

GESTIÓN DE LA IMAGEN DE MARCA DE DESTINOS TURÍSTICOS MADUROS USANDO HERRAMIENTAS ONLINE. EL CASO DE LA COSTA BRAVA

Jaume Marin Rabiol

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TESIS DOCTORAL

Gestión de la imagen de marca de destinos turísticos maduros usando herramientas online. El caso de la Costa Brava

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Compendio de artículos

Jaume Marin Rabiol

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Dirigida por:

Dr. Lluís Prats Planagumà

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Girona, 15 de Abril del 2022

El Dr. Lluís Prats Planagumá, de la Universitat de Girona,

DECLARO,

Que el trabajo titulado "Gestión de la imagen de marca de destinos turísticos maduros usando herramientas online. El caso de la Costa Brava", que presenta Jaume Marin Rabiol para obtención del título de doctor, se ha realizado bajo mi dirección.

Y que para que así conste y tenga los efectos oportunos, firmo el presente documento.

Firma

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Esta tesis doctoral, titulada "Gestión de la imagen de marca de destinos turísticos

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RESUMEN

La promoción de los destinos turísticos ha evolucionado de forma exponencial con el paso del tiempo y el uso de internet. Este cambio ha generado diferentes actitudes en el turista y en su forma de consumir información sobre el destino. Frente a esta evolución, los destinos maduros de sol y playa se han enfrentado a retos para rejuvenecerse y aumentar su atractivo turístico en un entorno altamente competitivo, a través del uso de innovaciones tecnológicas que les permite estar en las mentes de los visitantes, así como la previsión de la demanda turística a partir del conocimiento de este. La DMO (Destination Marketing Organization) es uno de los máximos responsables en la evolución del turismo focalizándose en la interacción con el visitante y en la gestión para la atracción del grupo objetivo para el destino. Esta investigación tiene como objetivos, en primer lugar, la formulación de estrategias del destino por parte de una DMO mediante la previsión de la demanda turística usando los datos e información sobre los turistas que han visitado el destino, y en segundo lugar, la influencia de las acciones de marketing y branding de la DMO sobre el destino. A partir del entendimiento de estos dos objetivos, se puede prever comportamientos futuros en destinos maduras.

Teniendo en cuenta los objetivos planteados por el autor, la tesis se concentra en el análisis de las acciones llevadas a cabo por destinos maduros en la Costa Brava para evocar una imagen deseada de los visitantes, la toma de decisiones de la DMO considerando los sistemas de información y finalmente, la definición de escenarios futuros utilizando datos históricos.

En primera medida se realiza un análisis a nivel regional de las personas que generan interés e influencian el cambio de percepción del destino. Se hace una revisión de una estrategia de marketing llevada a cabo por la DMO de la región, en donde se presentan las ventajas y puntos positivos de una acción de promoción llevada a cabo por el Patronato de Turismo de Costa Brava Girona en 2015 sobre la forma de comunicación del destino por parte de *travel bloggers* quienes presentan el destino a partir de la

construcción de un relato propio a través de sus redes sociales, y conseguir con esto mayor credibilidad que la que puede conseguir la DMO. Se procesaron las acciones y se llevó a cabo un estudio de las conversaciones y el impacto generado por el Congreso TBEX (Travel Bloggers Exchange) en las redes sociales.

En segundo lugar, se realiza una revisión en un entorno local dentro del destino Costa Brava Girona. Se analiza la percepción del turista frente a los cambios efectuados por el destino en un nivel local en Lloret de Mar. A través del análisis de la evolución de la percepción del turista sobre los recursos principales del destino. Se realizó un seguimiento en redes sociales para conocer si las estrategias desarrolladas influyen en el cambio de imagen del destino y que se pueda prever un comportamiento en el turista.

En la medida que se entiende la forma como se producen los cambios en los turistas y como se pueden influenciar sus acciones en el destino, es posible realizar un análisis de los cambios que se presenten desde el turista y prever la demanda turística. En este sentido, la tesis continúa a partir de la identificación de los cambios que ocurren en el destino y la forma como se deben tener en cuenta los cambios para determinar una previsión de la demanda. En este caso se considera el municipio de L'Estartit en la que se ha desarrollado un cambio de imagen del destino gracias a la puesta en valor de sus recursos naturales. Se realizó un análisis de datos desde 1984 al 2019 en donde se tiene información de los datos relevantes del turista (nacionalidad, tiempo de estadía y organización del viaje). El haber podido analizar un periodo de tiempo superior a 35 años permite conocer factores cíclicos y aquellos que se deben tener en cuenta a la hora de hacer una previsión de la demanda turística de un destino.

Para finalizar, esta tesis es un compendio de tres publicaciones en donde se intenta dar respuesta al objetivo principal, prever el comportamiento futuro de los destinos maduros, lo que implica que la investigación ha sido desarrollada en tres fases y considerando tres diferentes estrategias desarrolladas para un mismo destino a nivel regional y local, cada artículo desarrollado responde a diferentes estrategias realizadas. De esta forma, la metodología varía dependiendo del artículo, buscando responder a cada uno de los objetivos planteados en la investigación.

RESUM

La promoció de les destinacions turístiques ha evolucionat de manera exponencial amb el pas del temps i l'ús d'internet. Aquest canvi ha generat diferents actituds en el turista i en la seva manera de consumir informació sobre la destinació. Enfront d'aquesta evolució, les destinacions madures de sol i platja s'han enfrontat a reptes per a rejovenirse i augmentar el seu atractiu turístic en un entorn altament competitiu, a través de l'ús d'innovacions tecnològiques que els permet estar en les ments dels visitants, així com la previsió de la demanda turística a partir del coneixement d'aquest. La DMO (Destination Marketing Organization) és un dels màxims responsables en l'evolució del turisme focalitzant-se en la interacció amb el visitant i en la gestió per a l'atracció del grup objectiu per a la destinació. Aquesta recerca té com a objectius, en primer lloc, la formulació d'estratègies de la destinació per part d'una DMO mitjançant la previsió de la demanda turística usant les dades i informació sobre els turistes que han visitat la destinació, i en segon lloc, la influència de les accions de màrqueting i branding de la DMO sobre la destinació. A partir de l'entesa d'aquests dos objectius, es pot preveure comportaments futurs en destinacions madures.

Tenint en compte els objectius plantejats per l'autor, la tesi es concentra en l'anàlisi de les accions dutes a terme per destinacions madures en la Costa Brava per a evocar una imatge desitjada dels visitants, la presa de decisions de la DMO considerant els sistemes d'informació i finalment, la definició d'escenaris futurs utilitzant dades històriques.

Primer es realitza una anàlisi a nivell regional de les persones que generen interès i influencien el canvi de percepció de la destinació. Es fa una revisió d'una estratègia de màrqueting duta a terme per la DMO de la regió, on es presenten els avantatges i punts positius d'una acció de promoció duta a terme pel Patronat de Turisme de Costa Brava Girona en 2015 sobre la forma de comunicació de la destinació per part de *travel bloggers* els qui presenten la destinació a partir de la construcció d'un relat propi a través de les seves xarxes socials, i aconseguir amb això major credibilitat que la que pot aconseguir

la DMO. Es van processar les accions i es va portar a cap un estudi de les converses i l'impacte generat pel Congrés TBEX (Travel Bloggers Exchange) en les xarxes socials.

En segon lloc, es realitza una revisió en un entorn local dins de la destinació de la destinació Costa Brava Girona, Analitza la percepció del turista enfront dels canvis efectuats per la destinació a nivell local, a Lloret de Mar. A través de l'anàlisi de l'evolució de la percepció del turista sobre els recursos principals de la destinació. Es va realitzar un seguiment en xarxes socials per a conèixer si les estratègies desenvolupades influeixen en el canvi d'imatge de la destinació i que es pugui preveure un comportament en el turista.

En la mesura que s'entén la forma com es produeixen els canvis en els turistes i com es poden influenciar les seves accions en la destinació, és possible realitzar una anàlisi dels canvis que es presentin des del turista i preveure la demanda turística. En aquest sentit, la tesi continua a partir de la identificació dels canvis que passen en la destinació i la forma com s'han de tenir en compte els canvis per a determinar una previsió de la demanda. En aquest cas es considera el municipi de L'Estartit en la qual s'ha desenvolupat un canvi d'imatge de la destinació gràcies a la posada en valor dels seus recursos naturals. Es va realitzar una anàlisi de dades des de 1984 al 2019 on es té informació de les dades rellevants del turista (nacionalitat, temps d'estada i organització del viatge). L'haver pogut analitzar un període de temps superior a 35 anys permet conèixer factors cíclics i aquells que s'han de tenir en compte a l'hora de fer una previsió de la demanda turística d'una destinació.

Per a finalitzar, aquesta tesi és un compendi de tres publicacions on s'intenta donar resposta a l'objectiu principal, preveure el comportament futur de les destinacions madures, la qual cosa implica que la recerca ha estat desenvolupada en tres fases i considerant tres diferents estratègies desenvolupades per a una mateixa destinació a nivell regional i local, cada article desenvolupat respon a diferents estratègies realitzades. D'aquesta forma, la metodologia varia depenent de l'article, buscant respondre a cadascun dels objectius plantejats en la recerca.

ABSTRACT

The marketing and promotion of tourist destinations have evolved exponentially with the passage of time and use of the internet. This change has generated different attitudes in tourists and altered how they consume information on their destinations. In the face of this evolution, the established destinations of sun and beach have confronted the challenges to rejuvenate and increase their tourist appeal in a highly competitive environment, through the use of technological innovations that allow them to be, as it were, in the minds of the visitors, and to exploit that knowledge to forecast tourist demand. The DMO (Destination Marketing Organization) is one of the leading agents responsible for the evolution of tourism, focusing on interaction with the visitor and management to attract the right target group for the destination. The aims of this research are: 1) the formulation of strategies for the destination by a DMO by means of the forecast of the tourist demand using the data and information on the tourists that have visited the destination, and 2) assess the influence of DMO marketing and branding actions on the destination. From the understanding gained by these two objectives, future behaviors in long-established destinations may be foreseen.

Taking into account the objectives posed by the author, the thesis concentrates on the analysis of the actions carried out by mature destinations in the Costa Brava to evoke a desired image for visitors, the making of decisions by the DMO considering their information systems and, finally, the shaping of future scenarios using historical data.

Firstly, analysis is conducted at a regional level of personnel that generate interest and influence the change of perception of the destination. A review of a marketing strategy executed by the DMO of the region is done, setting out the advantages and positive action points of promotion carried out by the Costa Brava Girona Tourism Board in 2015 on the form of destination communication by travel bloggers, who depict destinations via construction of storytelling on their social networks, thereby achieving greater credibility

than can be accomplished by the DMO. Actions were processed, and a study of the conversations and resultant impact in the Congress of TBEX social networks was made.

Secondly, a review was conducted in the destination Costa Brava Girona, including an analysis of tourist perception of the changes effected by the destination at a local level in Lloret of Mar. A follow-up on social networks was carried out to establish whether the strategies developed effect a change of image of the destination and if the tourist behavior can be foreseen.

To the extent that the way changes affect the tourists is understood, and how their actions at the destination may be influenced, it is possible to analyze changes in the tourist profile and predict tourist demand. In this manner, the thesis continues by identifying the changes that occur in the destination and how such changes should be taken into consideration in forecasting demand. In this case, the municipality of L'Estartit is examined, which has developed a change of image of the destination based on greater emphasis on and enhancement of its natural resources. An analysis of data from 1984 to 2019 has been carried out, drawing on information on nationality, time of stay, and organization of the trip. The opportunity to analyze a period of more than 35 years makes possible to know cyclical factors and others that should be taken into account when forecasting the tourist demand of a destination.

Finally, this thesis is a compendium of three publications which attempts to resolve the main aim: predict the future behavior of the mature destinations, to which end the research has been developed in three stages encompassing three different strategies designed for the same destination at a regional and local level, with each article dealing with a different strategy. Accordingly, the methodology varies depending on the article, responding to each of the aims proposed in the research.

INTRODUCCIÓN

Los destinos turísticos han sido estudiados en los últimos años, siendo una unidad de medida básica de análisis del sector (World Tourism Organization, 2019). Un destino turístico como lo definen Bornhorst, Ritchie y Sheehan (2010) es una región geográfica, de jurisdicción política o administrativa que ofrece diferentes productos y servicios que generan experiencias satisfactorias a los turistas que lo visitan. En éste se incorporan diferentes agentes (en adelante *stakeholders*) y se puede extender para conformar destinos más amplios. Según Butler (1980) un destino turístico tiene un ciclo de evolución similar al de los productos/servicios, y comprende 6 etapas: exploración, implicación, desarrollo, consolidación, estancamiento, y declive o rejuvenecimiento. Aunque es importante aclarar que no todos los destinos pasan por todas las etapas, esto dependerá de la naturaleza con la que se desarrollen. Cada etapa requiere un nivel de gestión del destino diferente.

Un destino maduro que se sitúa cerca de la fase de estancamiento se encuentra con ciertos retos para evitar el declive progresivo y poder rejuvenecerse para aumentar su atractivo turístico. Estos implican trabajar en la creación de una oferta con nuevos productos y experiencias turísticas y ofrecer un plan de desarrollo turístico que atraiga a los visitantes a escoger el destino sobre otro (Kozak y Martin, 2012; Hernández-López y Cáceres-Hernández, 2007). En un entorno altamente competitivo, los destinos deben desarrollar estrategias para atraer consumidores (Molinillo *et al.*, 2008), dentro de las cuales se puede presentar un cambio de producto/servicio, un cambio de mercado o una mezcla de las dos (Baum, 2010), en donde es pertinente la revisión de posibles escenarios. Según Wilde y Cox (2008), la competitividad de un destino se ha definido como la habilidad de éste para mantener su posición en el mercado o mejorarla a través del tiempo. Teniendo en cuenta el rol que cumplen las organizaciones de gestión de los destinos (DMOs, por sus siglas en inglés), deben, junto con los diferentes *stakeholders* del sector encargarse de mejorar la competitividad de un destino (Abou-Shouk, 2018).

Anteriormente, la efectividad de la DMO estaba basada en la percepción de imagen de un destino (Pike y Page, 2014). Ésta a su vez, enfocaba su presupuesto en promoción y marketing dirigido a diferentes mercados y segmentos, para promocionar el destino. Adicionalmente, los Tour Operadores, actores importantes especialmente en los destinos de sol y playa, eran quienes con gran capacidad de marketing y poder, influían en la toma de decisiones de los viajeros. Un destino maduro, que ha vivido una transformación en la forma de gestionar y promocionarse, se ha visto también en la obligación de considerar las innovaciones tecnológicas para estar presentes en las mentes de los visitantes. En la actualidad, esto ocurre en gran medida a través de las redes sociales (Pike y Page, 2014).

Para lograr la gestión del destino considerando las nuevas tecnologías, las DMOs concentran su atención en emparejar los diferentes elementos de la oferta de los destinos con las necesidades de los viajeros (Abou-Shouk, 2018). Investigaciones mencionan que dentro de las actividades principales en la gestión y marketing del destino se encuentran; formulación de la estrategia turística del destino, la construcción de la imagen y reputación del destino, la coordinación de actividades relacionadas con los diferentes actores involucrados en el entorno turístico y, la gestión de ventas y distribución del destino (Bieger, Beritelli y Laesser, 2009; Volgger y Pechlaner, 2014). Por otro lado, autores como Palmer, Montaño y Sesé (2006), Hernández-López y Cáceres-Hernández (2007) y Zhang, *et al.* (2020) agregan a las actividades de las DMO el desarrollo de previsión de la demanda turística. De esta forma, conociendo la composición de grupos que llegan al destino se pueden tomar decisiones estratégicas y prácticas que incrementen la ganancia económica del destino (Palmer A., *et al.* 2006).

Tomando en consideración los principales retos del destino turístico según el ciclo de vida de los destinos turísticos de Butler, la DMO como ente de marketing turístico, es uno de los máximos responsables para la evolución del turismo. Las DMOs están transformándose progresivamente en DMMO (*Destination Marketing and Management Organization*), ente gestor y de marketing del destino, con el objetivo de mejorar y fusionar las funciones de gestión y marketing. Primero construyendo una marca diferenciada y singular, posicionándose en los mercados y comunicando y promocionando sus valores y la oferta del destino. Pero, en su evolución, deben asumir

un papel de co-creación en el diseño y gestión de la experiencia del visitante, juntamente con este y el resto de *stakeholders* (Lund, Cohen y Scarles, 2018) creando redes de valor para lograr objetivos comunes sobre la competitividad y sostenibilidad del destino (Wang, 2011; UNWTO, 2019). Siguiendo con lo propuesto por Shaw, William y Bailey (2011) bajo el concepto de la lógica de servicio dominante (service-dominant logic) en donde se ve al visitante como un recurso con el que se co-crea el valor.

La DMO deberá en muchos casos, y dependiendo del destino, disminuir sus esfuerzos por atraer más visitantes. De esta forma, la DMO cambia de rol y se focaliza en la interacción con el visitante y gestionar la relación de este con el territorio y los diferentes agentes para generar experiencias que le permitan atraer al público objetivo en el momento correcto (Wonderful Copenhage, 2020). Generando de esta manera sostenibilidad en el destino turístico en donde se impida que el turismo afecte tradiciones y valores locales (UNWTO, 2019).

Considerando los retos de un destino turístico maduro, los dos objetivos que se fija esta tesis son 1/ la formulación de estrategias del destino por parte de una DMO mediante la previsión de la demanda turística usando los datos e información sobre los turistas que han visitado el destino, y 2/ la influencia de las acciones de marketing y branding de la DMO sobre el destino. Estos son objetivos prioritarios ya que definen posibles tipos de estrategia y posicionamiento del destino, así como puede llegar a prever ciclos de flujos y comportamientos turísticos, que ayuden a la DMO y al resto de agentes turísticos a conocer el futuro previsible de la actividad turística en el destino.

Así pues, la principal intención de esta tesis es la de prever comportamientos futuros en destinos maduros.

Teniendo esto en cuenta, el autor desarrolla tres artículos en los cuales busca señalar las acciones llevadas a cabo por destinos maduros, para evocar una imagen deseada de los visitantes, la toma de decisiones de la DMO considerando los sistemas de información y finalmente, la definición de escenarios futuros utilizando datos históricos. La tesis tiene como base la región de la Costa Brava, uno de los destinos más visitados en el Mediterráneo que cubre 657.4 kilómetros cuadrados y ha presentado mayor desarrollo desde 1960 (Sardá, Mora y Ávila, 2006), por ser considerado un destino

altamente atractivo para las clases medias y interesante por su clima y playas y cuyo principal motivo de turismo es el sol y playa (Jiménez y Prats, 2006). Durante el año 2019, el destino Costa Brava recibió 7,8 millones de turistas (3,7 millones extranjeros y 4,1 millones nacionales) —un 1,28 % más que en el ejercicio 2018— y más de 25,8 millones de pernoctaciones —con un incremento del 1,18 % respecto a 2018. De esta forma, los tres artículos analizan diferentes unidades de medida de los destinos. El primer artículo hace una revisión de una estrategia de marketing llevada a cabo por la DMO de la región y los siguientes dos se concentran en marcas locales geográficas más pequeñas que forman parte de este destino, la Costa Brava.

El primer artículo, que analiza la imagen del destino, es un estudio de caso que tiene como objetivo principal presentar las ventajas y puntos positivos de una acción de promoción llevada a cabo por el Patronato de Turismo de Costa Brava Girona, la DMO de la región. En 2015 se llevó a cabo el mayor congreso de creadores de contenidos en Lloret de Mar, Costa Brava, donde se realizó una acción promocional de la marca Costa Brava Pirineu de Girona a través de los 'travel bloggers' y creadores de contenido participantes en el congreso. Cerca de 700 'travel bloggers' de diferentes países participaron en el congreso, donde la mayoría de ellos tomaron parte de las actividades planeadas para conocer la región como viajes de familiarización, excursiones y visitas, que proporcionaron oportunidades de generación de historias (storytelling) sobre el destino. En este sentido el destino, pretendía crear una campaña de reconocimiento de marca, y ser el anfitrión facilitando la promoción de la marca a los creadores de contenidos en cooperación con la totalidad de agentes turísticos (Morgan, Pritchard & Pride, 2011). El destino cedió el protagonismo a los 'travel bloggers', para que estos crearan su propio relato, alcanzó una audiencia cualificada y selectiva interesada en viajar, con una credibilidad mucho mayor de la que puede conseguir un ente oficial turístico (DMO). Al mismo tiempo, se consigue que los bloggers se conviertan en embajadores del destino en el entorno digital (Prats & Marín, 2012). Para procesar los resultados de las acciones, se llevó a cabo un estudio de las conversaciones y el impacto generado por el Congreso TBEX 2015 en redes sociales. Utilizando los siguientes hashtags para hacer el rastreo de la información, #TBEX, #TBEX2015, #InCostaBrava, #InPyrenees, #CatalunyaExperience y #LloretdeMar. La información fue medida en la red social Twitter. Adicionalmente, para conocer los nodos claves donde se presenta el flujo de la información, se hizo el esfuerzo de ir más allá de las variables agregadas y así conocer las audiencias a las que se llegaron a través de los usuarios, y cuáles son los principales influenciadores y generadores de opinión sobre el destino. La acción promocional fue organizada por el Patronato de Turismo Costa Brava Girona en un nivel regional, Lloret Turismo a nivel local, y la Agencia Catalana de Turismo a nivel nacional. En este sentido la DMO, Patronato de Turismo Costa Brava Girona, tenía como objetivo generar reconocimiento de la marca en mercados objetivos lejanos, y generar interés en aquellos mercados más cercanos y que ya conocían el destino. La acción se desarrolló en Lloret de Mar, un destino muy conocido por su atractivo en sol y playa, con el objetivo de ofrecer otros productos diferenciales, y proporcionar una imagen y percepción diferentes en los principales mercados emisores europeos como lo son la naturaleza, familia, cultura entre otros propuestos en el artículo. De esta manera, la mejora de la percepción y oferta de productos turísticos en Lloret de Mar, provocaba un valor añadido a la marca Costa Brava, así como Catalunya. Se selecciona la red social Twitter, ya que en 2015 era una de las principales redes sociales para compartir historias y viajes y todos los asistentes al congreso disponían de esta red en sus dispositivos, y afirmaron a los organizadores del congreso que principalmente utilizaban esta para su comunicación social con su audiencia. Los asistentes también afirmaron que disponía de Facebook, aunque su uso era menor, y además esta red no dejaba obtener datos de sus publicaciones. En el 2021, las redes sociales serían totalmente diferentes, donde Instagram y YouTube son las principales redes de los 'Travel Bloggers', seguidas de Twitter y Facebook.

