

University of Groningen

Digital complexity in destination branding

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Published in:
Journal of Environmental Management and Tourism

DOI:
[10.14505/jemt.v4.2\(8\).02](https://doi.org/10.14505/jemt.v4.2(8).02)

IMPORTANT NOTE: You are advised to consult the publisher's version (publisher's PDF) if you wish to cite from it. Please check the document version below.

Document Version
Publisher's PDF, also known as Version of record

Publication date:
2013

[Link to publication in University of Groningen/UMCG research database](#)

Citation for published version (APA):
Oliveira, E. (2013). Digital complexity in destination branding: A preliminary analysis to destination Portugal. *Journal of Environmental Management and Tourism*, 4(2), 65-76. [https://doi.org/10.14505/jemt.v4.2\(8\).02](https://doi.org/10.14505/jemt.v4.2(8).02)

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DIGITAL COMPLEXITY IN DESTINATION BRANDING: A PRELIMINARY ANALYSIS TO DESTINATION PORTUGAL

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Suggested Citation:

Oliveira, E. (2013). Digital complexity in destination branding: a preliminary analysis to destination Portugal, *Journal of Environmental Management and Tourism*, (Volume IV, Winter), 2(8):65-76. doi:10.14505/jemt.v4.2(8).02. Available from: <http://www.asers.eu/journals/jemt/current-issue>.

Article's History:

Received November, 2013; Revised December, 2013; Accepted December, 2013.

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Abstract:

Tourist destinations demand strategic thinking and dynamic instruments, methods and tool to address the contemporary digital complexity. The application of information communication technologies by tourism destinations, when correctly articulated with a destination branding strategy, could be a driving force to improve their strategic positioning, and enhance competitiveness. In addition, reinforce perceived images and to optimize the benefits they derive from tourism. Tourism is an important and dynamic sector in the economy of destinations. Our aim is to reinforce tourism as necessary for an economic and social transformation and as a response to the contemporary challenges. The novelty of this preliminary analysis lies in the strategic approach to the digital complexity in destination branding by researching developments in branding Portugal as a tourism destination. In terms of methodology, a brief content analysis, complemented with a text mining study, were developed. Perceive how online tourism-oriented promotional channels characterize Portugal as destination, and further discuss the best branding strategies, is a central element along the article.

Keywords: content analysis, destination branding, digital complexity, Portugal, strategy, text mining.

JEL Classification: M31; L83; R11.

1. Introduction

We live in digitally complex times where the internet has revolutionized our travel planning process. Therefore, makes sense questioning when was the last time we visited a travel agent to plan our holidays? In addition, when was the last time we selected our holiday destination after reading a travel catalogue? We can find ways to reply these questions, but there are no assertive answers. According to the Digital Portal of the European Travel Commission, 183 million European internet users visited travel web sites in March 2013 and 76% (up from 13% in 2003) used *internet* to book their holidays; 18% used *travel agents* (down from 65% in 2003) and 5% the phone (down from 22% in 2003). In addition, the *Attitudes of Europeans Towards Tourism* (2013) survey highlight the most frequently information sources of for trip planning: (1) *recommendations from friends, colleagues or relatives*, with 56%; followed by (2) *internet web sites*, with 46%; (3) *personal experience about a destination*, with 34%; (4) *travel agencies and tourism offices*, with 21%; and (5) *tourism brochures and catalogues*, with 11% (see Travel Daily News 2013). Given these facts, what are the challenges for tourist destinations and the destination branding process? Should places/destinations keep *shouting* their tourism potential by using mainstream marketing campaigns, such as catalogues, paper magazines ads, television spots, or do something more creative, innovative and adapted to the digital reality?

