tool offers information and opinions on all kinds of places, including museums. Since memory institutions are important sites of preserving and interpreting cultural identity, it becomes vital to investigate the impact digital platforms such as Google Maps have on their visitors. This research aims to measure how much Google Maps' reviews influence the choice of people to visit (or not visit) museums. For that, around 20 Erasmus students in Prague were surveyed on their use of the platform and its tools, their cultural habits, and their overall use of technology. From those, five were interviewed and had their Google Maps account analyzed. Overall, all students relied on Google Maps in some way or another, with most underestimating the impact the tool had on their choices. They were most affected by negative reviews that undermined a museum's social status and positive reviews that deemed the exhibitions as interesting/interactive. Google Maps overall showed commercial museums to most students looking for museums on the platform and showed positive reviews on top of negative ones, actively hiding reviews with a political bias. The work highlights the impact this tool could have on European culture, by influencing toponymic discourse, leading citizens to non-educational museums, normalizing the commercialization of cultural attractions, and unjustly comparing museums.

Keywords: Google Maps, Museums, Cultural Heritage, Prague, Online Reviews, Erasmus Students, digital platforms