En el primer artículo el autor evalúa a nivel regional quienes son las personas que generan interés y que influencian un cambio de percepción del destino. El segundo artículo realiza una revisión en un entorno local dentro del destino de Costa Brava. Sigue con la línea que propone el autor en el primer artículo en la medida que analiza la percepción del turista frente a los cambios efectuados en el destino. Teniendo en cuenta la gestión interna, el segundo artículo toma los datos ofrecidos por la plataforma Mabrian, de Lloret de Mar, una ciudad de la Costa Brava reconocida por ser una de las más paradigmáticas con relación a la percepción de marca y donde la actividad turística se

ha desarrollado significativamente, siendo la tercera ciudad de Catalunya más visitada en 2019. Este segundo artículo tiene como objetivo ver la evolución de la percepción del turista sobre los recursos principales del destino. Considerando lo anterior, se evaluaron las diferentes acciones internas planteadas por la oficina de turismo de la ciudad alineadas al plan estratégico del ayuntamiento de la ciudad con relación al turismo. Se realizó un seguimiento en las redes sociales Instagram y Twitter de comentarios en donde se incluyeron los siguientes hashtags: #lloret, #lloretdemar, #ллорет у #льорет, en un periodo de tres años (2017 – 2019). Los datos obtenidos se cruzaron con los perfiles de los usuarios lo que amplió la información obtenida y permitió generar un análisis para conocer si las estrategias desarrolladas influyen en el cambio de imagen del destino.

Entendiendo como se producen los cambios en los turistas y la forma de influenciar sus acciones en el destino, y comprendiendo los ciclos por los que pasa un destino en donde cambia el tipo de turista, se puede realizar una evaluación constante de los ciclos, y con esto desarrollar acciones que influyan de forma positiva en el destino. En este sentido, el tercer artículo planteado desde un nivel local, que también considera la gestión interna, busca identificar los cambios que ocurren en un destino y como estos cambios permiten generar una previsión de la demanda turística para la toma de decisiones. Este artículo da respuesta al objetivo inicial de la formulación estratégica turística mediante la previsión de la demanda turística, y definiendo y previendo ciclos en la demanda, gracias a los datos e información sobre los turistas que han visitado el destino. Este artículo concentrado en la ciudad de L'Estartit en la Costa Brava, un lugar popular en 1960 por su condición de sol y playa que, progresivamente, se transformó gracias a la puesta en valor de sus recursos naturales (Parque Natural del Montgrí, las Islas Medas y el Bajo Ter) para posicionarse como un destino natural y sostenible. Se realizó un análisis de los datos y perfiles de los turistas, facilitados por la oficina de turismo, en el cual se presentan datos desde el 1984 al 2019. En este análisis se consideró información como la nacionalidad, el tiempo de estadía y la forma como se organiza el viaje. Al obtener datos de un período superior a los 35 años, permitió observar las variaciones que se desarrollan en el ámbito turístico y conocer los cambios que son previsibles, y si constituyen un comportamiento cíclico. Con la información recogida se realizó análisis de datos de composición con el fin de evaluar la relación entre las diferentes variables relevantes para el estudio. En este artículo se puede ver como datos recolectados a largo plazo permiten identificar un comportamiento cíclico en factores claves de la demanda. Específicamente, estos datos permiten identificar factores que se pueden anticipar como lo son la duración de la estadía y la forma como se organiza el viaje, considerando los cambios en la demanda turística. Así como, la evolución de la edad del turista que a través de los datos se puede otorgar una explicación, al igual que tener elementos para realzar una previsión. La tendencia de búsqueda de destinos de proximidad ayuda a entender el cambio de demanda y permite evaluar los cambios presentados en las nacionalidades de los mercados emisores.

El resultado de estas tres publicaciones muestra la forma como los destinos pueden evolucionar gracias al análisis de datos y a la previsión de la demanda turística en los destinos visto desde un panorama de marca local de destino, teniendo en cuenta las diferentes aristas. Considerando este último elemento el que permite a un destino evolucionar a partir de la toma de decisiones basada en datos.

Las tres publicaciones intentan dar respuesta al principal objetivo y prever el comportamiento futuro de los destinos maduros.

Un aspecto fundamental de esta investigación es poder prever ciclos de comportamiento de la demanda dados una serie extensa de datos en el artículo basado en L'Estartit, que puede ayudar a las DMOs a establecer patrones de gestión, así como definición de acciones de comunicación, y la gestión de los diferentes canales de distribución, desde la tour operación a través de mayoristas hasta la organización directa e individual del viaje por el propio turista. Los otros dos artículos pretenden definir como los elementos de promoción y estructuración de productos del destino son percibidos por el turista, y como podemos hacer llegar nuestra marca y posicionamiento de destino, mediante historias, creadas por influenciadores en las comunidades de viaje como son los 'travel bloggers' y creadores de contenido.

Las DMOs, muchas convertidas en DMMOs, deben analizar los datos, de los turistas y ser proactivos para generar productos y experiencias, que creen una narrativa en los propios turistas alineada con sus objetivos de destino (Lund, Cohen y Scarles, 2018).

Para optimizar las acciones de comunicación, y llegar a una audiencia cualificada, y con credibilidad, el uso de 'travel bloggers' y creadores de contenido, mediante sus historias (storytelling) son una herramienta eficaz, y muy eficiente, si se analizan cuales son los principales influenciadores de conversación en la red adecuada (Lund, Cohen y Scarles, 2018; Bassano, et al. 2019). Estos cambios de percepción son analizados mediante los propios comentarios de turistas, viendo la progresión y los cambios de estos en un periodo de tiempo no muy extenso.

En cuanto a la gestión interna, es importante ver que las medidas tomadas generan un cambio de comportamiento en los visitantes. Por un lado, a partir de las acciones de las entidades encargadas del turismo se puede observar un cambio en las menciones de los turistas, mostrando la posibilidad de la desestacionalización del destino (Bigné, Sánchez, & Sánchez, 2001). Así mismo, considerando un análisis de datos históricos de un destino, es posible generar un ciclo de turismo teniendo en cuenta la proyección de la demanda turística (Hernández-López & Cáceres-Hernández, (2007)). Ahora bien, dentro del estudio fue importante considerar factores externos que ayudaron al cambio del comportamiento de los turistas como fue la llegada de Ryanair en el año 2003, que es un cambio eterno difícil de predecir.

En este sentido, el estudio contribuye a que las DMO puedan realizar acciones específicas para influir en los resultados del destino y que puedan desarrollar acciones para predecir el comportamiento de la demanda de acuerdo con la información y datos que surgen de las acciones que realiza el destino. Por ello, a partir de la información histórica del destino debe crear escenarios futuros anticipándose a los cambios en la tipología de los clientes. Adicionalmente, debe tomar decisiones utilizando sistemas de información que permitan un monitoreo de los turistas y generen indicadores que permitan conocer el comportamiento del turista y de esta forma se puedan realizar estrategias. Así como, el desarrollo de estrategias de marketing que permitan ampliar la difusión del destino. Por esto la importancia de contar una DMO fuerte detrás del destino, que tenga en cuenta este tipo de actividades.

Este documento está organizado de la siguiente manera. A continuación, se presentan los tres capítulos que corresponden a los artículos publicados bajo el tema central de

esta tesis que la gestión y previsión de las DMO en destinaciones maduras. Termina con una discusión, conclusiones generales, implicaciones prácticas, contribuciones de la tesis y sus limitaciones, y futuras líneas de investigación.

PUBLICATION 1 - TBEX Europe Costa Brava 2015: Effective
strategy for branding mature tourist destinations?

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TBEX Europe Costa Brava 2015: Effective Strategy for Branding Mature Tourist

Destinations?

ABSTRACT

Travel bloggers are digital prescribers who help to construct the brand

image of a tourist destination and whose posts are currently deemed more

credible than communications emitted by companies and brands. This

article presents the case of the World Congress of Travel Bloggers 'TBEX

Europe Costa Brava 2015', co-organized by the Costa Brava Tourist Board

as a promotional action to improve its 2.0 communication and harness the

power of bloggers' prescriptions as destination ambassadors. In addition, a

monitoring study was conducted during and after the event, which revealed

that online conversations resulting from the event generated more than 186

million impressions in an audience of 11 million people, figures that far

exceed those of earlier promotional actions carried out by the Board. The

study also identified interactions between members of online communities,

finding that 20 influential users generated more than half of the total number

of potential impressions.

KEYWORDS

Travel bloggers; Branding; E-branding; TBEX; Costa Brava.

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1. INTRODUCTION

An important part of the work of Destination Management Organizations (DMOs), Tourism Boards and other agents responsible for managing a tourist destination is managing its brand image i.e. the perceptions created in the mind of individuals (Huertas Roig, 2011) regarding that destination; that is, using various branding strategies to generate an induced image of the destination aimed at specific consumer segments in order to motivate a first or repeat visit.

This image is intended to generate dissemination, create a story, a narrative or an image strategically evoked in the target audience (San Eugenio Vela, 2013) to influence their decision-making process; it therefore constitutes a determining factor in the destination's degree of competitiveness (Camprubí Subirana, 2011).

As San Eugenio Vela (2010) explains, the *a priori* consumption of images represents a first symbolic journey prior to a real trip, and therefore plays a decisive role in consumers' interpretation of the destination and their decision regarding whether to visit it or not (Camprubí Subirana, 2011). Equally, the consolidation of these induced images represents a potent strategy for building territorial identity, which is reaffirmed when it becomes a city brand (Jiménez Morales & San Eugenio Vela, 2009).

However, with the increased access to Information and Communications Technology (ICT) and tourism 2.0 (Camprubí Subirana, 2011; Donaire Benito, 2011) new business models have emerged, forcing DMOs and other promotional organizations to adapt their strategies to this new digital context and evolve towards e-branding (San Eugenio Vela, 2011); that is, the use of Web-associated channels to reach new types of customers, whether digital natives (born after the spread of the Internet) or digital immigrants (those users who were born before the spread of the Internet but who wish to be part of the new digital context) (Marin, 2011; Territorio Creativo, 2013), so as to continue to compete with other destinations. A transformation has therefore taken place in the communications model traditionally used in tourism: from a purely informational/promotional format to new persuasive and/or emotional-type formats, resulting in new ways of working related to advertising language and destination branding (San Eugenio Vela, 2010).

In addition to the above, doors will also open to new challenges: with so much information and such ease of access to it, prior knowledge of the destination might influence an individual's information search behavior and affect the credibility of sources used for information search processes (Marchiori & Cantoni, 2015). This will lead travelers to rely less and less on what brand communications say and increasingly more on people who visit the destinations and then write about their experiences, as they identify with such people and believe in the impartiality of what they say, unmotivated as they are by economic interests (Lu & Stepchenkova, 2015). Marin (2010) reinforces this idea, pointing out that new customers/travelers prefer to listen to friends or communities with similar interests than watch an ad or heed a promotional action by an official body. Furthermore, studies conducted by De Bruyn & Lilien (2008) support the hypothesis that certain sources might have greater influence on consumers' decision-making process due to their perceptual affinity, tie strength, high perceived authority and/or social status. As stated by Sun, Ryan, & Pan (2014, p. 132):

'Since the peer group is by far the most significant determinant for the decision-making process, electronic word of mouth (e-wom) has come to be considered as an important information source for destinations (Yao, Xu, Li, & Yang, 2011) ... digital marketing is essential for marketers to promote destinations'.

In fact, regarding eWOM communication and experience sharing among people on social network sites, it is more acceptable to young people than general advertising information and often becomes a basis of reference for young people's attitudinal acceptance and purchase intention. The degree of taking pleasure in sharing information with others has a great impact on consumer acceptance (Sheu & Chu, 2017).

According to the study 'The Social Traveler in 2013. A Global Review' (Territorio Creativo, 2013), social networks are the absolute priority as a source of information for travelers between the ages of 18 and 34. Furthermore, 52% of travelers admit to feeling influenced by the photos their friends share when choosing a destination and 60% trust online videos posted by expert travelers over brand advertising videos.

This suggests that information production and dissemination has escalated beyond the reach and control of DMOs and that visitors' decision-making is no longer influenced by

these organizations to the extent that they would like (Kladou & Mavragani, 2015). Although official websites are used as sources of reference and research, the seduction of and final decision regarding the destination usually comes from other sources, comments or recommendations by other travelers (Marin, 2010).

Thus, the main aim of this article is to present the advantages of two promotional actions carried out by the Costa Brava Girona Tourist Board - organizing an event of the magnitude of TBEX Europe Costa Brava 2015 and organizing blogtrips specially designed for those attending the event - as part of an online branding strategy to rejuvenate such a mature brand as 'Costa Brava Pirineu de Girona'. Furthermore, a pioneering study on the impact of different conversations on the social network Twitter, mainly, but also in blogs and online media, has allowed us to assess the effectiveness of both actions in accordance with the objectives established by the Board and generate a theory based on a qualitative analysis of the numerical data obtained. Furthermore, it has also been possible to identify the key nodes for maintaining the information flow within the network and to determine which audiences were reached through certain users. The study not only measured the outcome of TBEX 2015's online activity but how this outcome was reached.

2. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

2.1 Social Media and User Generated Content (UGC):

Social media comprise activities, practices and behaviors among communities of people who meet online to share information, knowledge and opinions using Web-based applications that make it possible to easily create and transmit content in the form of words, pictures, videos and audio (Safko, 2010). They can be classified as follows: blogs, review sites, media sharing, question/answer sites, social bookmarking, social networking, social news, wikis, etc. (Gandomi & Haider, 2015; Marine-Roig, 2014).

They are all forms of user-generated content or UGC (Marine-Roig & Anton Clavé, 2015), and are one of the main sources of information for prospective travelers (Marchiori &

Cantoni, 2015). The Holmes Report (2012) states that: 'Social media plays the largest role in the first and last phases of a consumer's travel decision-cycle inspiration and experience, according to the Digital Index travel and tourism survey conducted by Text 100, which examined the increasing importance of social media and mobile technology during four major stages: inspiration, decision, purchase and experience. This correlates to the finding that 63 percent of survey respondents consider recommendations by friends and family the number one factor to inspire travel and social channels make sharing among friends and family easy.'

Thus, social media make it possible for those prospective travelers who must choose between different destinations and activities to compare this information and write comments related to their travels, opinions and personal experiences (Fotis, Buhalis, & Rossides, 2011; Míguez González, 2011). UGC allows post-tourists (those who have already traveled) to communicate with pre-tourists (those who are yet to travel) (Donaire Benito, 2011; San Eugenio Vela, 2014). As Bashar (2014, p. 8) noted:

Researchers also found that it is usually user generated content (hereinafter UGC) such as travel reviews, that are generally considered very helpful in the travel planning process (Arsal, Backman, & Baldwin, 2008). The validity of this idea can be justified with the findings by Nielsen research from April, 2012, when 13.2 million users only in America acknowledged to visiting TripAdvisor to find information about their upcoming travels (Nielsen, 2014).

In this respect, the main objective of a marketing (or branding) strategy based on social media is to encourage check-ins, 'likes', 'hauling' and 'reviews' so as to generate Word of Mouth (WOM) among customers (Marketing, 2012), or as Költringer & Dickinger (2015) call it in this case: Electronic Word of Mouth (e-WOM).

This is because 'In the field of tourism, most authors agree on the importance of UGC (Koltringer & Dickinger, 2015; Lu & Stepchenkova, 2015; Marine-Roig, 2015) in the construction of destination image through the e-WOM effect (Hidalgo, Sicilia, & Ruiz, 2014; Jalilvand, Samiei, Dini, &Manzari, 2012), and consider travel blogs, online travel reviews (OTRs), or online consumer

reviews as rich sources of UGC data (Marine-Roig, 2014; Xiang et al., 2015)' (Marchiori & Cantoni, 2015, p. 187).

However, it is important to bear in mind that people do not always post positive WOM only:

'Tourists mention a wide range, and unexpected combinations, of emotions as they construct memories of their experiences; they write about sacred moments, awe inspiring people, personal pride as well as being scared, disappointed, disturbed and depressed... challenging the rather narrow view that tourists are predominantly concerned with pleasurable experiences and personal happiness. Meaning-based gratification can equally arise from events that provoke negative emotions' (Bosangit, Hibbert, & McCabe, 2015, p. 11).

On the other hand, Camprubí Subirana (2011), Kladou & Mavragani (2015) and Reza Jalilvand, Samiei, Dini, & Yaghoubi Manzari (2012) have posited that a visitor will only generate a positive WOM and/or e-WOM and recommend the destination to others if their quality standards have been met; that is, if the *a posteriori* image (embodied by the idealized image that the visitor takes from the destination) matches the image they had of the destination before visiting, as a result of the contrast between this previous image (*a priori*) and that actually experienced at the destination (*in situ*) (Galí Espelt & Donaire, 2006).

2.2 Strategic Alliances with Travel Bloggers To Manage a Destination's Brand Image:

As noted by Buhalis & Foerste (2015), people who write about their travels become prescribers of the destination and undoubtedly influence the construction of its image as new unofficial sources of information. For what they write to be truly relevant, however, they must be influential people within the communities they belong to and have the content they post widely disseminated on the Internet (Marine-Roig & Anton Clavé, 2015).

'Today, travel bloggers are the go-to people when searching for information on tourist destinations, over guides and advertisements. This leads to them enjoying huge credibility among Internet users and being taken into account when promoting places of interest' (Torelló, 2015).

Travel bloggers write and share their experiences on destinations in the form of entries and posts (text, images, videos, etc.) in their online diaries (blogs), websites and social networks such as Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, Flickr, Pinterest, YouTube, etc. These posts also serve as a means of promotion, so that those who have access to them can find out about the destination *a priori* and/or share and compare experiences about their own visit, creating a database of opinions which can directly influence the end consumer/traveler.

In fact, Marin (2011) proposes defining bloggers as 'social travelers', due to the fact that what really matters is not the actual format used (blog) but the possibility of using any Internet-based tool to communicate and relate their story or experience in a context of 2.0 socialization and conversation.

Such is the influence of bloggers on the Net that a 2014 study conducted by SEGITTUR (2014) ('KAYAK-6to. Barómetro de Viajes Online') revealed that when choosing a destination 38% of Spanish users are inspired by travel blogs, 25% consult online versions of traditional media, 20% are inspired by social networks and 17% by social networks specifically related to travel.

This makes travel bloggers key players in a destination's marketing chain, and if DMOs understand this and know how to adapt to appropriate collaborative work strategies, they have in bloggers an opportunity to maximize their efforts in managing the destination's brand image.

As Buhalis & Foerste (2015) note, those DMOs who have already understood this harness the power of bloggers, photographers, and Instagrammers in the co-creation and management of their online reputation, seeking to construct brand value by effectively communicating the attributes and values associated with the destination (Fernández Cavia, 2011) through social media.

In addition, blogs and other forms of UGC reflect the views and attitudes of travelers in a less expensive, faster and less biased way than traditional methods of consumer research

(Bulkeley, 2005; Donaire Benito, 2011; Pan, MacLaurin, & Crotts, 2007; Schmallegger & Carson, 2008). In fact, Sun et al. (2014, p. 26) state that tourists' real motives can be revealed through observation and reading their travel stories rather than depending on their responses to questions set by researchers. However, travel blogs are an underutilized resource for researchers of tourism experiences (Bosangit et al., 2015, p. 1).

In this respect, DMOs could use these sources to assess the destination's image among a particular group of travelers who would otherwise be difficult to reach (Choi, Lehto, & Morrison, 2007; Pan et al., 2007; Schmallegger & Carson, 2008; Wenger, 2008), or identify potential strengths and weaknesses of the tourist destination in question, which may lead to ideas and inspiration for developing and improving products (Schmallegger & Carson, 2008). Woodside, Cruickshank, & Dehuang (2007) also explain that this type of narrative (UGC) usually represents unique associations and emotional high points that visitors are likely to retrieve and report automatically, or in other words, that which they consider worth telling others, providing creative clues for positioning a destination uniquely and meaningfully in the minds of potential future visitors.

What is more, given that much of bloggers' reputation and credibility depends on their skills in producing narrative, images, audio, etc., in most cases the generated content tends to be of high quality. It is therefore a way of showing the destination in a 'professional' and 'honest' light, taking advantage of the credibility that information users (and potential consumers) attribute to this type of content, due to the fact that it is not generated directly by the DMOs themselves, but by people like them who travel to the destination and write about their experiences independently, owners of their own brand.

It is clear, then, that bloggers are prescribers of both the destination and the brands, organizations and businesses they interact with, for their respective countries of origin and/or their followers. However, it is worth identifying the individual leaders of different communities or groups in order to define which specific people to work with to reach the largest possible target audience via just a few prescribers and better target the efforts and resources of DMOs and other promotional organizations. The aim should be to work

through a few influential people with a greater number of influential mid-level prescribers who also act as communication multipliers.

2.3 Blogtrips (Previous experiences on the Costa Brava).

Schmallegger & Carson (2008) refer to a strategy that has proven very successful: sponsoring professional bloggers to write about their travels, whether in company or destination blogs, or in their own personal blogs. According to these authors, several state and regional Tourism Organizations in the US started to use this blogging approach in 2005, inviting bloggers to tour the region and write about their trips and travel experiences with the aim of obtaining a variety of comments about the regions' attractions. These authors go on to explain that the benefits offered to the sponsored bloggers included covering all travel-related expenses (such as airfares, accommodation, entrance fees to attractions, etc.), and sometimes additional travel allowances. Subsequently, DMOs and promotional agencies from different destinations around the world began to organize trips aimed at these digital prescribers.

Although blogtrips and press trips are sometimes considered to be the same, they are in fact very different promotional activities. The fact that the people are different means that the media and goals for the activity change.

Traditional media look for very specific topics, sometimes determined by the editor of the medium, while bloggers are their own brand and need to create content in real time – or most do – as well as find stories that suit their audience. Therefore, bloggers/content creators are more focused on finding stories, and the DMOs have to provide more memorable experiences and unique opportunities for each of them. So, the activity schedules are usually completely different from those of the traditional media.