In today's competitive environment a wide range of challenges are confronting tourist destinations. Destinations, such as countries, cities, regions and islands have been struggling to improve their own assets, features, attributes and unique elements to become attractive destinations to visit and spend leisure time

(Alvarez 2012). Understanding exactly how individuals perceive and use the information spread by both, online and traditional promotion channels, when planning their trips, is a challenge that requires suitable strategies at the destination level (Alvarez and Asugman 2006). The plethora of information communication technologies (henceforth ICTs) has been transforming tourism globally. Factors including development of the internet, a new wave of web-based communities known as Web 2.0 (e.g. *Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, Youtube and Tripadvisor*) have changed market conditions for tourism agencies and Destination Marketing Organizations (henceforth DMOs) and the destination branding process itself (Buhalis *et al.* 2011; Page 2009). Tourism has often been seen a key element in the development of places and destinations, which are adopting branding strategies - meant to gain a competitive position and assert their identity - in their communication with potential tourists (Morgan *et al.* 2011; Morrison 2013).

The accelerating and synergistic interaction between ICTs and tourism destinations has transformed the nature of tourism products, processes, business and the competitive environment around them. An upgrading of the communication channels used by destinations, articulated with an effective branding strategy, can fulfil the requirements of the destination stakeholders and (potential) visitors, allowing efficient responses, enhanced image, in addition to improving their long-term prosperity and competitiveness. Among the range of ICTs, the Internet is the number one source of information for travel and tourism. Web sites are incredibly important for business communication, namely for the business of destinations (Buhalis *et al.* 2011). The internet has transfigured the way in which consumers make their travel decisions. However, there is a lack of statistical information to prove it so. The European Travel Commission (henceforth ETC) through the New Media Trend Watch (2013), the World Tourism Organization, the digital marketing agency eMarketer and recently the report *Attitudes of Europeans Towards Tourism* conducted by TNS Political and Social at the request of the European Commission last 2013 (henceforth EC) have been publishing statistics regarding the ICTs usage in travel and tourism.

According to eMarketer (2013) in the United States of America (henceforth US) the digital travel sales, which include leisure and unmanaged business travel, purchased online and via mobile devices, will increase between 2013 and 2017, achieving a 5.36% compound annual growth rate. Digital travel sales accounted for more than 40% of total travel sales in US in 2012. In their May 2012 Consumer Barometer survey, Google, Interactive Advertising Bureau and TNS Infratest found that 81% of US internet users who had booked travel in the past 12 months had researched their trips online, while 74% of respondents had booked online (Consumer Barometer 2012).

The Internet web sites are the most important source of information for respondents in seven European countries: The Netherlands (63%), Finland (63%), Iceland (60%), Denmark (57%), Luxembourg (51%), Malta (46%), and Cyprus (42%). Internet remains the most common way to organize holidays (preparation stage), with 53%. The utilization of the Internet to research and plan holidays has mentioned by respondents located in: Norway (80%), The Netherlands (75%), and Ireland (73%). Therefore, the digital complexity in destination branding is challenging DMOs to enhance their efficiency and to re-engineer their communication strategies and the destination branding process. Hence, devising agile and effective strategies for tourism destinations is required, either at a strategic level, or at tactical and operational management levels (Buhalis *et al.* 2011). The recent empowerment of the visitor it should be taken at the heart of any destination branding exercise.

The aim of this article is to discuss the use of digital platforms by tourist destinations and the impact of digital upon strategy-making in destination branding. In terms of methodology, the present article applies the methods of text mining (see Lau *et al.* 2005; Singh *et al.* 2007) and content analysis (see Hannam and Knox 2005; Govers and Go 2005). Aimed at understanding what is going on in terms of the utilization of the online channels to communicate Portugal as a tourism destination - by searching key words on online sources such as *Visit Portugal* internet page, and the Facebook social media page. Additionally, a content analysis on the travel page of *The New York Times*, and *The Guardian* has been elaborated. Thereafter, an exercise of comparing what has been written about Portugal in a tourism-oriented perspective with the *National Strategic Plan for Tourism 2013-2015* (Turismo de Portugal 2012). We also aim to contribute to the discussion concerning the best strategies for branding Portugal as a tourism destination. In addition, open up new academic paths in destination branding research acknowledging that this is a preliminary research, hence with several limitations. In order to generalize the findings, a more in-depth research should be conducted by amplifying the sample of data and conducting primary research.

2. The complexity of the digital environment in destination branding

Understanding the challenges involved in the branding and management of destinations is an essential element for the success of tourism activity. Challenges may include those provoked by economic imbalances (for instance the economic and financial crises in some European countries such as Greece, Spain, and Portugal. OECD 2012) social and political protests (the recent protest in Turkey, Egypt, and Ukraine), environmental and natural disasters (for example the tsunami in Bali) and the exponential growth and influence of digital channels (see Oliveira 2013a/c). Hence, it is a difficult and time-consuming task to persuade visitors and tourists to change their minds/perceptions about a certain tourism destination. Nowadays, there are a large number of channels to communicate the tourism potential of destinations (e.g. internet web pages, social media networks). Every conceivable tourism destination wants to improve, reverse, adapt, or in some way manage its domestic and international image and reputation (Morgan *et al.* 2011). Destination planning and management asks for the design of strategies capable to leave a clear and unique image. Leave a clear image, through digital destination branding, for instance, should have consistency in all media choices (Balakrishnan, 2009). Different images associated with a destination can create sound confusion making it harder to take a decision to visit. Furthermore, to foster momentum and competitiveness, the quality of the experience and service must live up to the promised level (through assertive communication) or it will lead to dissatisfaction (Balakrishnan, 2009).

The use of ICTs facilitates the tourism experience throughout the whole spectrum of preparation, during and post-visit. ICTs could be used as a tool to coordinate stakeholders more effectively (Buhalis, 1997), as well as to boost the multiplier effects in the economy (Buhalis and Spada, 2000). For better economic performance and split the benefits through the host communities is necessary to develop suitable strategies. Local communities should be the firsts to benefit from the tourism potential of their own territory. Destination branding strategies requires a strong vision, strategy, focus and commitment of time. The right cooperation networks, resources and changes in policy decision-making, culture and mindset (Balakrishnan 2009; Balmer 2001; de Chernatony and Riley, 1998). In destination branding exercises it is fundamental to capture the elusive spirit of the visitors, a campaign can quickly go viral and become highly influential, positively but also spreading in seconds a negative message and hence damage the reputation of a destination. Successful destination branding strategies in the digital and networked environment relies on a collaborative approach among destinations stakeholders and local communities. Harnessing the power of the online contents, the community, and like-minded brands where the overall effect is greater than the sum of the individual parts (Munro and Richards 2011); collaboration, cooperation, coordination play an important role in successful destination branding exercises.

3. Making strategies in destination branding

Destination branding has become one of the hottest topics amongst place branding research, from Turkey to Portugal, from Berlin to Edinburgh. These destinations, and many others, are facing challenges at economic, social, environmental and technological levels. Therefore, understanding of the critical issues involved in the branding and management of destinations is an essential element to secure the success of global tourism industry (Fyall *et al.* 2012). In that regard, the use of branding has been considered a powerful tool available to develop tourism destinations (Morgan *et al.* 2003). The application of a place branding approach to tourism destinations, known as destination branding, is focused in lowering costs, changing the type, the nature or the behavior of visitors, but also changing tourism products, integrating stakeholders and communities, avoiding irritations and responding to issues created by the present economic crisis, and challenges at the digital level (Law, 1993).

The literature, such as Buhalis (2000), Morgan *et al.* (2011), Pike (2005; 2009), Caldwell and Freire (2004) define a tourism destination in multiple ways. Traditionally, destinations are geographical areas as countries, regions, cities, or islands (see Hall 2000; Davidson and Maitland 1997). Moreover, a destination is also a perceptual concept, which can be interpreted subjectively by visitors, depending on their travel itinerary, cultural background, purpose of visit, level of studies and previous experiences. According to Buhalis (2000) tourism destination is a geographical area, which is understood by its visitors as a unique entity, with political and legislative framework for tourism marketing and planning. As a complement to the definition, Saarinen (2004) cited in Morgan *et al.* (2011) interprets a tourism destination as socio-culturally produced space in a constantly evolving discursive practice. As argued by Brent-Ritchie and Crouch (2011), tourism destinations are composed by a complex range of social, economic, legal and technological policies that affect their appeal, attractiveness,

competitiveness and sustainability. According to Fyall *et al.* (2012), tourist destinations are inherently complex, inter-related nature and are best understood as composite entities.