Some characteristics that make bloggers or content creators different from traditional media are: authenticity, real time sharing and storytelling, personality, interaction and engagement, compelling meta story and global audience – in specific segments. These provide huge value for DMOs and brands, which other types of media or traditional

marketing activities cannot, since the audience has lost faith in most official marketing communications.

For its part, in October 2010 the Costa Brava Tourist Board, which is responsible for marketing and promoting the Costa Brava (Girona, Catalonia) as a destination, first decided to commit to the innovative promotional action of the 'Blogtrip #InCostaBrava' project, with the tagline '16 bloggers, seven days, one destination', creating synergies between the territory, storytelling and online communication (Marin, 2011).

The aim of the project was to show bloggers from the United States the experiences, landscapes and products offered by the Costa Brava in order that they create stories and narratives adapted to the interests of their demographically diverse readers and achieve a wide dissemination of the destination on social networks in real time (Marin, 2010).

Some months before the blogtrip took place, the company Playbrand was commissioned to conduct a study to monitor the 'Costa Brava' brand and highlight key elements and values of the brand worth taking into consideration. In addition, positive and negative aspects standing out from the bloggers' conversations were also to be identified. Taking into account the results of the study and the communication strategy and action taken by the destination reflected in the 2011-2015 Strategic Tourism Plan, the decision was taken to promote the themes of 'nature, culture and gastronomy'.

The blogtrip also had some specific objectives: to improve the presence of the brand on social media, generate quality and eye-catching content, associate the brand with current values and innovate promotional tools, improve awareness of the brand on social networks, increase traffic to the destination's website and improve its indexing and ranking on search engines.

Monitoring was carried out over five months, during and after the blogtrip, using tools such as TweetReach, SocialMention and OpenStreeMap. A total of 44 Web posts were analysed to determine the orientation, perception and image of the tourist destination generated by the bloggers' experiences on the trip.

By September 2011, the bloggers had published a total of 80 posts on their respective blogs, of which 23 were selected by the prestigious international travel guide Lonely

Planet for publication on its website. Using data provided confidentially by the bloggers, it was estimated that more than 527,000 visits had been made to their different posts, while approximately 2 million visits were calculated to have been made to the posts published on Lonely Planet, according to traffic figures for the website. In addition, it was estimated that the more than 500 photographs posted on the Web by the bloggers received over 100,000 visits (Marin, 2010).

With regard to the hashtag #InCostaBrava, more than 17 million Twitter impressions were obtained and it was a worldwide TrendingTopic (#TT) for 4 of the 7 days of the blogtrip, reaching 27 countries. According to the organizers, this made it a highly significant action because a direct promotional action had never previously reached so many countries (Marin, 2010).

Furthermore, a study of the texts used in the posts revealed that they had promoted the values of 'nature, culture and gastronomy', as defined in the aims of the action, and mentions that stood out in the posts were: 'Dalí' (culture), 'Ferrán Adrià, Roca brothers' (gastronomy) and terms related to the beach, the coast and the inland region of the Costa Brava (nature).

Based on these results, it was concluded that the articles published by participants on the Blogtrip #InCostaBrava had a high degree of prescriptive power and used language very much linked to experience, emotions and feelings, as well as telling stories and giving micro-accounts of experiences at the destination. This contrasts with other travel blogs, which limit themselves to describing the chronology of the trip and do not delve into stories or relate to feelings of any kind.

3. CASE STUDY: WORLD CONGRESS OF TRAVEL BLOGGERS 'TBEX EUROPE COSTA BRAVA 2015'

Organizing and hosting events has proven to be an effective branding strategy for countries, regions and/or destinations (Jiménez Morales, 2011). One example is the case of the 2010 Football World Cup (Knott, Fyall, & Jones, 2015): it not only raised awareness about the host country, South Africa, and changed the perception of it among the

international community, but also positioned it as a tourist destination thanks to unprecedented media presence and coverage, through both the traditional and social media. As Knott et al. (2015) explain, this constituted brand development at a deeper level: from mere awareness to knowledge and understanding of the nation brand.

Bodies responsible for tourism destination management now make efforts and define strategies on the basis of this Public Relations technique, leading to cities with notable tourist attributes becoming common venues for conferences and conventions. It is clear that the main objective of this type of action is to generate attention and interest in the host destination and the brands involved in organizing the event both through direct communications and those generated by the media covering it (Míguez González, 2011).

However, if these communications are not only generated and disseminated by the traditional media (television, printed press, radio, etc.) but those attending the event are also people whose professional life involves writing about the different experiences offered by a destination, leaders of online communities who enjoy a high degree of credibility and whose posts are widely published on social media, then the benefits for the host country, region and/or destination will increase exponentially.

Such is the case with the World Congress of Travel Bloggers TBEX (Travel Blog Exchange), which has grown to become the world's largest gathering of travel bloggers, writers, new media content creators, and social media savvy travel industry professionals. It also attracts some of the world's most recognizable brands, as well as various tourist boards and sponsors looking to connect with bloggers and writers.

The aim of TBEX is to mobilize bloggers and help them promote themselves, monetize their media and improve their work, while also offering support to public relations firms and industry professionals to connect with content creators and obtain benefits for their brands and destinations (Patronat de Turisme Costa Brava Girona).

Each year, TBEX is associated with different destinations in North America, Europe and Asia Pacific, which host the Congress and provide space and facilities for talks and activities related to the event. One to three events are held per year, each in a different destination (Travel Blog Exchange, 2016).

3.1 Background: World Congress of Travel Bloggers 'TBEX Europe Girona 2012'.

In 2012, the Costa Brava Tourist Board and Catalan Tourist Board signed an agreement with New Media Expo (the North American company responsible for organizing the TBEX Congress) to hold that year's European Congress in Girona, Catalonia, on 21 and 22 September (Costa Brava Girona Convention Bureau, 2012).

TBEX Europe Girona 2012 had 371 participants. A total of 7 day trips were conducted with 120 bloggers around the destination, and 6 blogtrips were organized, with the participation of 53 bloggers. In addition, 800 nights of free accommodation were made available to bloggers after the Congress.

The hashtags #TBEX, #InCostaBrava and #InPyrenees were used to monitor conversations, and the tools HASHTRACKINGbeta, TweetReach and TOPSYPRO were used to measure the impact on the Net and social media during the period analysed: from 8 August to 30 September 2012.

According to the results, 13,843 contributors posted 26,967 tweets on Twitter, generating a total of 147,280,979 impressions and reaching an audience of 28,563,676 people in 63 countries, the highest numbers being in the United States, Spain and the United Kingdom, respectively (Patronat de Turisme Costa Brava Girona).

3.2 World Congress of Travel Bloggers 'TBEX Europe Costa Brava 2015'.

The Costa Brava Tourist Board decided to apply to host the European edition of the World Congress of Travel Bloggers TBEX again in 2015, holding it from April 30 to May 2 at the Evenia Olympic Resort in Lloret de Mar, Costa Brava, Girona. The action specifically addressed one of the aims set out in the 2011-2015 Strategic Plan for Tourism, that of improving 2.0 communication (Marin, 2011) for the brand 'Costa Brava Pirineu de Girona' through online prescribers, including travel bloggers.

Although TBEX was the main focus of the strategy, other activities such as excursions and blogtrips were also organized, these being promotional activities that the Board has

carried out before, but rarely together (the exception being TBEX Europe Girona 2012) and never on such a large scale.

On this occasion, more than 700 travel bloggers from different countries around the world participated in the Congress, some taking part in different blogtrips, excursions and other activities throughout Catalonia (mainly in Girona and Barcelona) before and after the Congress, organized by the respective tourism promotion organizations and 722 partner companies. This allowed bloggers to get to know the region and make the most of their trip, giving coverage to both the TBEX event and the destination.

A total of 16 excursions were undertaken with 151 participants in the province of Girona, 22 blogtrips were organized throughout Catalonia by the corresponding tourist boards, with 169 participants, and 11 blogtrips were conducted in the province of Girona, with 65 participants. Activities included the fourth edition of the Blogtrip #InPyrenees from 4 to 11 May, organized by the Costa Brava Tourist Board together with the regional councils, and during which the twelve guest bloggers were able to discover the Girona Pyrenees and different activities in the region. In addition, during the ten days after the event, 3,200 nights of free accommodation were made available to participants around Catalonia to allow them to discover the destination for themselves and create quality content.

3.3 Research Design

3.3.1 Methodological considerations

For TBEX Europe Costa Brava 2015, a *pioneering* study was conducted of the conversations and impact on social networks generated by the Congress, activities, blogtrips and excursions; the hashtags #TBEX and #TBEX2015 (New Media Expo), #InCostaBrava and #InPyrenees (Costa Brava Tourist Board), #CatalunyaExperience (Catalan Tourist Board) and #LloretdeMar (Lloret Tourist Board, the Congress venue) were defined for this purpose. Monitoring took place between 11 March and 10 May, 2015.

The quantitative variables measured by La Magnética were studied qualitatively to assess the event's impact on social media. As Mishler (1990) points out, qualitative studies

ultimately aim to describe and explain (at some level) a pattern of relationships. According to Huberman & Miles (1994), qualitative studies are especially well suited to finding causal relationships; they can look directly at the local processes underlying a temporal series of events and states, showing how these led to specific outcomes. In effect, this makes it possible to understand not just that a particular thing happened, but how and why it happened. This explanation can be achieved either deductively or inductively (Huberman & Miles, 1994). In the case of the data collected from online activity related to TBEX 2015, a mix of inductive and deductive analysis was used.

Since this is a case study, it was necessary to select online tools with features that would allow us to reliably measure (Huberman & Miles, 1994) the impressions, reach, daily tweets and web traffic on Twitter, but also on other social media for an event like TBEX 2015 (see table 1). In fact, similar variables were studied for TBEX 2012, but differences in the monitoring methods and tools used (due to availability at the time) do not allow for an exact comparison of data for the two events. However, it is possible to provide an overview and assessment of the findings for both editions.

Table 1 - Online tools used to measure the different variables on Twitter and blogs and other media

SOCIAL MEDIA	VARIABLES	TOOLS		
Twitter	 Number of tweets Potential impressions Audience (Reach) Countries Tweets per country. 	 Crowdbooster (discontinued Dec 31, 2016) Twitter REST API 		
	 Number of tweets sent per hashtag from 3 May to 2 June 2015 	Analytics by Topsy (discontinued)		
	Structure of the conversations on Twitter. (Interactions)	 Twitter REST API Software developed by La Magnética for gathering information from Twitter API and processing it Gephi for the visualizations 		
Blogs and other media	Country of origin of the users who read the posts (Main Markets).	• SimilarWeb*		

*Moz was used for variables related to the SEO importance of websites that have linked moz+SemRush+Google Search Console (formerly Google Webmaster Tools) to see which new links we have received, how important the websites that link to us are and which countries they are from.

Source: Authors' own using data supplied by La Magnética.

The monitoring work for TBEX Europe Costa Brava 2015 was conducted by the company 'La Magnética'. The results were compiled in the report 'TBEX Costa Brava Catalunya 2015: Analysis of the Impact on Social Networks' and presented to the Costa Brava Tourist Board. The most important findings are presented in this document.

As mentioned earlier in this article, our goal was to analyze how the content generated by travel bloggers and users attending TBEX Europe Costa Brava 2015 spread through the network. We analyzed the whole structure of conversations around TBEX 2015 with graph theory tools and software.

There are several social media monitoring and analysis tools that can help a Tourist Board to build a base of influential and engaged followers. These followers' communities must be diverse enough to ensure a wide dissemination of the contents related to the destination or to choose a set of influencers that meets the requirements – influence, engagement, diversity – for a particular marketing action. Some of these tools provide an easy way to pick influencers focusing on their standard influence measure on social networks (i.e. klout) or their diversity and ability to disseminate the information (i.e. followerwonk). Some others provide lists of influencers based on keywords or hashtags and locations (i.e. Audiense, formerly SocialBro), which is a starting point to pick the more suitable ones for an specific marketing action.

We also made an effort to go beyond aggregated variables (followers, retweets, potential impressions) and include within our methodology an approach capable of coping with this 'social' or 'networked' structure of social media in order to detect the key nodes for maintaining the information flow, and to determine which audiences were reached through certain users. We measured not only the outcome of TBEX 2015 but how this outcome was reached.

It is important to mention that the online marketing department of the Costa Brava Girona Tourist Board kept an updated list of all tweets and Facebook and blog posts around TBEX 2015. An overwhelming majority of them were positive regarding the destination and the diversity of tourism products and services it offers. Having several hundreds of travel bloggers on our doorstep was an invaluable opportunity for reaching new audiences, and analyzing 'reach' was therefore our foremost consideration. This is one of the reasons why this study focused on analyzing quantitative variables.

As for the variables measured, we used 'reach' and 'potential impressions' mainly because they were the metric available. You can determine the actual impressions of the tweets published in your profile, but not in other people's profiles. However, this metric was not available back in May 2015 (not even for the tweets posted by the Convention Bureau account of the Costa Brava Girona Tourist Board).

We used state-of-the-art technology back in March - May 2015: SimilarWeb.com. This tool has proved a reliable source for assessing estimated website traffic (as well for other related variables) when applied to tourist websites with traffic from different countries (as opposed to tools mainly able to assess US traffic). We have tested it with tourist websites that have provided data from their Google Analytics dashboard. On the other hand, at the time of TBEX 2015, SimilarWeb only provided an estimate of desktop visits (for their estimates to be calculated they need broader data from several sources: mobile ISP, Google mobile search –keyword monthly estimates, as well as data tools such as SEMrush – or similar capable of providing local mobile SEO results around the world). Nowadays SimilarWeb also provides an estimate of both mobile and desktop visits. A reassessment of the estimated traffic of these websites is possible, but limited to a 6-month timespan.

3.4Results and Analysis of the Impact on Social Networks - TBEX Europe Costa Brava 2015 (Source: La Magnética):

3.4.1 Twitter:

Twitter is the most important social network for measuring the impact of an event like TBEX, as the information it provides allows interactions among participants to be analyzed and their audiences to be determined at a level of detail that is difficult to obtain with other networks.

3.4.1.1 Potential impressions, audience, number of tweets and countries reached in conversations about TBEX:

Table 2 - Main hashtags used in Twitter conversations related to the Congress 'TBEX Europe Costa Brava 2015' between 11 March and 10 May 2015

Hashtags	Tweet s	Users Publishin g	Tweets Per User	Potential Impressions	Reach ^a	Tweets Received Per Unique User	Countries
#TBEX	18,044	3,670	4.9	133,567,931	7,483,752	17.93	86
#InCostaBrava	11,077	2,567	4.3	53,035,786	4,246,413	12.5	73
#InPyrenees	1,355	464	2.9	10,792,873	1,559,250	6.9	28
#CatalunyaExperien ce	3,168	1,333	2.4	8,479,268	1,622,701	5.2	48
#LloretdeMar	4,716	1,463	3.2	13,174,122	4,208,858	3.1	54
#TBEX2015 ^b	2,418	773	3.1	10,117,437	1,947,444	5.2	42
ALL	32,164	6,877	4.7	186,003,427°	11,221,225°	16.58	102

^aNumber of unique users in audience.

^cThe difference between the sums and totals is due to the elimination of duplicate tweets which included several hashtags, reducing the number of potential impressions from 229 to 186 million and the reach from 21 million to half that amount.

The results shown in **Table 2** indicate that **6,877 users** posted **32,164 tweets** withat least one of the main hashtags, generating over **186 million total potential impressions** (the number of times the tweets were viewed) among an audience of **11,221,225 of users** who follow profiles related to travel and tourism. The impact of this variable, potential impressions, is especially beneficial for the destination. As Arnegger & Herz (2015) report in a study related to the impact of a mega-event on the image of Azerbaijan, repeated exposure to a destination inevitably raises awareness, creates higher general knowledge of the country and thus creates a more positive country image, which may influence future tourism revenues.

Of the tweets posted using the different hashtags, 56% (18,044) contained at least the hashtag #TBEX as the main hashtag. It is also important to note that #InCostaBrava (the Costa Brava Tourist Board's hashtag) was used more than twice as much (11,077) as #LloretdeMar (Lloret Tourist Board's hashtag – used 4,716 times) and more than three

^bMonitoring began on April 29, the day before the Congress started.

times as much as #CatalunyaExperience (that of the Catalan Tourist Board – used 3,168 times).

The analysis carried out by La Magnética on the Costa Brava Tourist Board's Twitter environment allowed for a better understanding of these data: although both of its profiles @costabrava (local) and @VisitCostaBrava (international) have fewer followers than the Catalan Tourist Board profile and others with a similar target audience and number of followers, the Costa Brava Tourist Board had more frequent interaction with a high percentage of its followers, as well as constant contact (bidirectional, not only mentions) with bloggers who had been invited on a blogtrip. Very few destinations have maintained the same strength of relationships as the Costa Brava Tourist Board (La Magnética).

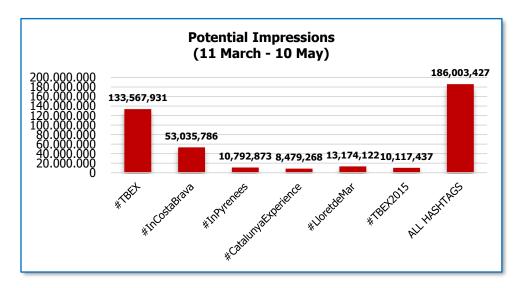


Figure 1 - Potential impressions generated on Twitter, between 11 March and 10 May 2015, by tweets posted by those attending the TBEX Europe Costa Brava 2015 Congress, for each of the main hashtags monitored

As **Figure 1** shows, 72% of the potential impressions (over 133.5 million) were generated by tweets containing at least the main hashtag #TBEX. This was therefore the main hashtag with the greatest repercussion on Twitter.

It is important to note that in addition to potential impressions, which represent the number of times the tweets have been seen by different users (a single user being able to receive several impressions via different tweets or retweets), there is another variable, referred to as 'reach', which considers the number of individual users reached by one or more tweets.

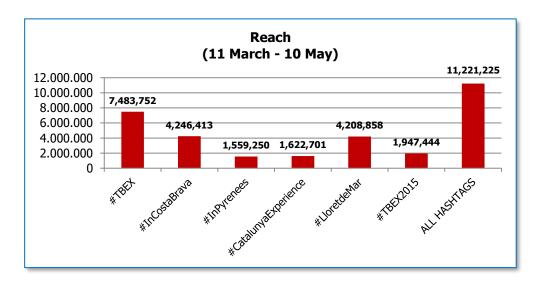


Figure 2 - Number of 'individual' Twitter users reached by the tweets posted by those attending the TBEX Europe Costa Brava 2015 Congress between 11 March and 10 May 2015, for each of the main hashtags monitored.

The total audience for all hashtags without duplicates was estimated at more than 11 million users, of which two thirds (around 7.5 million) were potential readers of the main hashtag #TBEX (**Figure 2**). By contrast, #InCostaBrava reached an audience of about 4,350,000 people (**Figure 2**).

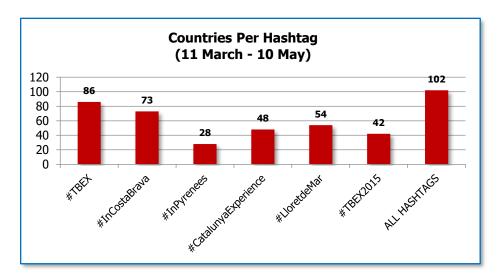


Figure 3 - Number of different countries represented by attendees who posted tweets at Costa Brava TBEX Europe 2015 for each of the monitored hashtags, between 11 March and 10 May 2015

According to **Figure 3**, the hashtags with the most international repercussion were #TBEX, with 86 countries, and #InCostaBrava, with 73. This provides an overview of the international scope of the Congress and its impact on the dissemination of Catalan brands. In total, taking into account all hashtags, users from 102 countries generated the 186 million potential impressions on Twitter.

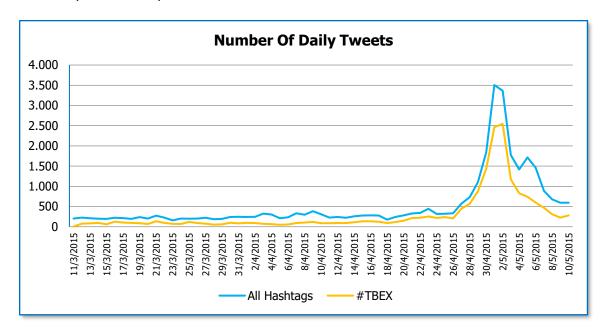


Figure 4 - Number of daily tweets sent by TBEX Europe Costa Brava 2015 Congress attendees prior to the event (from 11 March to 29 April), during the event (from April 30 to May 2) and after the event (from 3 to 10 May), comparing those tweets that included the #TBEX hashtag

As **Figure 4** shows, 43% of all tweets sent in the period studied were posted between April 28 and May 4, 2015, coinciding with the days when the Congress was held, with an average of nearly 2,000 tweets per day (including all hashtags).

In addition, by calculating the daily difference between the number of tweets with all hashtags (blue line) and the number of tweets with the #TBEX hashtag (orange line), we obtain the number of tweets without the #TBEX hashtag, which provides an overview of the additional publicity TBEX gave to the tourism institutions/brands involved in organizing the event.

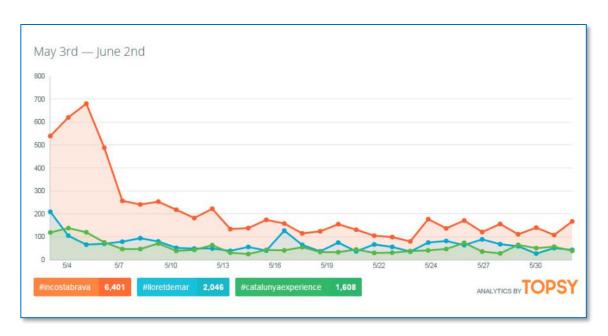


Figure 5 - Number of tweets sent by TBEX Europe Costa Brava 2015 Congress attendees per day with the hashtags #InCostaBrava, #LloretdeMar and #CatalunyaExperience, during the period from 3 May to 2 June 2015

Using the tool Topsy Analytics, La Magnética analyzed the hashtags #InCostaBrava, #LloretdeMar and #CatalunyaExperience, concluding that #InCostaBrava was most benefitted by the TBEX Congress.