Enhancing the line of reasoning along this article, a tourism destination, while communicating the value and strengths of its assets, through a destination brand, integrated in a wide strategy, could earn a better position in the tourism market. This integration could be operationalized through strategic spatial planning initiatives (more spatial/territorial oriented) or strategy-making (Oliveira 2013a) in addition to tourism planning practice (more market/business oriented). In addition, the search for the right strategies for destinations branding lies in understanding that strategy in planning involves the translation of knowledge into action (Friedmann 1987). Strategic spatial planning initiatives works better in coordinating and integrating spatial policies when it engages in inclusive and participatory processes, involving the communities values, needs, assets and place identities, thus supporting a destination branding strategy. Researching the links between destination branding, strategic spatial planning and spatial strategy making remains a wide topic for researchers, both theoretically and in practical terms (Oliveira 2013a/b).

On the other hand, the complexity of the destination branding exercises requires digital strategies to face the advancement of digital technologies. Social networking websites provide forums for visitors and tourists to discuss the places they have visited. They dream about a trip, they plan, they book the tickets and accommodation, and they actually travel to the destinations with high hopes to feel the experience. Afterwards they will share their thoughts, images, videos, experiences and feelings by using online means (e.g. social media platforms). The vast numbers of digital platforms are challenging destinations to enhance their efficiency and to re-design their digital strategy.

4. Digital strategies in destination branding

A tourism destination seeks to be positively positioned in the minds of potential visitors. A key component of this positioning process is the creation, management and communication of a distinctive and appealing image (Echtner and Ritchie 2003; Oliveira 2013c). Destinations are subject to increasing market complexity (e.g. globalization, internal and external government policies, foreign exchange fluctuations and natural environment instability, such as earthquakes or floods) and increasing marketing and promotion costs. Tourist destinations have been pursuing the uniqueness of their tourism potential, hence to define the best strategies to enhance competitiveness. Thus, develop points of attractions and/or highly specialized competencies in terms of specific tourism products and processes are fundamental. As financial resources for destination branding processes are scarce, it is advisable to lower the high dependence on public funding by identifying business partners and alternative rationales and revenue mechanisms able to make a destination branding initiative financially sustainable (Laesser and Beritelli 2013). Applying the right tools and designing strategies for destinations is fundamental for successful destination branding. According to Munro and Richards (2011), an effective digital destination branding strategy should tactically deploy and instigate stories that address the destination negatives points. Therefore, the argument stated here emphasizes the need for a strategic thinking in whole destination branding process.

Tourist destinations are increasingly spending more on advertising, marketing campaigns and online promotional activities. The destination branding processes that use digital platforms, such as web pages, blogging, and social networks have become more puzzling. So, how best to use online channels to communicate a destination to the outside world? For starters, destination managers should provide reasons and purposes for a visit to potential tourists. They should do it in a coherent way by maintaining communities of interest, collecting user-generated content, displaying photos and videos, emphasizing local events, and encouraging word-of-mouth recommendations. Understand that content is king and communicate qualitative and diverse information. A destination brand should be part of the destination's overall branding effort, and that is much more than creating a logo, a tagline or opening a Facebook page. That effort should consider the community's needs, being clear in terms of objectives. Engage with stakeholders and build the destination brand with them in an active and participatory way (Oliveira 2013a/b/c).

The present article highlights the digital challenge in destination branding. A brief content analysis of travel and tourism oriented websites where Portugal has been mentioned, provides a starting point for future discussions of a strategic thinking and strategy-making in destination branding.

5. Portugal as tourism destination

Tourism in Portugal is a key growth driver for the national economy and for the social, economic and environmental development of the country says the *National Strategic Plan for Tourism 2013-2015* (Turismo de

Portugal 2012). According to data from Statistics Portugal tourism revenue increased by 7.2% in 2012 (note that the information is up-to-date). As described on table 1 the total contribution of tourism to the GDP was 26.2 billion of euros, 15.2% of the total GDP in 2011, and is forecast to fall by 2.1% in 2012 and is expected to rise by 1.8% pa in 2022. In 2011, tourism generated 322,000 jobs directly, 6.6% of total employment, and this is forecast to fall by 0.3% in 2012 to 321,000 (6.7% of total employment). Despite the importance of the tourism to the GDP and employment, The World Travel and Tourism Council (henceforth WTTC) forecast (i.e. 2012-2022) shows a negative growth for the year 2012 and lower growth of the tourism by 2022.

Table 1. The economic impact of tourism in Portugal (data for 2012)

	2011	2012	2022 (forecast)	2020 Growth (forecast)
Tourism GDP (% of National GDP)	15.2	-2.1	15.7	1.8
Tourism Jobs (% of total employment)	17.8	-0.3	18.9	1.2

Source: World Travel and Tourism Council (2012).

Analysis of Table 1 underlines the direct contribution of tourism to the GDP in 2011 that was 9.2 billion euros (5.3% of the total GDP). This is forecast to fall by 2.2% in 2012 and register a 1.7 growth up to 2022 (10 year forecast). This primarily reflects the economic activity generated by hotels, travel agents, airlines and passenger transportation services. Nevertheless, it also includes, for example, the activities of restaurants and leisure industries directly supported by tourist activity. The total contribution to employment (including wider effects from investment, the supply chain and induced income impacts) was 866,500 jobs in 2011 (17.8% of total employment). This is forecast to fall by 0.3% in 2012 and increase by 1.2% by 2022 (18.9% of total employment) according with WTTC (2012). The Travel and Tourism Competitiveness Report 2013 reveals the Travel and Tourism Competitiveness Index-TTCI (World Economic Forum, 2013) and states that Portugal is the twentieth most competitive country/economy in the world in terms of tourism, among one hundred and forty economies assessed. Countries such as Switzerland, Germany and Austria occupied the first three positions. According with the same report, Portugal received 7,412.2 international tourist arrivals in 2011 within 11,338.6 US\$ (i.e. United States dollars) as international tourism receipts. Since 1997, international tourist arrivals and international tourism receipts progressively increase. The same Travel and Tourism Competitiveness Report 2013 (World Economic Forum 2013), emphasizes the ranking indicators of environmental sustainability where Portugal holds position number fifteen in terms of environmental sustainability and position number nineteen in terms of safety and security, out of one hundred and forty countries. That enhances the position of the country as a tourism destination and reinforces the importance of tourism to economic and social dynamics and to support a strategic (structural) change. In terms of tourism promotion *Destination Portugal – The beauty of simplicity* has been used to communicate the tourism potential of the country.

6. Research methodology

Increasing numbers of researchers in the field of tourism studies are using discourse analysis as a means of critical investigation when faced with qualitative or textual forms of data, such as written documents, or visual materials (Hannam and Knox, 2005). Deepen the knowledge about what is going on in certain destination in terms of both strategies and tactical interventions is necessary for a resilient approach able to enhance competitiveness and boost the economy of the destination. An increasing number of researchers in the field of tourism studies (Hannam and Knox, 2005), hospitality (Singh *et al.* 2007) and destination image online (Govers and Go, 2005) are using specific research methods that are often conveniently organized under the term discourse analysis. For instance, text mining and content analysis, when faced with qualitative or textual forms of data, such as written documents (e.g. strategic plans), or visual materials (e.g. photographs; videos) (see Hannam and Knox, 2005).

6.1. Text mining

Similar to data mining, text mining explores data in text files to establish valuable patterns and rules that indicate trends and significant features about specific topics (e.g. tourist destinations visited). Text mining works with an unstructured or semi-structured collection of text documents (e.g., corporate documents, web sites, newsgroup postings, see Berson *et al.* 2000). With the availability of huge volumes of text-based information

freely available on the internet (e.g. travel blogs, social media), text mining can be used by the tourism industry to develop competitive, strategic and operational decisions (Lau *et al.* 2005). According to Lau *et al.* (2005), tourism agencies and DMOs may find the text mining methodology valuable in several areas of their operations, including:

- ✓ Scanning customer intelligence by analyzing newsgroups, online bulletin boards, and surveys;
- ✓ Acquiring customer intelligence by analyzing personal home pages, comment cards, and qualitative survey data, and
- ✓ Improving efficiency in destination management exercises, which includes analyzing visitor's databases, and strategic documents of sectorial guidelines (e.g. master and strategic plans).