As **Figure 5** shows, during the Congress and in the following weeks, the three hashtags obtained between 900 and 1,000 tweets on three days (1, 5 and 6 May) and the figure remained above 250 daily tweets for two weeks (starting the day before the opening of TBEX and continuing until a week after its closure). Moreover, between 100 and 150 tweets were recorded with #InCostaBrava per day in late May and early June, while between 40 and 80 tweets were sent per day with the other hashtags.

As for #InPyrenees (which was left out of the comparison in **Figure 5**), on the one hand it had fewer mentions in tweets, but on the other its use increased between 4 and 10 May, that is, after the Congress had finished and the blogtrip #InPyrenees had begun.

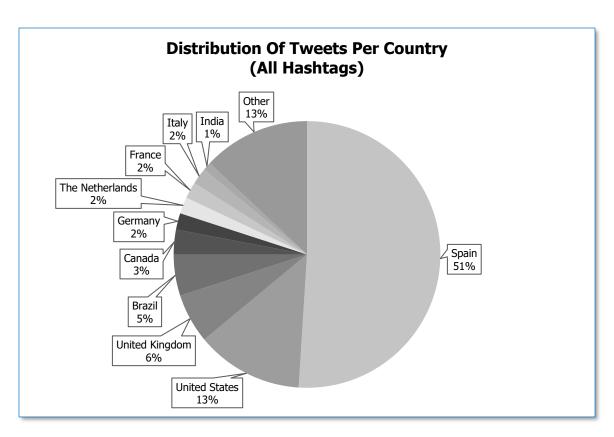


Figure 6 - Distribution of tweets sent by participants at TBEX Europe Costa Brava 2015 between 11 March and 10 May 2015, by country (taking into account all the hashtags)

Georeferencing was possible for 65% (21,120) of all tweets posted using any of the monitored hashtags (32,380). Thus, bloggers participating in the Congress were found to be representing 102 different countries (**Fig. 3 and Fig. 6**). Although the tweets were posted from the Costa Brava, bloggers were assigned a location based on their user profile, which they themselves had defined. This also revealed other valuable data, such as the fact that in most cases the bloggers' audience was related, but not linked, to their country of origin and native language. Specifically, Spain stood out with 51% of the tweets posted using any of the hashtags, then the US with 13% and the UK with 6% (**Fig. 6**).

The countries posting most tweets coincided with the main markets where the Costa Brava Girona Pyrenees brand is marketed: European markets, in addition to the United States and Canada. However, there was less repercussion in some European markets, such as France and Germany; with regard to this, it should be taken into account that a significant part of the British and American bloggers' audience is distributed throughout several European countries.

3.4.1.2 Users:

Table 3 - Ranking of the 20 Twitter users who generated most potential impressions at TBEX Europe Costa Brava 2015, including all major hashtags. The most important data are highlighted in red

User	Total Potential Impressions	Direct Potential Impressions ^a	Potential Impressions per RTs ^b	% of Potential Impressions per RTs received	Original Tweets Posted	RTs of other tweets ^c
theplanetd	1,1438,846	8,898,085	2,540,761	22.2%	77	8
MrScottEddy	1,0236,310	10,112,657	123,653	1.2%	7	10
VisitCostaBrava	7,883,801	3,616,737	4,267,064	54.1%	214	121
TBEXevents	7,631,903	5,173,517	2,458,386	32.2%	147	48
LandLopers	7,483,731	5,526,356	1,957,375	26.2%	76	0
momfluential	6,875,253	6,779,394	95,859	1.4%	34	7
costabrava	5,625,125	4,776,679	848,446	15.1%	161	49
exploretravel1	4,641,370	4,641,370	0	0.0%	0	22
HostelRocket	4,470,454	4,318,567	151,887	3.4%	5	36
CoachDeb	4,344,733	4,075,231	269,502	6.2%	71	75
EverywhereTrip	4,106,204	3,478,342	627,862	15.3%	16	7
HusbandInTow	4,074,391	1,996,728	2,077,663	51.0%	96	65
NormanBuffong	3,642,287	3,642,287	0	0.0%	0	8
redhunttravel	3,593,439	2,784,653	808,786	22.5%	365	5
Sihpromatum	3,448,511	3,160,109	288,402	8.4%	109	16
catexperience	3,264,336	2,930,146	334,190	10.2%	12	43
ottsworld	3,059,709	1,671,699	1,388,010	45.4%	47	8
TravelMedia_ie	2,805,063	1,642,760	1,162,303	41.4%	319	117
Travelogx	2,721,422	2,201,617	519,805	19.1%	364	3
jaumemarin	2,518,835	1,502,946	1,015,889	40.3%	96	202
TOTAL	10,3865,723	82,929,880	20,935,843	20.2%	2,216	850

^aThe potential direct impressions calculated in this table are the result of multiplying number of profile followers by number of tweets and re-tweets posted.

^b Retweets by other users.

^c Retweets of other users' tweets.

The **total potential impressions** are calculated by adding direct potential impressions (i.e. those generated directly in followers of the profile that posted the tweet or tweets) and potential impressions generated by Retweets (RTs) (i.e. in followers of the profile that has retweeted the original post). **This is the key variable reflecting the impact of each user in the conversation.**

To better understand the data shown in **Table 3**, we must bear in mind that:

- The Costa Brava Tourist Board's international profile (@VisitCostaBrava) comes in 3rd place for total potential impressions generated despite having only 11,000 followers, while the local profile (@costabrava), with 23,500 followers (at the time of monitoring), comes in only 7th place.
 - This is not only due to the former profile posting more tweets (335 vs. 210 by @costabrava, taking into account original posts and RTs by both profiles to other publications), but also to it having more RTs thanks to it being the English language profile which interacted more with those attending TBEX.
- If we analyse the direct potential impressions, i.e. potential impressions generated only by the number of followers, without taking into account possible RTs and mentions, it is clear that the @costabrava profile (with nearly twice as many followers) would be better positioned in the ranking than @VisitCostaBrava.
- The first two profiles in the ranking (@theplanetd and @MrScottEddy) have over 100,000 and 600,000 followers, respectively, and therefore start from a much larger base of total potential impressions. This means the third position of @VisitCostaBrava is even more significant.

The above demonstrates the importance of knowing how to manoeuvre on the Net: it is important to be active not only posting tweets but also receiving RTs and/or mentions, especially from influential users (Khan et al., 2017). This leads to a higher number of potential impressions and therefore number of potential readers of the tweet. We might even talk about a 'multiplier effect' for tweets posted by a profile depending on the potential impressions they obtain through RTs (**Table 3**) (La Magnética).

On the other hand, these **20 profiles generated 56% of total potential impressions** (103.8 million). Of these, 80% (around 83 million) were direct potential impressions and 20% (around 21 million) were achieved through RTs received (**Table 3**).

3.4.1.3 Interactions:

One of the most valuable contributions of this study is having been able to monitor online conversations for the first time, although it has been equally valuable to identify and analyze interactions between the different users involved in those conversations. Interactions are considered to be mentions in other users' tweets, i.e. a user's profile name (e.g. @VisitCostaBrava) being added to a tweet or being retweeted (RT) (La Magnética).

Detecting repeat interactions has also allowed us to understand the structure of the relationships existing around TBEX, identify influencers and different communities within the network and detect underlying structures.

This structure of interactions has been represented in a graph (**Figure 7**) which, although using a mathematical structure, provides a graphical representation that facilitates analysis.

In this case, the graph consists of a series of objects called **nodes**, **which represent the profiles of users** (and whose size is proportional to the profile's relevance within the conversation) and arrows (whose thickness depends on the number of interactions that occurred) between pairs of nodes, called **edges**, which **represent different mentions and RTs among these users**. Colour has also been added to the graph in order to identify the different communities, also called 'clusters'.

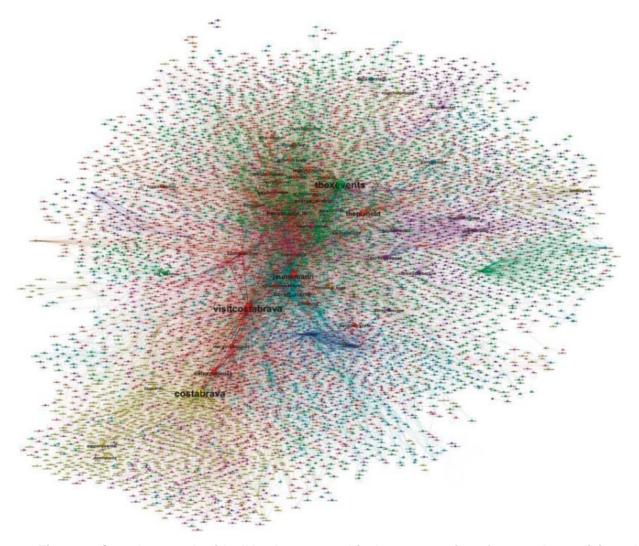


Figure 7 - Complete graph with all hashtags. Graphical representation of users who participated in conversations about TBEX Europe Costa Brava 2015 during the period analyzed (11 March to 10 May 2015), and the relationships between them (mentions and RTs).

For this graph, only **6,000 nodes** (fewer than the total of 6,877 users who posted a tweet with one of the hashtags - **Table 1**) and **20,243 edges** or interactions were considered. This indicates that a percentage of users did not mention or retweet any other profile, and/or did not have their posted tweets retweeted.

Table 4 - The 10 most influential Twitter profiles in conversations related to TBEX Europe Costa Brava 2015

	Profiles with most influence
1	tbexevents
2	costabrava
3	visitcostabrava
4	jaumemarin
5	theplanetd
6	lloretturisme
7	catexperience
8	travelmedia_ie
9	Everywheretrip
10	surfingplanet

As **Figure 7** and **Table 4** show, the profiles @TBEXevents, @costabrava and @VisitCostaBrava stood out as being the most important in the conversation in terms of centrality, that is, due to their contribution to the total graph structure. Naturally, this is because these profiles belong to the institutions that jointly organized the Congress: the Costa Brava Tourist Board and New Media Expo (TBEX).

It should be noted that in this case, profiles' influence was determined by the number of mentions and RTs they received as well as the influence of other profiles that mentioned and retweeted their posts, not by the number of followers.

In order to visualize and better understand the relationship between these profiles and others within the network, the data were filtered considering only those profiles with the greatest relevance in the conversations to obtain a 'choregraph' (Figure 8). This graph comprises less than a ninth (515 profiles) of the total number of initial users (6,000), but represents more than a quarter (5,590) of all interactions (20,243); in other words, a very large part of the conversations related to TBEX occurred in this nucleus.

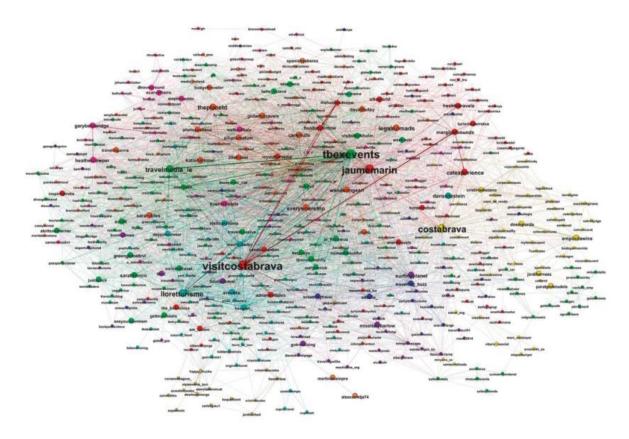


Figure 8 - Core graph with all hashtags. Graphical representation of the 515 users of most relevance in discussion about TBEX Europe Costa Brava 2015 during the period analyzed (11 March to 10 May 2015), and the relationships between them (mentions and RTs).

3.4.2 Blogs and other media (on-line version):

Unlike social network posts, blogs and publications in other online media occur on a broader timescale, some even months after visiting the destination. They have the advantage of being available on the Net for years and some take on such significance that they are positioned high in the ranking of Google search results, particularly those in influential blogs that attract a high number of links to a website. In addition, some publications of this type contain links to the official websites of the Costa Brava Tourist Board, the Catalan Tourist Board or the Lloret Tourist Board, which contributes to increasing visitor flows (Search Engine Optimization) to these sites (La Magnética).

For this study, monitoring was carried out using competitive intelligence tools, SEO tools and data from Google Web Master Tools. The results were as follows: **368 posts were**

published related to TBEX and blogtrips conducted around Catalonia on 128 different blogs and websites between April 30 and August 5, 2015.

It was also possible to determine the country of origin of visitors to blogs and websites that mentioned TBEX, thus providing an overview of the international reach achieved by the Costa Brava TBEX.

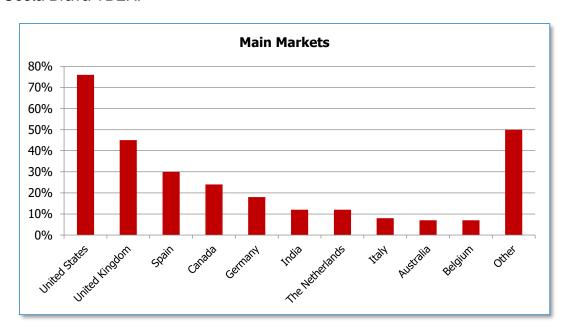


Figure 9 - Estimated percentage of total blogs and websites that mentioned TBEX Europe Costa Brava 2015 read by users in each country

The most relevant markets were the US (76%) and the UK (45%), probably because most publications were written in English. In general, the markets with the highest impact coincided with the Costa Brava and Girona Pyrenees' main consumer markets (La Magnética).

3.5 Conclusions

To succeed on social media, any DMO needs influential and engaged followers whose communities are diverse enough to ensure a wide dissemination for the destinations' posts and events such as blogtrips or product trips. This is precisely what the study and the tools used allowed us to identify: the list of influential users that helped us to widely

disseminate the contents related to TBEX and the local tourism brands, and to reach new audiences.

From the qualitative analysis of the results of the study conducted by La Magnética it was possible to identify the leaders or influencers that allowed certain communities to be reached (**Figure 8**). We could also see which bloggers could have been left out without a significant loss of 'reach'. This is especially relevant when planning the list of bloggers that meet the criteria – influence, engagement, diversity – for future blogtrips in accordance with their particular interests (and those of their audiences) and the values of the brand we want to communicate. Furthermore, we can also analyze audience overlap beforehand and improve planning of the blogtrip.

It is important to note that many studies have analyzed the outcome of a social media action or campaign involving travel bloggers and the extent to which they influence the target audience when spreading their message (Khan et al., 2017). In fact, Weimann (1983) posits that WOM plays a role not only in the flow of information but also in the flow of influence. Accordingly, awareness, interest and action towards a destination brand may be influenced by source characteristics (De Bruyn & Lilien, 2008), like their position within the structure of the network and the quality of the contents they produce. Additionally, although most of these studies rely on aggregated variables –followers, impressions and so on- we have not focused on the outcome alone (reach, tweets, impressions) but have tried to understand how we have reached this outcome. This kind of analysis helps to establish better data-informed tourism marketing strategies, which will likely result in future marketing actions with greater impact that reach the targeted online communities.

Therefore, the findings in this study provide valuable insight for the Costa Brava Girona Tourist Board and other DMOs on the identity of the ten or twenty people to work with so as to reach the largest audience in the main or developing markets of the destination Costa Brava and Girona Pyrenees (**Figure 8**). This will help DMOs to better target future promotional activities (events, workshops, presstrips, famtrips, blogtrips, presentation of clubs/products in new markets, etc.) and/or establish new strategic alliances.

In addition, it was possible to confirm that most of the main conversations generated online around TBEX 2015 were determined by these leading content creators (travel

bloggers) and not necessarily by the organizations involved in organizing TBEX. Therefore the contents enjoy a much greater degree of credibility and diffusion than if they had been generated directly by the DMO; every action therefore has a greater impact locally, nationally and internationally, generating a higher return on investment and therefore proving more effective.

Moreover, the event proved an excellent showcase to show off the production and management capacity of the Costa Brava Tourist Board and the other organizations that collaborated on organizing such a huge event as TBEX. In respect of this, TBEX 2015 was a means of bringing the world's largest community of travel bloggers to the destination. They were able to consume and try out the experiences it had to offer (Jiménez Morales & San Eugenio Vela, 2009) through various specialized excursions and blogtrips aimed at communicating the values, culture and essence of the destination and generate an *in situ* image (Galí Espelt & Donaire, 2006), providing them with input with which to write stories capable of capturing the attention of their audience and exciting them, encouraging future visits. Therefore, the word of mouth produced by these digital prescribers on social media generated an *a priori* image of the Costa Brava, Girona Pyrenees and other sites visited around Catalonia among their followers and community members.

In addition, by monitoring results we were able to confirm that the event served as a means of boosting the internationalization of small and medium-sized tourism brands (Costa Brava Pirineu de Girona, Lloret de Mar, Catalunya Experience) by giving them broad exposure on social media; this, in turn, led to an unprecedented impact for the destination among online communities: taking only the results presented in this article for Twitter and websites, by May 10, 2015 there had been over 186 million potential impressions on 11 million users from 102 countries via 32,532 posts (including tweets and blog posts, news, etc.) (**Table 5**), figures that far exceed those achieved by prior promotional activities and marketing campaigns conducted by the Costa Brava Tourist Board.

Table 5 - Consolidation of results for the impact of TBEX Europe Costa Brava 2015 on the most relevant social media networks and websites during the monitored periods.

Table 5 - Consolidation of results for the impact of TBEX Europe Costa Brava 2015 on the most relevant social media networks and websites during the monitored periods

	Potential impressions	Users who posted	Number of posts	Reach	Countries
Twitter (11 March – 10 May 2015)	186,003,427	6,877	32,164	11,221,225	102
Blogs and Other (30 April – 5 August 2015)	-	133	368	-	102
TOTAL	_a	_b	32,532	_c	_d

^a Data traffic to blogs and other websites are needed to calculate the total figure for potential impressions, therefore the number of impressions generated only on Twitter is taken as a reference, as this provides an overview of the importance TBEX has had with regard to promoting the destination.

Moreover, the content and posts related to TBEX and the blogtrips and excursions undertaken can be classified into two types: posts on social networks that have immediate impact and dissemination; and posts on blogs and websites that take place in the medium term, but tend to remain available for consultation for some time, meaning their impact on social media takes place over a much broader time frame. In this respect, it is important to note how the nature of the activities carried out during and after the Congress affected the generated content: for example, during the Congress itself, posts tended to be composed more of text and very few videos, while posts from the blogtrips and excursions after the Congress had similar amounts of text but with more and better-quality videos.

These posts created by travel bloggers (UGC) constitute quality content that brings credibility not only to information regarding the brand but also the brand image of the destination. It also serves as input for creating new promotional tools and materials; for example, for the anniversary of TBEX, the Costa Brava Tourism Board launched a project

^b A more detailed analysis is needed to determine the actual number of *unique* users who made posts related to TBEX, as in many cases bloggers may have used the same post on Twitter and on their blog.

^c In the case of *unique* number of users (reach), the Twitter results have been taken as a reference (11 million users), as we do not have the data traffic for blogs and other websites.

^d With regard to countries reached, data from Twitter and blogs are taken as a reference (102 countries), as this information was not available for other social networks.

to create a digital map of the province of Girona by geo-locating the most relevant content created by bloggers. This had a dual objective: to give visibility to and disseminate their work a year on from the Congress, and to generate a reference tool for future visitors, made available on the Board's official website (tbex.costabrava.org).

Huang, Chou, & Lin (2010) argue that whenever financial gain is involved, information posted in blogs may be deceitful, causing the information-sharing benefit among blogs to diminish or even disappear. However, it is worth noting that a huge part of travel bloggers' credibility relies on them managing their own brand and opinion, this being one of the factors that make them leaders and trendsetters within the communities they form part of.

Finally, travel bloggers are allies who help tell and convey stories regarding the destination – its essence, values and culture. Huang et al. (2010) also imply that high-involvement travel bloggers are more likely to form favorable impressions. Hence the importance of promoting more personal, more fluid and more reliable channels of communication, so that those people who represent the DMO can transmit to bloggers the essence of the destination reflected in the brand, generating in them a sense of commitment as they discover and understand its values, and 'make them their own', before sharing them with their followers. This will bring authenticity to the stories told by bloggers, who ultimately have an effect on how the public sees and perceives the brand image and therefore the destination. Thus, the main objective of such a strategy is to establish long-term relationships with bloggers so as to obtain not only a return on investment (ROI) but also a return on engagement (ROE) that benefits the brand.

3.5.1 Limitations and new lines of research:

As with any research, this study has a number of limitations. Firstly, this is a case study focused on a specific action conducted by the Costa Brava Tourist Board and its impact on social media, and findings cannot therefore be assumed to be generalizable to other destinations or branding actions conducted by other DMOs.

Secondly, despite having proved to be very reliable resources, the tools used to measure different variables on Twitter, blogs and other social media were the only ones available

-technologically - at the time the study was conducted (May 2015). Thus, technological limitations included the impossibility of measuring all visits to blogs (from both desktops and mobile devices).

Thirdly, the analysis presented in this document focuses on how the information and contents posted by TBEX 2015 attendees and online users spread throughout the network, the relationships existing between said users and how the different audiences were reached. Further research should be conducted to assess the impact of posts related to TBEX 2015 (e-WOM and WOM) on the process of decision-making and choosing the destination Costa Brava and Girona Pyrenees over others, focusing on visitor arrivals. We also recommend evaluating changes in the image of the Costa Brava and Girona Pyrenees perceived by those end consumers reached through the different posts, and/or the type of image perceived by those who did not know the destination beforehand (a priori image).