The methodology tool of text mining it is best suited for learning and discovering information that was previously unknown. While text mining may work with almost any kind of information, it delivers the best results when used with information that is text-based, valuable and explicit text. Therefore, it fits the aims we want to achieve with this article.

6.2 Content analysis

Content analysis is concerned with categorizing and counting occurrences of aspects of content (Hannam and Knox, 2005). Content analysis is an empirical technique, which involves the counting, identification of issues and interpretation of the content of a text, which is assumed as relatively significant. Content analysis calls for the categorization of the various elements or components to help researchers understanding tourism trends (Krippendorff 2003). Even though it requires the researcher to use personal judgment in making decisions about the data collection, the decisions must be guided by an explicit (objective) set of rules that minimize - although probably never quite eliminate - the possibility of subjective predisposition (Singh *et al.* 2007).

A content analysis attempts to identify image arrays and identify the key words they use to characterize tourism destinations. Furthermore, is a useful tool to design successful destination branding strategies. For instance the numerous times a word have been mentioned while describing a travel experience (e.g. relaxing holidays; stunning landscape); these keywords were collected in previous studies (see Oliveira 2013b).

6.3 Sample the data

In Portugal the entity in charge of tourism planning and development is *Turismo de Portugal* (tourism of Portugal). Tourism of Portugal – communicated as *Visit Portugal*, integrated in the Portuguese Ministry of the Economy and Employment, is the national tourism authority responsible for the enhancement and sustainability of the tourism activities in the country. In addition, stimulate tourism activities, from the supply sector to demand, operationalizing, and coordinating the promotion of Portugal as tourism destination.

The Visit Portugal entity is currently promoting the tourism sector under the campaign of *Destination Portugal - The Beauty of Simplicity*. Managing Portugal as a tourism destination, while seeking to increase its reputation at international level, consolidating the country's image, strengthening tourism as one of the core growth engines of the Portuguese economy in tandem with the regional tourism entities and local stakeholders (e.g. accommodation sector; municipalities) are the main goals of Tourism of Portugal.

To sample the data, an online search was conducted on the Visit Portugal web site, available on <http://www.visitportugal.com/> and the Facebook page, available on its web site <https://www.facebook.com/Visitportugal>. A content analysis of the three most read articles that mention Portugal, between 1st of February and 15th of May of 2013, on the online travel page of the *The New York Times*, on its web site <http://www.nytimes.com/pages/travel/index.html> and the online travel page of *The Guardian* on its web site <http://www.guardian.co.uk/travel> was conducted. Thereafter, a cross comparative study linking the findings of the content analysis with what is written on the *National Strategic Plan for Tourism 2013-2015*, the main document for the tourism in Portugal (Turismo de Portugal 2012) was elaborated. Is the information widespread by online channels connected with the *National Strategic Plan for Tourism*? The findings will attempt to some clarifications.

7. Research findings

Six online articles, out of ten, are analyzed and research findings for each one presented. To set out the frequency of words the tool – word cruncher has been applied on each article from The New York Times and The Guardian. While several limitations were acknowledged during this study, overall the findings provide a preliminary foundation for future research to investigate online channels usage and social media involvement to promote Portugal as a tourism destination and therefore attempt to design effective destination branding strategies.