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PUBLICATION 2 – Can a mature sun & beach destination change its perception image among its tourists? The case study of Lloret de Mar
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Can a mature sun & beach tourist destination change its perception image among its tourists? The Case Study of Lloret de Mar

ABSTRACT

A destination's image has a central role in conditioning the behaviour of the visiting tourists, aligning its strategies with social networks may contribute to improve their image among visitors. This study focuses on the impact of tourist strategies on how the tourist's image of the destination changes. A case study conducted in Lloret de Mar, a mature destination with a new strategic plan to change its tourist's image is analysed through the monitoring of the comments made by tourists on social networks in a period of three years. Using Software by Mabrian above 600.000 comments on Instagram and Twitter were analysed to prove that the efforts made by Lloret de Mar were giving results in their main markets. The results give a perception of change in the destination's image that leads to de-seasonalize and diversify the destination's products. The research and implementation of a different strategic plan enabled a repositioning of its image in their different markets. Even though Lloret de Mar's image is changing, it remains as a sun and sand place.

KEYWORDS

Mabrian; Lloret de Mar; destination image; social networks, tourist perception

1. INTRODUCTION

Recent decades have seen destinations make concerted efforts to develop strategic planning policies, their goal being to foment the evolution or transformation of their image. The main drawback to these actions has been how best to assess their effectiveness. Authors such as Marrero and Santana (2008) highlight the gap between tourist discourse and strategies and the true situation of the destinations themselves and Ferrer-Rosell and Marine-Roig (2020) acknowledge the gap present between the projected image with the perceived image in destinations declaring a gap between supply-led actions and the behaviour of demand.

On the other hand, over the last years, social media platforms have become a powerful tool for online communications and content creation that allow tourists interact and comment on tourism experiences. Because social media is part in all the tourist experience, it has opened new communication channels between the tourists and the tourism providers. This openness allows the interaction between consumers and lets the destination get user feedback and receive consumer behaviour input (Sotidiadis, 2016) and measure the impact of the tourism provider activities.

Academic research in the social media field is interested in the past few years in analysing the changes of the tourist behaviour and the impact of management of tourism providers (Sotidiadis, 2016). Research on destination image, show the gap between the projected image as being dissonant or congruent (Ferrer-Rossell and Marine-Roig, 2020). In order to establish the extent of this gap, this study focuses on the use of social media networks as a tool for identifying changes in tourist behaviour, and how this is the result of changes in the image of the destinations in question. Therefore, this study aims to ascertain the impact of tourist strategies on how the tourist's image of the destination changes. In this sense, it continues the work of authors who have chosen to analyse tourism through social networks, such as Garay (2019); Barcelos, Correa and Sénécal (2019); and Ghermandi, Marine-Roig, Martin-Fuentes and Ferrer-Rosell (2019), Camacho-Valdez and Trejo-Espinosa (2020), among others.

In order to meet the established aims, a case study was carried out of a paradigmatic coastal tourist destination, Lloret de Mar. It is a mature destination on the Catalan coast, receiving over 1,300,000 tourists annually, with more than 5,800,000 overnight stays.

A combination of technological tools was used that enabled monitoring of comments made by tourists on social networks over three years. This allowed for more than 650,000 comments to be analysed, revealing whether or not there has been any change in the destination's tourist image, and what those changes are.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Tourist Destination Image

Published research has widely correlated the tourist's image of the destination and tourist consumption once there, resulting in a general consensus that a destination's image has a direct effect on how an individual behaves there (Bigné, Sanchez and Sanchez, 2001; Souiden, Ladhari and Chiadmi, 2017). A number of research perspectives have been adopted to examine this duality, analysing aspects such as: the role destination image plays at the various stages of destination choice; how the image effects tourist consumption while there (Chaulagain, Wiitala and Fu, 2019); shifts between the influence of the image and how this changes through the tourist's experience of the destination (Akgün, Senturk, Keskin and Onal, 2020); the concept of destination familiarity, how this links with its tourist image, and how that in turn affects tourist consumption once there (Tan and Wu, 2016); social-psychological stereotypes as an element of competitiveness between destinations and their respective tourist consumption (Shen, Lv, Lin and Li ,2019); the role of tourist image in assessing and satisfaction with products and services the tourist consumes (Lee, Lockshin, Cohen and Corsi, 2019); and an analysis of how the image of important events conditions tourist behaviour at the destination, both during and after the event (Lee, 2009).

Previous research has therefore shown that a destination's image plays a vital role in conditioning the behaviour of visiting tourists, and the shaping of this image has become

one of the most widely studied fields in tourism research (Stylidis, Yaniv Belhassen and Shani, 2015). While some studies highlight problems and a lack of consensus in defining or measuring this image, there is broad agreement that the term itself refers to the mental representation of the destination in the minds of individuals (Kock, Josiassen and Assaf, 2016). Despite this agreement on the definition, a number of perspectives and models have been used to classify tourist images, the most widely accepted in academic circles being that posited by Gunn (Prats, LL. and Camprubí, R. 2009). Gunn (1972) classified tourist destination images into three large groups: the organic image, the induced image, and the modified image. Numerous authors have taken this classification as a starting point, before modifying the model or giving it new perspectives. Miossec (1977) incorporated three kinds of emitted images: universal, ephemeral and induced images. These theories have undergone profound reformulations, such as that expounded by Gartner (1994), who suggested that Gunn's (1972) three images had an effect on cognitive and affective attributes and incorporated cognitive behaviour into the shaping of the tourist image. Donaire and Galí (2006) identified three kinds of images perceived by tourists: those perceived before, during and after the visit. More recent studies, such as that conducted by Zhang, Wu and Buhalis (2018), have distanced themselves from the categorization of destination image, identifying and classifying which of the destination's attributes shape its image, and how in turn this is also shaped by tourist experience. This type of approach incorporates an analysis of the tourist's image of the destination that is more dynamic.

Particularly relevant in all this research is Gallarza, Gil and Calderon's (2002) wide-ranging review, which listed six research categories, including the study of how the tourist's image of the destination has changed over time. However, according to the authors, it is the very complexity of this subject that makes it the least-researched field. In large part, this is due to the fact that the best tool to provide a reliable assessment of this change in image is not through comparing two samples at two different times, but, rather through longitudinal sample research (Bigné *et al.*, 2001; Gallarza, Gil and Calderon, 2002); this has been one of the ways research has found to deal with this problem in recent times.

2.2 Tourist Behaviour in the Destination Through Social Networks

The explosive growth of the Internet and social networks has added complexity to the shaping of a destination's tourist image; but it has also brought with it new analytical tools. A number of studies clarify the central analytical role of social networks. Garay (2019) used Twitter, and, in particular, the hashtag #visitspain to analyse how the tourist image is shaped on a national Spanish level. Kiráľová and Pavlíčeka (2015) showed how aligning destinations' strategies with social networks contributed to improving their positioning and image management. Kim, Lee, Sin and Yang (2017) focused on how the type of tourist information published by the destination influences social networks, and how this, in turn, transforms the image of the destination itself. Ghermandi et al. (2020) used social networks to understand the behaviour and interaction of international visitors to the Mexican coast. Zeng and Gerritsen (2014) based their study on the role social networks play in tourist behaviour, stating that research should focus on visualizing the impact social networks have on the tourism industry. Dolan, Seo and Kemper (2017) examined how tourist complaints on social networks, and specific complaints regarding an airline, result in increased or decreased value generated for the industry as a whole. Barcelos et al. (2019) analysed how destinations' attitudes towards social networks affects tourist behaviour and how customers process information. Lastly, Marine-Roig, Martin-Fuentes and Ferrer-Rosell (2019) proposed a theoretical framework to measure the destination image through online travel reviews specially in TripAdvisor.

The use of social networks as a tool to analyse tourist behaviour has, therefore, been constant over the past decade, and helped fill the void mentioned by Bigné *et al.*(2001) and Gallarza *et al.* (2002) with regard to analysing the change in the tourist's image of the destination. Besides, according to Marine-Roig, Martin-Fuentes and Ferrer-Rosell (2019), social networks have great importance in analysing the perceived destination image because they contain free and reliable information as well as it spreads fast among tourists.

3. METHODOLOGY

3.1. Choice of destination

The chosen tourist destination is Lloret de Mar, on the Costa Brava. Ever since Barbaza (1966) analysed the Costa Brava from a tourism and sociological viewpoint, numerous authors have studied its development and tourist model; noteworthy among these are Cals (1982); Fraguell (1993, 1997, 2007); Donaire (1996, 1997), Mundet (1997, 1998, 2000); Galí (2004); Martí (2005, 2007); Saló (2005), Calabuig (2006) and Marin *et al.* (2018). All of these studies have viewed Lloret de Mar as one of the most paradigmatic towns in relation to regional changes in tourism, with the industry in Lloret de Mar evolving from pre-Fordist, small-scale and traditional, to the current post-Fordist mature coastal destination. Tourist activity has developed significantly in the town, and it currently offers more accommodation than anywhere else on the Costa Brava, ranking third in Catalonia (2018). In 2019, Lloret received over 1.3 million tourists, with 5.8 million overnight stays. It has over 120 hotel establishments, with 29,000 beds.



Figure. 1 Location of Lloret de Mar in Europe

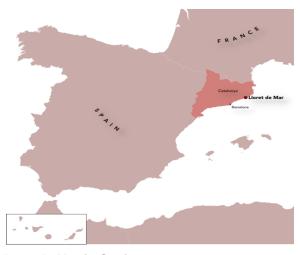


Figure. 2 Location of Lloret de Mar in Spain

There is, however, a special phenomenon or idiosyncrasy to Lloret de Mar: its tourist image has been very closely linked to nightlife. At times this has been highly controversial, and the Town Council has made a number of attempts to distance the destination's image from this segment. This included putting a Strategic Plan into place to focus on how the town oriented itself towards tourism, with goals to be met by 2014. Partly as a result of the plan, and partly as the result of efforts by a number of local tourism actors, Lloret de Mar has made great strides to reposition itself with new values.

A good example of this effort can be found when analysing Lloret Tourism Board's action plans and annual reports for 2017, 2018, and 2019. This documentation includes strategic directions and focuses on products and markets, following the line established in the previous Strategic Plan. The goals set in these plans, and maintained during the three years analysed here, are brand repositioning; consumer retention; the welcome offered by the town; deseasonalization; business generation; and increased profits. The target public were visitors to Lloret; tour operators; the media/prescribers; and residents. Greater efforts were made in relation to promotion and communication for two large groups: first, strategic markets, i.e. Catalonia/Spain, France, the United Kingdom, and eastern European countries; and second, priority markets, i.e. Italy, Benelux, Germany and Scandinavia.

Regarding the tourist product, the different actions where publicity and communication efforts have been made are as follows: Culture; Sports tourism, and particularly Lloret

Cycling; Business and congress tourism; Gastronomic tourism, in conjunction with the LlorEat Brand, and Fundació Alícia; Family tourism and Lloret Nature.

In contrast with the more frequently used images to promote traditional destinations like Lloret de Mar, none of the publicity or communication actions made any explicit reference to nightlife. Sun and sand tourism was only present as a complement to other products, such as family and sports tourism.

Aside from those actions that formed part of the destination's tourism marketing strategy, two particularly important changes had an impact on the profile of tourists visiting the destination. The first was the arrival of the Jet2 airline at Girona Costa Brava airport (Lloret de Mar's reference airport) in May 2016. The company, along with another company of the same group, Jet2 holidays, sells Costa Brava holidays to a predominantly family-oriented market. Over the three years analysed (2017, 2018, and 2019), an average of over 150,000 passengers per year arrived via these two companies. This has had an impact on the destination's deseasonalization (April- October); it also implies a change in the profile of the British visitor, who is presumably more interested in the natural, cultural, and family holiday offer, and has much less interest in holidays based around nightlife. Secondly, Jam Reisen, a German tour operator with strong links to holidays focusing on the town's nightlife, ceased operations in summer 2018 after 16 years operating in Lloret de Mar.

Plenty of evidence can be found of the choice Lloret made regarding its competitive positioning in the period analysed. One of the problems arising from the strategic planning processes carried out, and which other mature destinations share, is the ability to analyse whether actions undertaken by the town have actually changed the destination's image, and, in turn, tourist behaviour there.

3.2. Social network platforms analysed

In order to observe whether these efforts have led to a change in the tourist's image of the destination, we deemed it convenient to follow the lines of recent research, which has shown how social networks act as amplifiers for tourist behaviour at destination. Two social networks were chosen: Instagram and Twitter. Their fame and traceability were deciding factors in this choice, both being in the Top 5 for social network user numbers during the entire research period. Furthermore, they both permit a degree of traceability and analysis of users and generated content; other social networks were discounted as they provide less clear information for analysis.

3.3. Definition of sample

Information was compiled over 3 full calendar years, from January 1st, 2017 to December 31st 2019; this was then collated and analysed. Data are shown in annual aggregates. Focus was paid to the following hashtags on both social networks, which were chosen over others due to the number of mentions they received: #ллорет; #lloret; #lloretdemar; #льорет The software developed by Mabrian Technologies was used to select and analyse the information. The application produced 685,101 comments or mentions.

3.4. Information filtering process

One of the problems that researchers face when analysing information on social networks is filtering tourist-related information or Tweets from those unrelated to tourism. The following filtering stages were used to overcome this:

- Word filter: a group of terms were filtered through empirical experimentation, permitting the discarding of a series of mentions unrelated to tourism.
- Functional norms: linked to user and commentator profiles, mentions that were unrelated to tourism were discounted.
- Learning algorithm: once again using technology by Mabrian, who have developed an algorithm that enables machine-generated learning to eliminate spam or elements related to current events in the town.

This process left us with a total of 243,506 comments. Of these, 208,737 were on Instagram, and the remaining 34,769 on Twitter.

It is also interesting to observe the number of times that these appear as hashtags or literal mentions (there may be several in any one mention, and the number of mentions may therefore be higher than the number of comments). Regarding hashtags, we found:

Table. 1 Hashtag mentions on social media

Hashtag	Mention
#ллорет	1,370
#lloret	44,389
#lloretdemar	175,674
#льорет	698

Table. 2 Literal mention on social media

Word	Mention			
Lloret	47,306			
Lloret de Mar	7,228			

3.5. Comment categorization

The comments were placed in categories comprising an extensive corpus of words that encompassed a wide range of category-related concepts. The use of keywords, categories, and mentions avoided the potential risk of using sub-categories, which may contain too few mentions, and would have compromised the credibility of the results. This process resulted in nine product category groups: *cultural, natural, family, gastronomic, active, nightlife, shopping, sun and sand, and wellness.*

3.6. Data enrichment

Once this amount of information is available, it needs to be analysed and cross-referenced with user profiles. This is done through a data enrichment process; the tools used for this were again provided by Mabrian Technologies. A combination of tools was used to identify the age and gender of users who made comments. User profiles provided the basic information, which was then combined with facial recognition software. This both minimized bias and produced an age and profile of those who made comments.

Nominatim software was used, which is an inverse geocodification service, in combination with the dictionaries of Lloret de Mar, as the same concept, to place visitor origin. The use of *Open Street Maps* enabled us to assess the distance between users and the destination. This provided the tourist's origin and dispensed with the need for geolocalization data for each comment.

4. RESULTS

4.1. Analysis of uncategorized mentions and origins

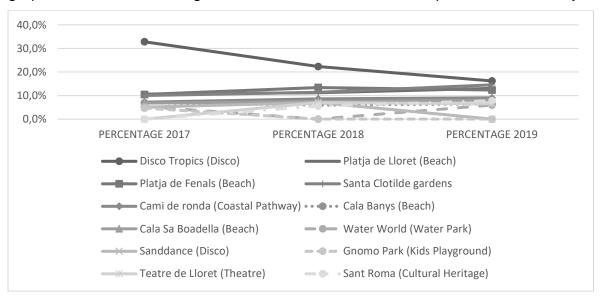
On analysing the information gathered, the first focus was on the main mentions on both social networks. The ten most frequent mentions over the three years were as follows:

Table. 3 Evolution in top 10 attractions in Lloret de Mar over the years

Mention	Category	Percentage 2017	Percentage 2018	Percentage 2019
Disco Tropics (Disco)	Nightlife	32.8%	22.4%	16.2%
Platja de Lloret (Beach)	Sun and Beach	10.7%	11.2%	13.1%
Platja de Fenals (Beach)	Sun and Beach	10.5%	13.4%	12.3%
Santa Clotilde gardens	Culture	10.0%	11.4%	14.6%
Cami de ronda (Coastal Pathway)	Nature	7.2%	8.6%	9.1%
Cala Banys (Beach)	Sun and Beach	6.9%	5.9%	6.4%
Cala Sa Boadella (Beach)	Sun and Beach	6.8%	7.5%	8.1%
Water World (Water Park)	Active Tourism	5.3%	0.0%	6.0%
Sanddance (Disco)	Nightlife	5.1%	7.0%	0.0%
Gnomo Park (Kids Playground)	Active Tourism	4.7%	0.0%	0.0%
Teatre de Lloret (Theatre)	Culture	0.0%	7.0%	6.5%
Sant Roma (Cultural Heritage)	Culture	0.0%	5.6%	7.8%

The little change among the most-frequently mentioned elements is clear evidence of the continuing popularity of Lloret's most important attractions; of the top 10 in 2017, only two

disappeared from the 2019 list (sanddance and gnomopark). However, the following graph with the relative weights of the various mentions tells quite a different story.



Graphic 1 Evolution in top 10 attractions in Lloret de Mar over the years

The graphic 1 shows the evolution of the different mentions, and leads us to draw the following conclusions:

- 1. The weight of nightlife was particularly important in 2017, with two of the town's most important venues (*discotropics* and *sanddance*) among the most mentioned, achieving a total weight of 37.9 % of Top 10 mentions. After 2017, there was a clear, continuous drop to just one mention in the Top 10 in 2019. It then represented 16.2% and had fallen from 1st to 4th place.
- 2. The loss of sectorial weight suffered by nightlife was compensated for by a relatively similar redistribution among other mentions. No single category accounted for the entire loss of weight by nightlife; the effect was that of a mosaic across the whole spectrum of most-frequently mentioned places in Lloret de Mar.
- 3. As far as categorization is concerned, there was a clear trend towards a greater presence of cultural venues. While in 2017 there was just one representative of culture (with a weight of 10%), in 2019 there were three, with an overall weight of 28.9%. Furthermore, this was the category that produced most comments.

4. The remaining categorizations showed similar relative weights, with slight percentage increases.

If we no longer limit the list to the Top 10, we note similarities and differences. Table 4 shows this behaviour over the period analysed.

Table. 4 Behaviour by category over the years

Category	Percent 2017	Percent 2018	Percent 2019	Differential Absolut	Percentage Difference (2017-2019)
Sun and Beach	38.7%	34.4%	28.6%	-10.1	-26.1%
Nightlife	17.7%	13.6%	11.9%	-5.8	-32.7%
Culture	11.0%	13.1%	12.4%	1.4	12.4%
Nature	8.2%	8.7%	8.7%	0.5	5.5%
Active Tourism	7.4%	9.6%	11.0%	3.6	48.9%
Gastronomy	6.6%	7.3%	9.8%	3.2	48.5%
Family	5.5%	8.5%	10.8%	5.3	97.4%
Wellness	2.8%	2.7%	2.6%	-0.2	-7.0%
Shopping	2.1%	2.2%	4.3%	2.2	105.6%

On incorporating all mentions, we see how the weight of the various products changes with regard to the results obtained if attention is only paid to the main mentions. Analysing table 2, we can conclude:

- The confirmation of the trend towards a greater mosaic of self-complementary products, and the lower presence of any single product, whether linked to nightlife or sun and sand.
- 2. The category with the highest percentage fall in mentions was nightlife; this confirms the observation for the Top 10 mentions.
- 3. The main absolute fall was in the sun and sand category; despite this, it was still the most-frequently mentioned product.
- 4. As far as increases are concerned, cultural tourism has been the main benefactor. An analysis of comments shows a clear positive trend. This must be qualified, however: while not the main focus of comments, it did replace nightlife in second

- place. A sharp percentage increase (12.4%) was found in the number of comments.
- 5. The highest percentage increases were seen in those categories with a lower presence in 2017. There has been a substantial increase in mentions of shopping and family tourism (105.6 %, and 97.4%), respectively.

Beyond the categories themselves, the appearance of gender-related elements is particularly informative. There was a higher proportion of male user profiles (54.2%) than female (45.8%). Analysis of gender behaviour in the three main product categories (sun and sand, cultural, and nightlife) showed a gender bias:

- In the sun and sand category, there was a 14.14 percentage point female bias in relation to the global sample proportion, where 59.9 % of comments were made by female user profiles.
- 2. The opposite (although nearer the global sample) was the case in relation to nightlife, with a far greater male presence, 57.5 % of the comment-generating profiles being male (3.29 percentage points higher).
- 3. Regarding culture, we once again found a more female vision, with 56.1% of the comment-generating profiles being women. This was 10.32 percentage points above the expected values.

4.2. Analysis of mentions by product category

The second part of the analysis gathered data regarding the countries and products that had been mentioned on social networks. Mentions originating from the Spanish market were discounted, as they include those made by the local population, with the corresponding distortion. The seven principal markets were selected, and then analysed using the Mabrian tool. These markets were France, Italy, the United Kingdom, Germany, Poland, the United States and Belgium.

The data showed France to have been the predominant market overall three years. Graph 2 shows the evolution in the share of comments made by social network users from the seven markets. The substantial fall in the German market, and similar rise in the British

market are both worth highlighting. The general fall in mentions accross the whole of the German market, may be the result of the end of nightlife based tourism.

France — Germany — Italy — United Kingdom — Poland — Belgium — United States

30
20
10
2017
2018
2019

Graphic 2 Evolution in the sharing information in social networks in the markets

As seen in Table 5 that show the percentage difference (2017 - 2019) in the selected markets in relation with the products by category, there is a rising in all markets with the mention of the culture and nature products. On the other hand, there is a clear decline in nightlife and sun and beach mentions in most of the markets. The following analysis will focus on the categories that have increased mentions or decreased mentions in an steeper way, as well as an analysis per market, in order to see if there is a difference on the profile of the tourists in each market.

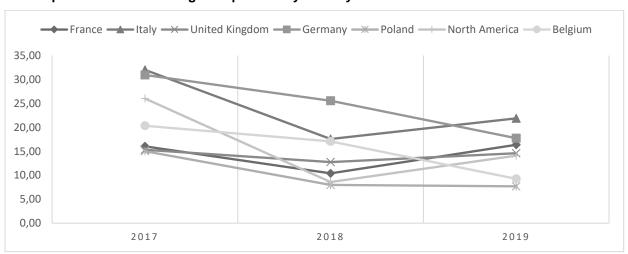
Table. 5 Percentage difference (2017 - 2019) in the markets by products

Category	France	Italy	United Kingdom	Germany	Poland	North America	Belgium
Sun and	10.000/	0.400/	47.700/	7.040/	4 4407	0.000/	5.00 0/
Beach	-12.26%	-6.19%	-17.78%	7.04%	-4.44%	8.09%	-5.08%
Nightlife	2%	-31.63%	-4.63%	-42.64%	-48.80%	-45.81%	-54.45%
Culture	71.49%	63.77%	33.88%	43.69%	20.73%	39.42%	84.11%
Nature	7.41%	77.97%	234.33%	8.36%	134.51%	339.27%	41.31%
Active							
Tourism	28.27%	-13.66%	-60.68%	134.74%	-25.62%	-39.36%	-40.47%
Gastronomy	4.01%	-8.13%	11.83%	20.20%	-26.29%	36.44%	28.42%
Family	-24.61%	39.90%	84.37%	0.71%	-8.06%	-27.77%	194.55%
Wellness	-42.68%	31.88%	-30.30%	-39.10%	38.06%	-65.96%	69.09%
Shopping	33.72%	90.24%	67.50%	37.50%	-100.00%	185.99%	244.44%

Making an analysis by categories, sun and beach, nightlife, culture, nature and family have greater changes, that is why they are highlighted and analyzed. Taking into account the sun and beach category, the table shows that five of the seven markets showed a slight decrease in the mentions of the product. This can be given to the opportunity of

deseasonalization of the destination, given the varied products built around culture, family and nature. Nevertheless, while mentions of sun and beach fell in those five countries analyzed, the mentions of the product were the most frequent across all markets.

Although there is a decline in six of the seven markets in the mentions for nightlife, which fell in the three years, the deepest decline in most on the markets was in year 2018. The German and Belgian markets were the ones that showed a continued fall in the mentions of the nightlife. Nevertheless, the difference along the years and the decline of mentions in most of the markets had a sharp fall above 30% in five of the markets giving a hint of a shift of the profile of the tourists in the region. Graph 3 shows the mentions of nightlife in the three years analyzed.



Graphic 3 Mentions of nightlife product by country in 2017 - 2018 - 2019

In regards with culture, all markets witnessed an increase in this category. The smallest rise, of 20%, was found in the Polish market, and the largest 84% in the Belgian. Mentions of the town's Top 10 attractions rose from 10% in 2017 to 30% in 2019; this rise can be seen as largely due to the increase in Lloret's offer of cultural products and services, such as Santa Clotilde Gardens, Sant Romà church and the Lloret Theatre. This behavior also gives a hint of a change in the profile of the tourists visiting the destination. As well as a shift in the city to open the variety of products in order to give a different image of Lloret.

Another category that showed rise in the mentions in all the countries was nature, being steeper in five of the seven markets, above the 40%. Four of these five countries also showed a steep decline in nightlife, the British market had a behavior in which the

decrease of the nightlife (4.63%) mentions was mild while the increase of the mentions of the nature (234.33%) category was abrupt. The German market that showed a high decrease in mentions in nightlife (-42.64%), but showed a slight increase in mentions in nature (8.36%), whereas the French market showed a minor increase in both the nightlife (2%) and the nature (7.41%) categories. These results support the effort the Tourism Board in Lloret de Mar is having valorizing the nature spaces. As well as identifying the profile switching in most of the markets, primarily the Italian, British, Polish and Belgium tourist.

Observing the family category, it happens something similar, in four of the markets where mentions of family increased, there was a fall in the number of mentions of nightlife. The French market saw a 24% fall in mentions of the family, and was the only market showing a rise in nightlife. The two markets that reflected a fall in mentions of both the family and nightlife were Poland and the United States. The German market showed a very slight increase in mentions of family (0.71%), while fell (-42.6%); however, there were very sharp rises in mentions of active (134%) and cultural (43.7%) tourism.

In terms of the markets, the French one showed a slight increase in mentions of nightlife, and a continual fall in the most-mentioned category, that sun and sand. We also see a substantial decrease in mentions of family tourism, and an increase in a range of other categories. These increases were most notable in culture (71.49%) and active (28.27%). The progressive fall in mentions of sun and sand may be due to a greater year-round diversification of tourists interested in these categories. On the other hand, the Italian market showed a steep fall in nightlife (32.63%), sun and sand (6.19%), and active tourism (13.66%). Radical shifts in how the destination is seen are supported by the increases observed in natural, cultural and family tourism. This clear sign of a new profile of tourist: more family-oriented and with a wider range of interests in the destination; there was also less youth tourism.

The British market showed a progressive decline I sun and beach (17.78%), nightlife (4.63%) and active tourism (60.68%), while there was an increase in culture (33.88%), nature (234.33%), and family (84.37%). These data may be evidence that the progressive introduction of tour operator Jet2 Holidays, with direct flights between the United Kingdom

and Girona Costa Brava airport from May 2016, led to a rise in the number of families taking non-peak season holidays (outside July and August) at the destination.

The German market showed notable changes in a number of fields. A fall in nightlife (-42.64%) went hand-in-hand with sharp rises in active (134.74%) and cultural tourism (43.69%), whiles sun and sand rose to a more moderate degree (7.04%). Regarding the Polish market showed a notable fall in nightlife of 48.8%, one of the sharpest in the whole study. There was a small decline in sun and sand (4.44%) and active (25.62%), and an enormous increase in nature (134.5%) and cultural (25.62%) tourism. The results provide evidence of a clear increase in the deseasonalization of the Polish market, bringing with it tourists who are far-removed from the profile of young tourists primarily interested in the destination's nightlife.

Mentions of nightlife fell by 45.81% in the North American market, and similar falls were recorded in active (39.36%) and family (27.77%) tourism. In contrast, rises were observed in culture (39.42%), gastronomy (36.44%) and a slight increase in sun and sand (8.9%). This indicates knowledge of the destination and ts products, and thus, an increase in stays due to the investment in 5-star hotels. It also suggests knowledge of the complementary products and services on offer. Lastly, we have the Belgian market, which shows the most notable fall in nightlife of the whole study (-54.45%) and decreases of 5.08% in sun and sand and 40.47% in active tourism. While such results were taken from the comments of young tourists, the increase in mentions of cultural (84.11%), natural (41.31%), and family tourism (194.55%) correspond to an older profile of tourist with wider interests.

These analysis leads us to draw the following conclusion, all markets behave in differently in accordance to the destination. Nevertheless, they all have in common a change in profile showing a decline in the nightlife mention and shifting to mention other types of categories that the Tourism Board is promoting such as culture, nature, family and active tourism.

5. CONCLUSIONS

The study purpose was tested by showing that recent actions implemented continuously by Lloret de Mar Town Council have enabled a repositioning of its image and the behaviour of its tourists. This may be closely linked to destination life-cycle theory, originally mooted in Butler's model, which, despite the many changes and adaptations it has undergone, represents one of the paradigms in relation to tourist destination development (Lundtorp and Whanhill, 2001). Furthermore, authors such as Foster and Murphy (1991) and Berry (2001) have noted the problems involved in its practical application, and the characteristics and idiosyncrasies that strongly condition each destination or the sector's global development. In the case of Lloret de Mar, we see how actions undertaken in a mature coastal destination have contributed to its repositioning and a change in consumer behaviour taking into account the call Nghiêm-Phu (2014) made in his literature review to develop studies on the projected image of a destination.

This study contributes to enriching prior research on the use of social networks to identify consumer behaviour, such as that conducted by Garay (2019); Kim, *et al.* (2017) and Ghermandi *et al.* (2020). Analysing social media networks and the mentions of tourism destination demonstrates the importance of measuring the data portrayed in these networks as tools to measure the impact of the strategic actions on tourists. It also demonstrates that the continuous and constant changing process of the tourism model in Lloret de Mar, gives a perceived image of the destination congruent with the policies applied by the DMO and other destination stakeholders, that give a product diversification and leads to deseasonalize the tourist season. The mentions analysed showed a clear trend towards another image of Lloret de Mar, in line with the deseasonalization and diversification of the product, to slowly leave behind its image of a destination for nightlife and young people.

It also reveals how the influence of the tourist image on behaviour once at the destination, as noted by authors such as Bigné *et al.* (2001) and Souiden *et al.* (2017), is faithfully reflected in the case of Lloret de Mar. If the destination's inductive agents (based on Gartner's model, 1993) implement an intensive publicity strategy largely linked to culture,

there will be an overall increase in comments on social networks referring to culture; in our case, this increase crossed all markets analysed and was sustained over the three-year study. It would also confirm the vision of authors such as Cànoves, Prat and Blanco (2016) and García and Alburquerque (2003), who considered that cultural tourism could serve as an impetus for reconversion or complementary tourism in mature coastal destinations.

This study of Lloret once more highlight the findings of Kim *et al.* (2017) analysis, where the transformation of a destination's image led to an increase in comments regarding family tourism as well as a clear fall in the number of comments referring to nightlife. However, one element remained unchanging in the eye of the consumer. Despite its infrequent mentions in publicity material, the presence of sun and sand tourism has remained a core element in tourist consumption. The data showed that comments linked to sun and sand remained robust, in contrast to the fall in references to nightlife. Said fall was the result of tourism actors at the destination having explicitly discouraged such tourism. Along these same lines, this would confirm the views of a range of authors who have stated that, despite all the efforts of coastal destinations to reposition and reconvert themselves, sun and sand remains a fundamental part of tourist appeal in coastal destinations.

While the actions designed to reposition the tourist image and competitiveness of Lloret de Mar have clearly had an effect on consumers, it is no less true that elements external to the strategy itself have also played a role. Examples of this are arrival of the airline Jet2 and Jet2 Holidays in May 2016, and the closure of Jam Reisen, the main tourist nightlife promoter, with particular interest in the youth market. In both cases, it is hard to establish whether these were elements that conditioned the results, or whether their presence and disappearance were partly the consequence of the destination's tourist strategy itself.

5.1. Practical Implications

In this sense destinations should use the proposed analysis and research methods, like the model proposed in this article to analyse and measure the impact and efficiency of the politics made around the promotion of a destination in a short time frame. This helps identifying the tourists' feedback and implement concrete actions to change the destination's image.

5.2. Limitations and future research

It should be noted that this study has several limitations that should be addressed in further research. First it is a study that is limited only to two social networks, Twitter and Instagram, additional research using other social networks like, Facebook or Tik Tok, as well as other social media, like blogs, should be considered in order to analyse the different age market segments. It also should consider that the constant evolution of the social networks, varies in user numbers as well as their way to use and communicate through them, according to each of the determined markets segments. Other limitation present in this study is that the research tool, Mabrian, has a robust data base, but it fails to give a complete information on months or trimesters for some of the markets considered in the research. Data like, expenditure, flight reservation or telephonic behaviour, is not related or is considered under other measuring criteria, making almost impossible their relationship with the study.

Future research should consider tools like "Vivential Value" to analyse other element considering online reputation of the destination. Further research lines also should consider the analysis of the daily flux of different tourists' profile, taking into account the geographical origin, using the data given by their smartphones, and the relationship of this data with their expenditure, considering the data given by their credit cards and the cash acquired in ATMs. This way a description of the tourists that visits Lloret de Mar, the type of their visit, the activities they develop and the expenditure data could be analysed to develop activities and policies in order to continue closing the gap between the projected and the perceived image Lloret is achieving.

6. REFERENCES

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PUBLICATION 3 - The possibility to anticipate the changes of	fa
destination analyzing long term data. The case of L'Estartit	

Reproducción del original enviado a Tourism Recreation Research

Marin, J., Ferrer-Rosell, B., Mundet, Ll., and Prats, Ll. (2022). Destionation transformation over time. Four decades of tourism data for a sun and sand destination.

The case of L'Estartit. *Tourism Recration Research*

The possibility to anticipate the changes of a destination analysing long term data. The case of L'Estartit

ABSTRACT

This article analyses the changes occurred in a traditional sun and sand destination such as l'Estartit over a period of 35 years (1984-2019). Thus, the aim is to explore if changes in destinations might be forecasted and anticipated analysing long periods of data. Aggregated data allows to describe and relate tourist segments patterns along the analysed period. Compositional Data analysis (CoDa) is used to treat the available aggregated data, and three variables would appear to have a clear effect on transforming the destination: tourist origin, length of stay and trip organization. Results show a radical transformation in the destination; from tourists of distant European origin to domestic tourists, length of stay which shrank considerably and tour operators and/or travel agencies being replaced by tourists organizing the trip themselves or through associations and clubs. Some of these changes are cyclic which might glimpse a possibility to forecast them, while others are clearly difficult to anticipate. The use of longterm data is still not common due to the lack of available and reliable data for destination analysis. The study provides implications for destination managers to take into account when foreseeing the evolution of the destination.

KEYWORDS

Forecast, Compositional biplot, Aggregated data management, Sun and Sand, L'Estartit, destination management

INTRODUCTION

Destinations are the standard unit of research for tourism studies (Jovicic, 2019) and therefore the focus of much research in the tourism literature. Initially, research was based on a single static picture, capturing a moment in time for different destinations. This included research on how destination boundaries evolve (Paulino and Prats 2019), how stakeholder networks change (Guia, Prats and Comas, 2006), how image perception is transforming (Camprubí 2013, Maríne-Roig and Ferrer-Rosell, 2018) and how tourist satisfaction is changing (Bernini and Cagnone, 2014), among others.

Other authors have attempted to provide what might be called a "consecutive pictures" view by focusing on how destinations evolve (Ivars *et al.*, 2013; Prats *et al.*, 2008) and adopting a more dynamic approach or identifying how the trends on destinations are changing (Costa, 2020; Fyall and Garrod, 2020). However, these authors worked with consecutive moments in time rather than a real movie time frame, which has its value but is limited in temporal terms.

According to Ivars *et al.* (2013), interest in analysing the evolution of tourism destinations came about in conjunction with interest in the mass tourism phenomenon, the latter being understood as the last stage in a destination's evolution.

What is common in all these researches is that the destination evolution has been mainly checked on a reverse formula, trying to explain what happened in the past, or how the present might illustrate the past. Nevertheless, there is a lack of literature trying to explain how the long-term evolution might help to forecast the future evolution of a particular destination.

Prediction is important for tourism activities and Destination Management (Khatibi et al. 2020). In this regard, academics and policy makers have always shown the need for accurate forecasts in the field of tourism (Sheldon & Var, 1985) Thus, tourism forecasting became a wide field of research, even though it is clearly heterogeneous. Several lines within forecasting might be found on the literature. Liu et al (2018) and Li et al (2017) forecast arrivals on Chinese destinations from the business perspective. Palmer et al. (2006) forecast tourism expenditure in Balearic Islands with a psychological approach.

Also, Khatibi et al. (2020) focus on social media data management with a computer sciences approach. Despite the approach, the main issue in forecasting research has been to anticipate the number of tourists to arrive in future times, to better plan the perishable nature of tourism products. That is perfect for individual businesses and attractions, but not useful for destinations.

Destinations are dealing with marketing and management issues that usually are impacting in a mid-term timeframe. Thus, there is a need to forecast not looking at next season or year but looking at mid or long-term. In this regard, destinations are more affected by the different cycles or trends that tourism suffer along the years. That is the reason why it seems logical to anticipate these cyclic changes.

This idea of stages originates from the Tourism Area Life Cycle (TALC) concept posited by Butler (1980) and continued by a wide range of researchers, several of whom tested the TALC model on various real destinations as a concept of evolution, although mainly in a descriptive manner (Priestley and Mundet, 1998). Setting that each stage of the destination's life cycle needs different strategies and to develop those plans, the knowledge about the evolution of the destination image and the reason of why the tourists choose one destination over another is pertinent (Báez-García, Flores-Muñoz and Gutiérrez-Barroso, 2018).

In fact, what is relevant from this perspective is that models incorporating stages like TALC, in which evolution is only represented by reaching a new stage, are being seriously contrasted with models that consider tourism as a complex phenomenon in which evolution can be achieved through multiple scenarios and by means of multiple factors. Complexity theories (Guia *et al.*, 2006) are one example of this.

In this regard, it is relevant to mention different examples of destination evolution research, such as that conducted by Ivars *et al.* (2013), who analysed the evolution of a mass tourism destination, in this case Benidorm, to provide a vision of tourism growth. Glover and Prideaux (2008) worked on the idea that population aging will have an impact on destination development, changing demand motivations and thus available products that will entail the evolution of a destination; this would be a more social-based vision. Kastenholz (2010) posited that destination evolution comprises changes in destination

marketing and segmentation, thus providing a more commercial vision of the phenomenon. And Bowen *et al.* (2017) shed light on the relationship between politics, power, and destination development, opening the debate on power in planning the evolution of a destination.

What all of these approaches have in common is a focus on the driving force behind change and evolution, resulting in a lack of research on the changes themselves. What changes occur in a destination over a long period of time? What elements do all destinations need to be ready to face? How do such changes explain the evolution of the destination?

To answer these questions, this paper draws on data for the sun and sand resort of L'Estartit from the last 35 years. This range of data covers the modern years of tourism and is further explained in the following section.

L'Estartit is a mature sun and sand destination that started out as a typical holiday resort during the 1960's, initially built and fully run by tour operators. At first, it was very popular among young British tourists arriving on charter flights operating through Girona airport. However, thanks especially to its natural resources - such as the Medes Islands and its subaquatic world - it started to become known as a more nature-based scuba diving destination. More recently, L'Estartit has started to position itself as a family destination based on natural and cultural assets. Illustration 1 shows its location.



Illustration - 1. L'Estartit in reference to Costa Brava

MATERIALS AND METHODS

The data consist of variables directly presented to tourists visiting the Tourism Office in the analysed destination, L'Estartit, during the period comprising 1984 to 2019. Data were gathered in the following years: 1984, 1987, 1991, 1995, 1999, 2003, 2008, 2012, 2013, 2016 and 2019. Since the aim of the study is to observe which elements triggered a change in the destination, the main initial variables analysed are nationality (where tourists come from), length of stay, and how the trip was organized. However, the questionnaire tourists responded to in L'Estartit Tourism Office also included other variables related to traveller characteristics and trip characteristics, including age, occupation, accommodation used and destination loyalty, among others. These data are also included in our analysis.

In respect of the data, it is worth noting that although gathering data for different periods over such a long time (more than 35 years) has allowed us to observe variations in tourism trends and the realities of a particular destination, it also makes it difficult to match variables due to data collection also evolving. While the variables used as response options in this study remained similar year-on-year, adjustments had to be made to the

length of stay variable, for example. At the beginning of the series (years 1984, 1987, 1991, 1995 and 1999), tourists did not stay fewer than four nights at the destination, so there was no need to include this response option in the questionnaire. However, in 2003 researchers realized that tourists were starting to stay for shorter periods and this option was therefore included from that moment on. Table 1 shows the response percentages for each response option for the four main variables considered.

Table - 1. Percentage of responses for each variable's response option per year

Variable /												
Year		2019	2016	2013	2012	2008	2003	1999	1995	1991	1987	1984
	CAT	20.4	22.9	25.2	23.3	27.2	20.3	17.0	7.8	8.2	7.6	10.0
	SPA	14.8	14.0	7.4	12.0	11.0	14.3	12.0	7.8	9.0	4.3	7.7
	FR	33.0	31.8	21.0	35.6	24.3	22.9	19.4	16.7	17.1	12.3	9.8
Nationality	UK	8.5	7.3	9.7	6.1	9.4	11.3	12.5	31.5	38.7	42.6	44.0
Nationality	GER	8.0	3.2	6.3	3.2	3.3	6.2	7.6	6.3	7.5	13.5	10.5
	BEL	5.0	3.4	6.3	3.4	4.9	3.7	8.2	8.6	7.5	6.9	6.0
	NETH	3.3	6.5	19.4	6.9	13.0	8.2	9.5	13.8	6.6	8.0	8.0
	OTHER	7.0	10.9	4.7	9.5	6.9	13.1	13.8	7.5	5.4	4.8	4.0
	1-3 nights	6.4	24.3	31.5	16.2	0.8	2.0					
	4-7 nights	39.6	24.1	21.1	36.0	33.9	31.0	27.5	3.9	17.1	11.7	15.9
Length of	8-14 nights	38.9	34.0	26.3	32.0	41.3	38.7	43.3	66.3	49.8	55.1	51.8
stay	15-21 nights	7.9	8.7	7.4	7.0	14.8	10.3	13.7	26.2	19.0	19.7	20.3
	More 21 nights	7.2	8.9	13.7	7.6	9.2	15.8	14.3	3.6	12.4	13.5	12.0
	Travel agency	16.2	17.8	7.2	17.2	22.9	26.7	33.0	47.7	45.5	43.2	41.6
Trip organization	Club/ Assoc.	6.5	5.8	1.2	5.6	5.3	3.8	5.0	6.3	3.5	5.5	5.0
o. gaao	Own way	77.3	76.4	91.6	72.6	68.0	63.0	57.7	46.0	45.0	51.3	53.4
	Under 24	9.6	13.1	7.24	11.7	9.5	10.4	8.1	8.9	8.1	16.5	12.2
	25-34	10.2	19.6	11.5 3	23.0	19.0	20.7	19.0	21.3	22.4	21.5	22.3
Age	35-49	29.8	31.2	38.6 1	38.0	44.2	44.5	47.0	45.2	45.2	43.5	39.0
	50-60	22.9	19.0	26.2 7	17.5	19.1	18.0	18.1	16.5	14.9	12.3	18.9
	Over 60	27.5	17.1	16.3 5	9.8	8.2	6.4	7.8	8.1	9.4	6.2	7.6

The data presented in Table 1 respond to aggregated data per year, because micro data (individual tourist data) are not available. Given that we had access to the percentages of

the response options for each variable per year, and since aggregated data are by nature carrying relative information (i.e. percentages), we believed it appropriate to use Compositional Data Analysis methodology, this being the standard statistical methodology used when data contain information about the relative importance of parts of a whole (Aitchison, 1986; Pawlowsky-Glahn and Buccianti, 2011).

Examples of typical compositional research questions in tourism and destination management might be: Which origins have the highest concentration of tourist flows per tourist segment to a destination? Or, how should destinations allocate their capacity to their product and service portfolio? (Coenders and Ferrer-Rosell, 2020). This is what we address from a temporal perspective, and for a particular destination, in this study.

Analysing proportions poses several statistical challenges. Compositional data analysis is defined as the analysis of parts of a whole, when the relative size of its D elements (or components) is of interest. The compositional vector x has to be positive and add up to 100 (percentage). In our case, each variable included in the study(per year) is a composition formed by D response options (components), and expressed in percentages.

The most common approach in CoDa literature is to transform the data carrying relative information into logarithms of ratios, with the simplest one computed as the log-ratio between the geometric means of components (called centred log-ratio transformation or clr). The main advantage of log-ratios is that they constitute the natural way of distilling the information about the relative size of components and form the basis for defining associations between components (response options) and distance in a meaningful way.

Proportionality between components (response options of each variable in this study) is used to measure the degree of association between them. If two components behave proportionally, their ratio will be constant, and the variance of the log-ratio will be zero. The variation matrix contains those log-ratio variances computed for all possible pairs of components. The zero value implies direct perfect association between two components. High values of log-ratio variance indicate that the two components do not change proportionally (Egozcue and Pawlowsky-Glahn, 2011). The so-called compositional distance must be computed using clr, which is interpreted as the relative importance of one of the components when compared with the geometric mean of all the others. This

distance is computed as the distance between two compositions, which is what the CoDa biplot draws on.

Thus, the data are presented here using first, a graph to see the evolution of the responses (percentages) of each variable along the time, and second, using the most common CoDa visualization tool, the CoDa Biplot (Coenders and Ferrer-Rosell, 2020), which allows for the joint visual representation of proportionality between components and units of analysis (or individuals). Its purpose is to arrange two types of information in a joint way reducing interpretation complexity. In this study, information refers to the responses options (components) for each variable (composition), and the years of the series (individuals or units of analysis). Components are usually represented as vectors, with the origin at the centre of the coordinates and individuals as dots. Interpretation is as follows: the main element to be interpreted is the distance between the ends of the vectors (response options). A short distance indicates that the response option retains an approximate proportionality. That is, pairs of response options, whereby the proportion of the other response is also doubled if the proportion of one response is doubled in a given analysed year. Contrarily, vectors that are far from one another indicate that if a response option increases proportionally in a given year, the proportion of the other response will decrease. In summary, this tool allows us to visualize the approximate importance of each response option for each year in relative terms and identify which response options contribute to distinguishing each year of the series from the others. More importantly, it also allows us to show changes over time.

When a component contains zeros, neither geometric mean nor log-ratios can be computed, and the zeros must be replaced. In this study, the few zeros that were present in the length of stay variable were replaced, as in Blasco-Duatis *et al.*, (2018).

CoDaPack software (v2.02.21) was used to carry out all analyses (Thió-Henestrosa and Martín-Fernández, 2005).

RESULTS

The results presented here refer to the historical evolution in tourist data for the destination of L'Estartit and the relationship between different variables since 1984. Our aim is to explore how this destination has evolved by analysing the progression of its main data, and defining which elements might be repetitive, which other might be cyclic, and define how other destinations can benefit from the results found. Thus, we start with the three main elements: nationality, length of stay, and trip organization, before going on to analyse other elements that generated change during this period.

Starting with the analysis by nationality, as Table 1 and Figure 1 – the evolution graph and the biplot - show, the structure of the tourist market in L'Estartit has undergone substantial changes.

In respect of this, we see a continued decline in British tourism, which accounted for 44% of total tourists in 1984 and just 8.5% in 2019. Those nationalities that have established themselves as the majority in the market and consolidated this change have been the French, Catalans and tourists from the rest of Spain. These three markets accounted for 68.1% of visitors in 2019, while in 1984 they accounted for just 27.5%. French tourists accounted for 33% of the total in 2019, while they did not reach even 10% in 1984 (9.8%). The Belgian market decreased slightly, from 6% to 5%, as did the German market, which fell from 10.5% to 8%. The Dutch market decreased substantially, from 8% in 1984 to 3.3% in 2019.

These data allow us to determine the importance of local demand, considered to comprise tourists from Catalonia, compared to that of more distant markets, the former representing a decisive change in demand consolidated over the 16 years of the period studied.

Figure 1 clearly shows an increase in the Catalan, rest of Spain, French and other markets from 1999 onwards.

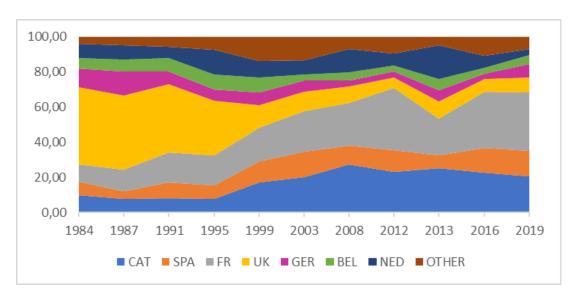


Figure - 1.a. Market evolution

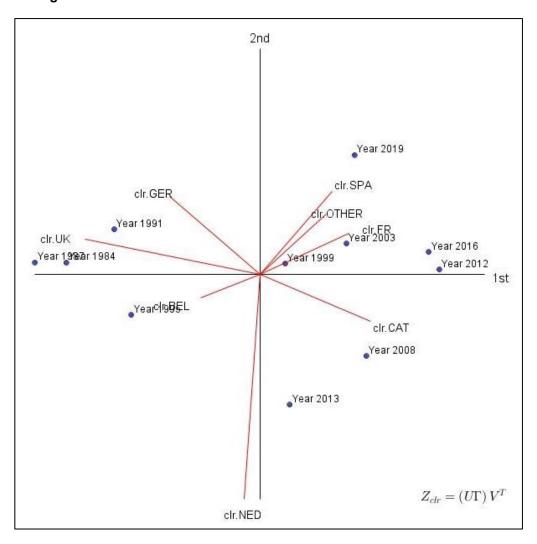


Figure - 1.b. Biplot chart in nationality market variable.

Table - 2. Variation array for the nationality variable

Xi/Xj	SPA	FR	UK	GER	BEL	NETH	OTHER	CLR
								variances
CAT	0.132	0.095	1.443	0.756	0.559	0.042	0.226	0.244
SPA		0.066	1.046	0.536	0.375	0.461	0.082	0.127
FR			1.201	0.627	0.426	0.455	0.129	0.165
UK				0.242	0.308	0.670	1.046	0.535
GER					0.124	0.459	0.553	0.202
BEL						0.204	0.375	0.087
NETH							0.419	0.176
OTHER								0.144
•							•	1.679

A relevant fact that emerges from Figure 1b and Table 2 is the antagonistic relationship between the British and Catalan markets, it clearly being shown that the years where one has a high percentage, the other's is low. The same relationship, although less pronounced, is also found between the Catalan and German markets. The British market also shows antagonism with the "rest of Spain" and French markets, although to a lesser extent than with the Catalan. It is clear how the years of the beginning of the analysed period, between 1984 and 1995, are relatively more associated to German, UK and Belgium markets. The French market has a greater affinity with the Catalan and Spanish markets (the three markets are relatively close in the biplot). That is, the years that more French tourists came to L'Estartit also saw more domestic tourists (Catalan and Spanish). The same can be said of the Dutch and Belgian markets. In the years when more Belgian tourists came, there were also more Dutch.

In short, there would seem to be a connection between local and more distant tourism, although we cannot determine at this time whether this change was caused by local management and planning or simply a case of the market self-regulating, and the rise of other competitive destinations in the Mediterranean area Also, something to be considered is the world economic crisis between 2008 and 2012, in which we can see a sharp increase of domestic and closer markets leading to a reduction of foreign European markets.

We have used these data regarding nationality to analyse whether other variables also show patterns of change and how they are associated with it. We first look at tourist age over time (Figure 2a – evolution of age tourists along the analysed period). It can be

observed how the percentage of tourists over 60 years old visiting the destination has been increasing along the time, and in relative terms was almost the dominant segment in 2019.

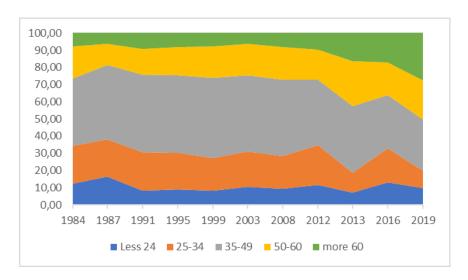


Figure - 2.a. Age market variation

Figure 2b and Table 3 relate the variables of tourist nationality and age.

In this case, a clear contrast was found between tourists from the British market and the over 60's age group. This therefore establishes that in the years with more British tourists, there were proportionally fewer tourists aged 60 or over. This relationship was also clearly reflected with German tourists, albeit to a lesser extent. In other words, the German and British tourists who visited the destination at the beginning of the period analysed were mostly younger people. In contrast, tourists aged over 60 were clearly associated with the Dutch and French markets. Belgian tourists were mainly in the 35-49 age range (dark blue in the table), although they were also associated with the age ranges of under 24, 25-44 and 50-60. Spanish tourists were in the age range of 50-60 years old.

It is worth noting the increase in tourist age throughout the analysed period, with the 60 years or over age group rising from 7.6% in 1984 to 27.5% in 2019. In respect of this, the "over 60's" segment was second in importance and clearly on the rise after the 35-49 year-old age group, which totalled 29.8% in 2019. This denotes an aging tourist population visiting the destination, with L'Estartit receiving younger British and German tourists at the beginning of the period analysed but more recently mainly older tourists from Catalonia, Spain and France.

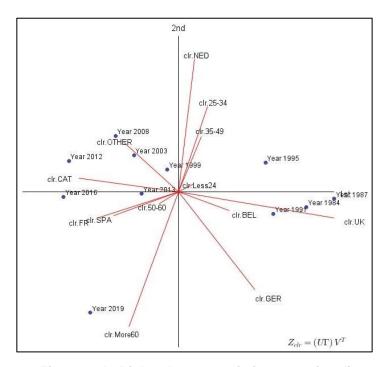


Figure - 2.b. Biplot chart on variation on nationality and age variables

Table - 3. Variation array for the nationality and age variables

Xi/Xj	SPA	FR	UK	GER	BEL	NET H	OTHE R	Unde r 24	25-34	35-49	50- 60	Over 60	CLR varianc
													es
CAT	0.13	0.09	1.44	0.75	0.55	0.04	0.226	0.344	0.462	0.382	0.175	0.22	0.244
	2	5	3	6	9	2						0	
SPA		0.06	1.04	0.53	0.37	0.46	0.082	0.216	0.260	0.241	0.120	0.16	0.127
		6	6	6	5	1						6	
FR			1.20	0.62	0.42	0.45	0.129	0.245	0.342	0.304	0.164	0.13	0.165
			1	7	6	5						6	
UK				0.24	0.30	0.67	1.046	0.467	0.413	0.451	0.708	1.00	0.535
				2	8	0						1	
GER					0.12	0.45	0.553	0.184	0.278	0.207	0.275	0.43	0.202
					4	9						5	
BEL						0.20	0.375	0.153	0.144	0.069	0.135	0.29	0.087
						4						8	
NETH							0.419	0.262	0.212	0.138	0.173	0.46	0.176
OTHER								0.404	0.400	0.400	0.400	3	0.444
OTHER								0.191	0.196	0.199	0.182	0.31 7	0.144
I la da a									0.070	0.000	0.400		0.040
Under 24									0.072	0.092	0.138	0.30 4	0.048
25-34										0.048	0.181	0.45	0.078
23-34										0.046	0.101	7	0.076
35-49											0.086	0.33	0.039
33-43											0.000	5	0.008
50-60												0.12	0.032
												0.12	0.002
Over 60													0.170
	1	1					1	ı	ı	1		1	2.046

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If we now look at the trip organization variable, we see from the variation array in Table 4 and from Figure 3a and b that booking through a travel agency and organizing one's own trip are opposed. The years most associated with organizing the trip through a travel agency were those at the beginning of the period, and the years most associated with organizing it oneself are those on the left of the graph. The year 2013 stands out, being the year in which most tourists organized the trip themselves in proportional terms.

Table - 4. Variation array for the trip organization variable

Xi/Xj	Club / Assoc.	Own way	CLR variances
Travel	0.236	0.596	0.148
agency			
Club / Assoc.		0.332	0.060
Own way			0.180
_		•	0.388

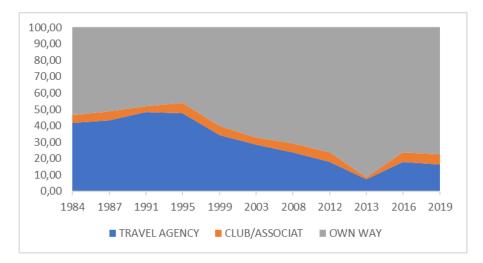


Figure - 3.a. Trip organization variation

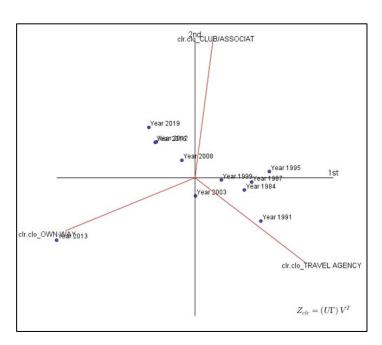


Figure - 3.b. Biplot chart on variation on trip organization variable

Let us now consider the relationship between nationality and trip organization. Figure 4 shows a clear association between the two variables.

The results show a contrast between the British market and booking a holiday independently. Also, but to a lesser extent, there was a contrast between this market and organizing the trip through clubs and associations. This reveals that the British market was clearly operated by tours, with bookings managed by travel agencies and tour operators during this period. Indeed, the Belgian, German and British markets all showed a high association with organization through travel agencies, especially between 1984 and 1995. On the other hand, it is not surprising to find that the Catalan market was closer to the response option of organizing the trip on your own.

Finally, the Spanish, French and other markets were the ones that used clubs and associations to organize their trip to a proportionally greater extent (the vectors on the biplot go in the same direction, especially from 1999 onwards).

It is worth noting the fact of Ryanair beginning to operate at Girona Costa Brava Airport in December 2002, which further accentuated the phenomenon of tourists organizing the trip on their own and the gradual decrease in organization through travel agencies.

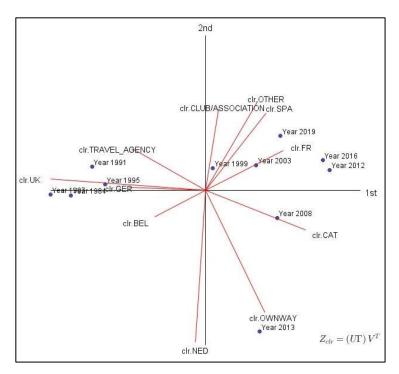


Figure - 4. Biplot chart on variation of nationality and trip organization

Table - 5. Variation array for the variables nationality and trip organization

Xi/Xj	SPA	FR	UK	GER	BEL	NETH	OTHER	Travel	Club /	Own	CLR
٨١/٨١								agency	Assoc.	way	variances
CAT	0.132	0.095	1.443	0.756	0.559	0.042	0.226	0.735	0.274	0.111	0.244
SPA		0.066	1.046	0.536	0.375	0.461	0.082	0.425	0.106	0.140	0.127
FR			1.201	0.627	0.426	0.455	0.129	0.561	0.138	0.183	0.165
UK				0.242	0.308	0.670	1.046	0.199	0.670	1.123	0.535
GER					0.124	0.459	0.553	0.170	0.312	0.513	0.202
BEL						0.204	0.375	0.092	0.190	0.366	0.087
NETH							0.419	0.092	0.190	0.366	0.176
OTHER								0.373	0.117	0.329	0.144
Travel									0.236	0.596	0.048
agency											
Club /										0.332	0.078
Assoc.											
Own											0.039
way											
											1.845

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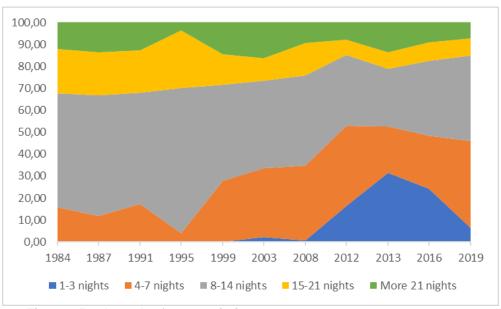


Figure - 5.a. Length of stay variation

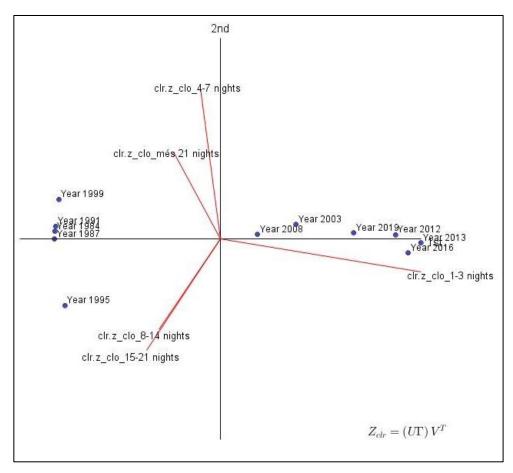


Figure - 4.b. Biplot chart on nationality and holiday duration

Table 5 and Figures 5a and b show the reduction in holiday duration from 2003 onwards,

which is closely linked to stays of 1 to 3 days. The association between the years 1984-2003 and stays of 8-14 nights, 15-21 nights and more than 21 nights is very clear. From 2003, there was a large increase, in relative terms, in stays of 1 to 3 nights (located at the right side of the biplot and closer to the last years of period analysed).

We have already stated that Ryanair began operating at Girona Costa Brava Airport in December 2002. Thus, 2003 was the first summer that the airline had air connections with the main issuing markets and where tourists could start booking and organizing their own air transport. This meant that, without the need for travel agencies, there was a greater likelihood of tourists making their stay more flexible and not purchasing the standard packages by the week.

Table - 6. Variation array for the length of stay variable

Xi/Xj	4-7 nights	8-14 nights	15-21 nigths	More 21 nights	CLR variances
1-3 nights	10.710	14.805	16.281	13.369	8.713
4-7 nights		0.702	1.031	0.335	0.235
8-14 nights			0.051	0.298	0.851
15-21 nights				0.426	1.238
More 21 nights					0.565
					11.601

As Table 6 and Figure 6 and the variation array in Table 7 for the variables nationality and length of stay show, the data reflect a contrast between more distant markets, such as Germany, Great Britain, Belgium and the Netherlands, and short stays of 1 to 3 days due to geographical distance. At the same time, it is observed that the German, British and Belgian markets are mainly to the right of the graph, closer to the years 1984-1999.

The British market shows a proportionally strong association with stays of 8-14 nights and more than 21 nights during the early years of the study. During the same period (the beginning of the series), the German market also shows a strong association with stays of 4 to 7 nights and more than 21 nights.

The Catalan and French markets display a similar behaviour and have an inverse, but less accentuated, relationship with stays of 15-21 nights in the years from 2003 onwards. After that point, these markets, along with the rest of Spain and other markets, display relationships with the variables of 4-7 nights and 1-3 nights.

From 2003 onwards, there was a trend towards shorter stays (left side of the biplot, Figure 6), those markets mainly associated with short stays being Spain, others, France and Catalonia. Therefore, in the years when stays were shorter - between 1 and 3 nights and 4 to 7 nights - a higher proportion of French, Spanish, Catalan and "other market" tourists visited L'Estartit.

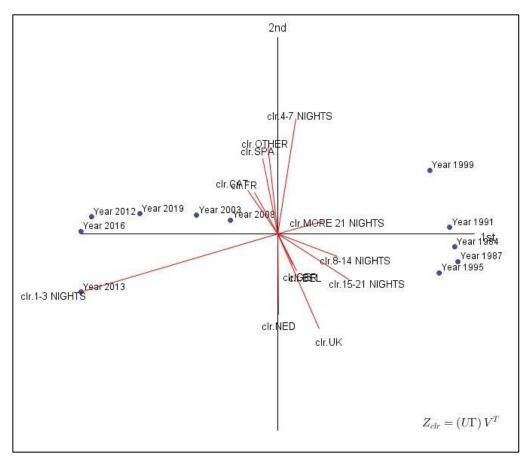


Figure - 5. Biplot chart on Nationality and length of stay

Table - 7. Variation array for the variables nationality and length of stay

V:W:	SPA	FR	UK	GER	BEL	NETH	OTHER	1-3	4-7	8-14	15-21	More	CLR
Xi/Xj								nigths	nights	nights	nigths	21 nights	variances
CAT	0.132	0.095	1.443	0.756	0.559	0.042	0.226	6.380	0.608	1.944	2.493	1.396	0.244
SPA		0.066	1.046	0.536	0.375	0.461	0.082	7.581	0.363	1.318	1.875	1.043	0.127
FR			1.201	0.627	0.426	0.455	0.129	6.865	0.536	1.605	2.147	1.274	0.165
UK				0.242	0.308	0.670	1.046	12.844	0.582	0.244	0.369	0.235	0.535
GER					0.124	0.459	0.553	10.540	0.287	0.583	0.899	0.304	0.202
BEL						0.204	0.375	10.139	0.241	0.510	0.802	0.343	0.087
NETH							0.419	8.941	0.572	0.993	1.287	0.689	0.176
OTHER								8.090	0.373	1.232	1.709	0.917	0.144
1-3 nights									10.710	14.805	16.281	13.369	8.713

4-7					0.702	1.031	0.335	0.235
4-7 nights								
8-14						0.051	0.298	0.851
8-14 nights								
15-21 nights							0.426	1.238
nights								
More								0.565
21								
21 nights								
								13.281

CONCLUSION & DISCUSSION

At the beginning of this paper, we asked if changes in destinations might be forecasted and anticipated analysing long periods of data. The answer is that long term data will help to forecast some cyclic changes in certain key demand factors.

Furthermore, the paper determined which elements of data can help to understand the evolution of a tourism destination over time. We can now state that tourists' origin, length of stay and how they organize the trip are the main elements of change anticipation. In our case, tourist age also evolved in such a way that it may provide an explanation for this evolution and clues for forecasting.

This study corroborates a large number of works that have individually shown changes in length of stay to be generic in contemporary tourism (Moll *et al.*, 2016; Ferrer-Rosell *et al.*, 2014; Alegre *et al.*, 2011; Barros and Machado 2010). The trend in all of these cases is towards greater flexibility in length of stay, with a greater number of trips during the year and less duration for each.

The emergence and cheapening of low-cost flights meant that tourists could consider flying more often and for shorter periods, and this had a great impact on the destination studied from 2002 onwards due to the commencement of commercial flights to the nearest airport (which is located 45 minutes away).

If we now consider nationality, we find numerous studies that explain changes in tourist demand being especially due to this factor. Among others, these include changes as a result of disasters (Ghaderi *et al.*, 2017; Zhue *et al.*, 2018), negative or positive images of the destination (Stylidis *et al.*, 2017; Isaac and Abu Eid, 2019) or improvements in ease

of access. However, no studies reflect changes in nationalities due to the passage of time and normal evolution. We believe this to be one of the key contributions of this article: noting that tourists' origin will necessarily vary over time, and that proximity, physical and real, to the destination plays a very key role. In this sense, the trend to a closer proximity of tourists can be observed and has a natural change of 29 years, so this will can be anticipated in traditional sun and beach destinations.

Changes detected in the way the trip is organized are in line with the findings of numerous works (Isaac and Abu Eid, 2019; Kang *et al.*, 2020), which have shown an increase in tourists organizing the trip themselves, or at least their use of flexible organization methods such as dynamic packaging. What is clear from the data is the notable increase in formulas linked to online booking compared to more traditional methods. That is, even when tourists do use a travel agency, they mostly opt for an online one.

Combining these last two elements, we see that joint evolution also exists, and that changes in the nationality of visiting tourists also incorporate changes in terms of trip organization. By way of example, the British market was the only one to book trips via Teletext in the early stages of the studied period. As this nationality diminished, this system of trip organization almost disappeared with it.

Length of the stay is a common element that we have been able to observe in all western destinations and for markets of a certain proximity. As with many destinations, L'Estartit was affected by the establishment of a low-cost flight airport in a nearby environment, which increased the number of tourists to the destination, but also drastically reduced their length of stay due to the cut in transportation costs, making it possible to visit several places for the same price.

In addition to changes in behaviour, the results obtained and analysed for the last 35 years also show a change in the profile of tourists visiting L'Estartit. Although this was not the scope of the present work, we can state that the average age of tourists who visit L'Estartit rose from 39 in 1984 to 49 in 2019. It should be noted that in 1984, the 50+ age group accounted for 26.5% of visitors, while in 2019 this figure was 50.4%. In other words, those German and British tourists who visited the destination at the beginning of the series were mostly young, and this was in line with the more traditional tourism-based supply of

leisure and sun and sand holidays. Most visitors are now French, Catalan and Spanish, with an average age of around 40, this reflecting the profile of family destination created by the local municipality.

Therefore, the L'Estartit DMO must start facing the challenge to attract final tourists and enhance their digital marketing strategy, targeting more specific tourists according to their new profile and motivations, and move away progressively from comarketing with tour operators and travel agencies. This strategy has to involve all the different stakeholders of the destination, and create a common Branding strategy that helps to position in the mind of the potential tourist, focusing on motivations and specific interests of the target

This study presents a number of limitations. One of the most important is that data were collected at the destination's tourist office, which may have caused a bias in the profile of tourists who visited the destination over the years. On the other hand, another limitation is related to the difficulty of having homogeneous data over time, and especially considering a period of 35 years. The evolution of the sector itself, tourists' behaviour, consumption patterns, etc. means that the tools used for data collection have also evolved over time. In respect of this, working with aggregated data facilitated the analyses necessary to meet the aims of the study, even if they are descriptive, and also led to the possibility of including other periods, other variables that may be of interest, or even other destinations in the future. A third limitation is that the present study only refers to a particular destination. In this sense, a future line of research would include comparing it with other similar and/or different destinations (e.g. sun and sand, mountain or city, among others), and both close (within the tourist destination of Catalonia/Spain) and far away (Mediterranean, Caribbean, Maldives, among others) with the aim of determining trends in the tourism industry, patterns of tourist behaviour and the evolution of the destinations themselves. Finally, another limitation refers to the lack of tourism destination policy data, impeding analysing cause-effect relationships between tourist segments visiting the destination and what actually was planned at the destination. A future research line would focus on relating information about destination management policies and tourists' trends visiting the destination.

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DISCUSIÓN

Los objetivos principales de esta tesis eran, en primer lugar, la formulación de estrategias del destino por parte de una DMO mediante la previsión de la demanda turística usando los datos e información sobre los turistas que han visitado el destino, y en segundo lugar, la influencia de las acciones de marketing y branding de la DMO sobre el destino. Y junto a estos objetivos, la motivación principal de este trabajo es la de prever comportamientos futuros en destinaciones maduras.

En este sentido, los artículos de este compendio presentan resultados con respecto a, la obtención y análisis de datos, la gestión de la imagen del destino, la gestión de los datos para la previsión de la demanda turística, y diferencias entre estrategias de promoción del destino locales y regionales. En este orden de ideas, los dos primeros artículos se concentran en la obtención y análisis de datos a través de las redes sociales y el tercero considera la gestión de datos para la previsión de la demanda turística. Así mismo, se puede ver en los resultados la diferencia entre las estrategias regionales, presentadas en el primer artículo, y las estrategias locales, presentadas en el segundo y tercer artículo.

En cuanto a las redes sociales, los artículos presentados están en consonancia con lo propuesto por Bashar (2014), en donde se obtienen resultados sobre estas como herramientas en procesos de planeación de los viajes. Sin embargo, en los resultados obtenidos se agrega que las redes sociales son una parte integral para la promoción del destino, en la medida que, a través de éstas se conecta y se comparte información valiosa para los viajeros como lo plantean Kiráľová y Pavlíčeka (2015). Así mismo, el autor identifica y destaca que las redes sociales sirven también como herramienta de recolección de información y evaluación de las estrategias realizadas por el destino.

Ahora bien, considerando las redes sociales como elemento importante en la promoción del destino, en los resultados de los primeros dos artículos se aprecia el uso de las redes sociales de tres maneras diferentes, por medio del destino, a partir del contenido

generado por el usuario y por parte de *travel bloggers*. A través de estas tres formas se puede generar una posible disonancia en la narrativa en la promoción del destino (Choi, Lehto y Morrison, 2007). Por esto, las estrategias que se mencionan en los primeros dos artículos, principalmente en el primero, están en línea para crear una consonancia en el discurso entre los tres actores diferentes. Buscando trabajar en conjunto con los *travel bloggers* comunicando el mensaje del destino, pero dándoles una voz propia se logra disminuir las desventajas que plantean Pan, MacLaurin y Crots (2007) del uso de *travel bloggers*. Adicionalmente, como parte de los resultados del primer artículo expuesto en este compendio, se encuentra que la articulación entre el destino, los *travel bloggers* y los usuarios en la generación de contenido permite aumentar el conocimiento (*awareness*) sobre el destino. Adicionalmente, se puede ver en el primer artículo que cuando se presenta esta articulación, y hay una interacción con los usuarios de las redes sociales, la poca credibilidad de la fuente que plantean Huang, Chou y Lin (2010) se revierte hacia una fuente creíble con la que se pueden crear estrategias de cambio de imagen como se plantea en el segundo artículo.

La promoción del destino por medio de las redes sociales genera un efecto multiplicador y permite recoger datos valiosos para el análisis tanto de la imagen emitida del destino como la imagen de la demanda turística que éste tiene. Chaulgain, Witala y Fu (2019) proponen que se gestione y promocione el destino por parte de la DMMO de manera cuidadosa evaluando el impacto que éste pueda tener en la imagen percibida. Sin embargo, siguiendo con la línea que plantean Stydilis, Yaniv y Shani, (2015) y según los resultados obtenidos en el segundo artículo, la percepción del visitante ayuda al cambio de percepción de futuros turistas. Esto genera un cambio progresivo en la imagen del destino, contrario a lo que establecen Lee, Lockshin, Cohen y Corsi (2019) que proponen que las actitudes con respecto a un destino son cambios momentáneos que no perduran en el tiempo, en la medida que las publicaciones e interpretaciones del destino por parte de los turistas ayudan a que el cambio de imagen en el destino se mantenga. Adicionalmente, De Bruyn y Lilien (2008) identifican el uso de internet como una forma de seguir en tiempo real el proceso de toma de decisiones por parte del turista. El autor encuentre que además de seguir el proceso de toma de decisiones, a través de la combinación redes sociales, según lo encontrado en los primeros dos artículos de esta tesis, el destino puede evaluar el impacto, duración en tiempo y reacción de las estrategias planteadas por el destino para su promoción.

Por otro lado, a partir del uso de las redes sociales como fuente de datos para el análisis de información, Ghermandi, Camacho-Valdez y Trejo-Espinosa (2020) sugieren que el análisis asociado al texto y geolocalizaciones de las publicaciones describen elementos que ayudan a comprender la imagen percibida por el visitante. El autor agrega a lo anterior, con los resultados expuestos en los primeros dos artículos en la medida que el seguimiento y análisis de la información transmitida por las redes sociales permite; una interacción entre las DMMO y los visitantes como se ve en el primer artículo, monitorear las conversaciones online, identificar *travel bloggers* relevantes para la promoción del destino, evaluar el alcance de la estrategia de promoción del destino, conocer la imagen percibida del destino, evaluar una estrategia realizada por el destino para el cambio de imagen percibida.

Con la información obtenida y analizada de las redes sociales, y la información tomada de forma análoga en el destino, es posible identificar que el comportamiento de los turistas cambia a lo largo del tiempo. En este sentido la evaluación de datos como lugar de procedencia, profesión, duración de la estadía son elementos relevantes para que la DMO proponga nuevas estrategias (Alegre, Caldera y Sard, 2011; Moll, Prats y Coromina, 2016). En este compendio, se está de acuerdo con estos resultados, sin embargo, se considera que la forma como los turistas organizan el viaje y la edad del visitante, también forman parte de los elementos que ayudan a entender la evolución del turismo en un destino. Adicionalmente, se agrega que debe haber una medición a lo largo del tiempo, tanto para medir o evaluar las estrategias realizadas, como se demuestra en el segundo artículo donde se realizó una revisión de tres años posteriores al cambio de estrategia por parte del destino. Como para conocer el ciclo del turista y prever situaciones cíclicas que se pueden presentar en el destino, como se puede ver en el tercer artículo en el que se hizo un estudio de 35 años de datos.

Otro elemento que permite identificar el comportamiento del turista son los factores externos al destino que generan un impacto en la forma como el visitante vive el destino. Ferrer-Rosell, Coenders y Martnez-Garcia (2014) estudia el impacto de las aerolíneas de

bajo costo y su impacto en la duración del destino. En este orden de ideas, el autor evalúa en el segundo y tercer artículo, la relación de factores externos como el cierre de operaciones de una agencia de viajes o la llegada de las aerolíneas de bajo costo con el cambio de comportamiento en el destino y la posibilidad de prever la demanda turística en el destino.

Ahora bien, se encontró a lo largo de esta tesis que dentro de los elementos que se deben tener en cuenta para identificar la evolución de un destino y determinar posibles predicciones en la demanda turística, es relevante el análisis y la gestión de los datos que son recolectados por el destino. Considerando también, el conocimiento de las tendencias que van de la mano con un cambio de comportamiento del turista en el destino. Cuando se hace una combinación de estos datos se obtiene como resultado información útil para el destino para predecir los cambios que puede sufrir. Lo anterior agrega a lo expuesto por Costa (2020) que propone la planeación de turismo en un destino debe tener en cuenta dinámicas sociales, económicas y las tendencias de turismo que afectan los destinos. De esta forma, la DMMO tiene diferentes formas de recolección de datos; como lo muestran el primer y segundo artículo a través de las redes sociales, y como se presenta en el tercer artículo, por medio de la oficina de turismo. Entender los datos que se presentan, analizarlos y gestionarlos le permite al destino tomar acciones y realizar predicciones en el comportamiento de la demanda turística del destino.

Finalmente, un elemento importante que se tiene en este compendio de tesis es el nivel de análisis, se consideró la marca regional de Costa Brava en el primer artículo y de forma local Lloret de Mar y L'Estartit en el segundo y tercer artículo respectivamente. En línea con lo que establecen Ivars i Baidal, Rodríguez Sánchez y Vera Rebollo (2013), existen estrategias y actividades que se desarrollan a nivel regional que afectan las estrategias locales. Dentro de la estrategia planteada por TBEX se incluía Lloret de Mar como destino, esto pudo haber influido en la percepción del destino.

CONCLUSIONES

Esta tesis resalta el cambio que han venido realizando las DMO de un destino maduro con el uso de redes sociales. Así mismo se comprende la transformación de la imagen percibida del destino analizando la promoción del destino y los productos turísticos que ofrece, así como los factores externos que influyen en esta. Lo anterior, adicionalmente permite entender la demanda turística, el cambio de comportamiento del turista, y el perfil del visitante basado en datos.

La percepción de la imagen de un destino estuvo generada, hasta antes de internet por dos grandes actores, las DMO y los Tour Operadores. Las primeras debían escoger mercados y segmentos a los que se debía comunicar. Los segundos, en cambio tenían mayor facilidad de llegar a sus clientes e influir en las decisiones de viajes de los turistas. Esto se complementa con el tradicional boca oreja de los turistas que tenían un radio de influencia bajo.

Ante la llegada de internet, y específicamente las redes sociales, estos dos actores importantes se han enfrentado a cambios en la forma de consumo, la forma de promoción y el perfil del turista en un destino. Agregando, los retos particulares que tiene un destino de sol y playa, y la referencia de un destino maduro. De esta forma, a partir del análisis de datos, es posible utilizar estrategias de marketing online en donde se incorporen estrategias de marketing de contenidos, redes sociales, posicionamiento en buscadores, atracción de tráfico a los canales digitales y conversión de clientes hacia el destino.

Esta tesis por compendio de tres artículos que permiten identificar las diversas maneras como se presenta el cambio de imagen de un destino y el entendimiento de la DMO para la gestión interna y externa en términos de promoción del destino. También permite entender el cambio del perfil del turista a partir de una previsión y análisis de los factores que influyen en la toma de decisiones del visitante. De esta forma cada artículo aporta para resolver el objetivo general.

El primer artículo realiza un análisis sobre la estrategia de la DMO Costa Brava Girona en camino a la promoción del destino a través de un evento. En este congreso TBEX de travel bloggers se obtuvo una repercusión tanto en el retorno de la inversión como en el retorno del compromiso (engagement). Estrategia que continuó siendo efectiva 5 años posteriores al evento. En este sentido, el artículo también resalta la importancia en la selección de aquellos travel bloggers o creadores de contenido, enfocándose en elemento que van más allá del número de seguidores, como la generación de una comunidad y el compromiso (engagement) que ellos tienen con esta. Así, con un bajo porcentaje de creadores de contenido, bien escogido, se llega a generar tráfico en la red superior a 855.

El segundo artículo continúa con el análisis de las redes sociales, pero éste se enfoca en un análisis de datos en redes sociales frente a las estrategias desarrolladas por la DMO para estructurar el producto. Este artículo permite ahondar en el hecho que el visitante se encuentra con la necesidad de compartir sus vacaciones en las redes sociales, y permite identificar la forma como cambia la percepción del destino, así como el consumo de sus activos.

El tercer artículo muestra la evolución que tiene un destino a través del análisis de los visitantes a lo largo de 40 años, y permite ver como se adapta el destino para generar un cambio de percepción de la imagen, que a su vez genera un cambio de perfil del turista. Adicionalmente, el artículo demuestra como los factores externos al destino como la aparición de internet y las aerolíneas de bajo costo provocan un cambio radical en el perfil del turista. Esto lleva a su vez a un cambio en la oferta del destino, pasando de ser basada en sol y playa, hacia promocionar atractivos basados en la sostenibilidad y el medio ambiente.

La tesis responde al objetivo general en la medida que se propone un modelo para realizar la previsión de un destino considerando los factores externos que pueden influir en el cambio del perfil del turista y su comportamiento. De esta forma, encaminar el contenido y promoción del destino siguiendo la imagen que se busca proyectar al visitante, considerando a los creadores de contenido y analizando la percepción de la imagen por parte del turista a través de sus redes sociales.

En general, la tesis contribuye al entendimiento de la imagen del destino, identificando los diferentes elementos que influyen en la percepción de esta. Adicionalmente, ésta contribuye en el análisis de datos a través de las redes sociales, los datos que se recolectan en las oficinas de turismo, así como los factores externos que pueden influir, para identificar posibles cambios en la demanda turística y promocionar el destino. En este sentido se desarrollan contribuciones teóricas y prácticas.

Con respecto a las contribuciones teóricas, la tesis resalta los diferentes factores que influyen la percepción de la imagen del destino. Las redes sociales, bien sea a través de acciones dirigidas por la DMO como se presentó en el evento TBEX o por las dinámicas generadas por los turistas. También el cambio de los productos que existen y se promocionan en el destino hace que se genere un cambio en la imagen percibida. Los cambios externos que hacen que se generen diferentes dinámicas hacen que haya un cambio en el perfil del turista y por tanto en los productos turísticos que se ofrecen.

En cuanto a las redes sociales, éstas permiten promocionar el destino y al mismo tiempo recibir retroalimentación de cómo se percibe la imagen a través de los datos y las conversaciones que estas se generan. Adicionalmente, es posible generar credibilidad en la promoción de un destino en la medida que se trabaje en conjunto en la creación de contenido con los *travel bloggers* y las interacciones y comentarios que realizan los usuarios. En este sentido, las DMO o DMMO pueden realizar un seguimiento de la imagen percibida que a su vez permite entender las dinámicas del mercado y prever el comportamiento y la demanda turística.

Por otro lado, la tesis aporta en el entendimiento de estrategias regionales pueden influir en la promoción y en la percepción de la imagen en el entorno local. Si se tiene en cuenta el evento TBEX que tuvo repercusión hasta cinco años después, influye en la percepción de la imagen y en los productos turísticos de Lloret de Mar. Y es también los elementos externos como las aerolíneas de bajo costo y los cierres de empresas que permiten entender un cambio del turista, lo que lleva a una redirección de la percepción de la imagen del destino.

Este compendio de artículos contribuye también a la teoría en el tema de gestión de datos por parte de las DMO. A través de las redes sociales es posible identificar los

patrones de consumo y perfil de los turistas. De esta forma, en la medida que se actualice la información, la oferta del destino se puede ajustar a la demanda que presenta el turista. También permite tener un mayor entendimiento del visitante para la formulación de estrategias de promoción en el futuro del destino.

Ahora bien, considerando la contribución práctica, la tesis contribuye a que las estrategias de promoción a través de las redes sociales deben estar planeadas, y se puede ver que es posible presentar un impacto mayor en la promoción del destino a través de los travel bloggers. Pero demuestra que la elección de los bloggers es fundamental en la medida que se debe conocer el vínculo que este tiene con su comunidad, más allá de la cantidad de seguidores que éste presenta. Este tipo de acciones permiten atraer al turista de forma natural a la página web, redes sociales o blogs del destino.

Finalmente, esta tesis demuestra la relevancia de la influencia de las redes sociales y los contenidos creados por los *travel bloggers* y los usuarios en la definición de la imagen del destino. Por esto, se establece que la DMO monitorice en tiempo real los datos de los usuarios para poder dirigir la conversación y definir sus productos turísticos. A su vez, las DMO o DMMO deben controlar y supervisar los ciclos y tendencias de los visitantes, como se muestra en el tercer artículo, y proporcionar no tan solo contenido adecuado a estos, sino una oferta de productos y experiencias acorde con el seguimiento demográfico, social o geográfico del visitante

En conclusión, se puede afirmar que los destinos maduros pueden prever ciertos comportamientos futuros y actuar estratégicamente para avanzarse a los cambios.

LIMITACIONES

En términos generales este estudio presenta hallazgos (insights) en la relación de las redes sociales, la imagen del destino y la previsión de la demanda turística. Sin embargo, como cualquier otro estudio, este presenta limitaciones que pueden ser consideradas para futuras investigaciones.

Por un lado, se presentan limitaciones metodológicas en el sentido que solo se consideran determinadas redes sociales en el estudio, Facebook y Twitter. Esto acompañado con el constante cambio y consumo de redes sociales, en donde se puede evaluar la imagen percibida del destino, implica que se evalúe el comportamiento del turista en otras redes sociales como lo son Instagram y Tik Tok. Por otro lado, los datos utilizados para el análisis de la información, aunque presentaban información robusta para predecir el comportamiento y poder determinar ciclos, hace falta poder evaluar más información del turista como son el gasto o el movimiento del turista que se pueden identificar a través de incorporar nuevas herramientas digitales.

Por otro lado, el estudio habla en términos generales de la percepción de imagen de un destino, del uso de las redes sociales, del análisis de datos y la previsión del turista, pero no ahonda en un tema en concreto. Si bien el componente general proporciona una visión panorámica de las actividades que puede desarrollar la DMO de un destino, también es importante considerar de forma profunda cada uno de los elementos que se mencionaron anteriormente. En esta misma línea, en términos geográficos se analiza una región y su promoción en general y dos municipios que hacen parte del mismo destino, por tanto, no es posible generalizar la información que se presenta en esta tesis. Para hacerlo, es importante analizar más municipios del destino Girona Costa Brava, y analizar aquellos que tienen representación en la oferta del destino.

Finalmente, se debe tener en cuenta que el hecho de trabajar con datos que han sido recolectados a lo largo del tiempo, no todos siguen los mismos parámetros y no son comparables en algunos casos. Es por esto por lo que se hace un análisis del cambio

del turista a través del tiempo y se busca entender los cambios. Sin embargo, entendiendo las tendencias actuales y las necesidades del turista y del destino, es importante monitorizar la información en tiempo real.

Así las cosas, considerando la amplitud de temas que se abarcan en esta tesis, es posible continuar la investigación. Vincular las redes sociales que se han dejado por fuera del estudio y analizar los datos arrojados por los consumidores a lo largo del tiempo en todo el destino permite analizar el cambio que se presenta en la percepción de la imagen del turista y prever el ciclo que se da en términos de cambio del perfil. También el seguimiento de las redes permite conocer intereses del visitante, así como su comportamiento en el destino. Y finalmente, es posible ahondar en la investigación en la gestión de datos necesarios para prever el consumo del destino.

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