7.1. Content analysis I: The New York Times

Article I: On Portugal Beach, Riding a Wave That Hits Like a Quake

Quotation	(...) “Despite its charm and a stunning 14th-century church, Nazaré, Portugal has seen some bad times, with the decline of its once-prosperous fishing industry and an exodus of local youth. Thanks to a photo that electrified the world last month - showing a big-wave surfer named Garrett McNamara (...)”
Source	http://www.nytimes.com/2013/02/25/world/europe/on-portugal-beach-riding-a-wave-that-hits-like-a-quake.html?_r=0
Keywords frequency	4 times: Nazaré (place); Portuguese; Surfing. 8 times: Norte (north); Praia (beach). 12 times: McNamara (the surfer); Waves.

Article II: On Trails Less Traveled

Quotation	(...) “For explorers seeking quiet pathways, a few outfitters offer pioneering routes and a comfortable place for you to put up your feet at day’s end” (...)
Source	http://travel.nytimes.com/2013/04/21/travel/on-trails-less-traveled-in-europe.html?_r=0
Keywords frequency	4 times: Vicentina (name of the route); Mountain; Rural; Travelers. 8 times: Route; Walks.

Article III: Haute Hostels Put to the Test

Quotation	(...) “Portugal has turned out a stream of stunning hostels. Every year the country scoops up armfuls of “Hoscars” the annual international awards presented by the booking site Hostelworld.com. (...) This year Lisbon hostels claimed the top four spots in the Best Worldwide Hostels” (...)
Source	http://travel.nytimes.com/2013/04/28/travel/haute-hostels-put-to-the-test-in-europe.html?pagewanted=all
Keywords frequency	4 times: Paris; Young. 8 times: Barcelona. 12 times: Lisboa (Lisbon).

7.2. Content analysis II: The Guardian

Article IV: 10 family trips in Europe for the school summer holidays

Quotation	(...) “Looking for an affordable and interesting getaway when the schools break up?”(...) “Set within the Rio Formosa, nature reserve, Quintamar offers a refreshing alternative to the Algarve's bland package holiday hotels”. The stunning sand-spit beaches of the eastern Algarve are just a short boat ride away and the local fishing village of Santa Luzia is renowned for its seafood restaurants” (...)
Source	http://www.guardian.co.uk/travel/2013/may/09/10-family-holidays-summer-school?INTCMP=SRCH
Keywords frequency	4 times: Algarve; Alternative. 8 times: Beaches; Family. 12 times: Children; Sleeping.

Article V: 10 trips during the school holidays – without kids

Quotation	(...) “Sintra, Portugal its air of genteel decay, exotic vegetation and fairy-tale palaces, the hill town of Sintra offers a cool respite from the sun-baked streets of nearby Lisbon. Explore the ramparts and towers of <i>Pena Palace</i> , the medieval splendour of the National Palace of Sintra and the lush, botanical gardens” (...)
Source	http://www.guardian.co.uk/travel/2013/may/10/summer-school-holidays-without-kids?INTCMP=SRCH

Keywords frequency **4 times:** Sintra; Summer; Breakfast.
8 times: Medieval; Marseille.

Article VI: Day trips from Lisbon, Portugal: readers' travel tips

Quotation (...) "Sintra, Cascais and Portinho all offer tempting holiday excursions that are a short drive or train ride from Lisbon" (...) "The Convento de Cristo in Tomar is probably one of the most spectacular places in Portugal". (...) "For a cycling day trip, check out Sintra-Cascais natural park" (...) "Portinho da Arrábida is a tiny village on a white sandy beach about 45 minutes' drive south of Lisbon. The calm sheltered bay is great for snorkelling. Behind it rise steep limestone mountains, part of the Arrábida natural park" (...)

Source <http://www.guardian.co.uk/travel/2013/may/06/day-trips-from-lisbon-portugal-sintra?INTCMP=SRCH>

Keywords frequency **4 times:** Arrábida (place); Portugal; Tomar (place); Natural.
8 times: Cascais (place); Portinho (place)
12 times: Sintra; Lisbon

From the content analysis to the articles of the online version of the international edition of the newspaper – *The New York Times* and *The Guardian*, the image of Portugal as tourism destinations is commonly associated with relaxing holidays. Places located between sand and mountains with stunning landscape and historical buildings have been identified in these particular articles. The cities of Lisbon, Sintra, Porto and Algarve region are the places more often described. The aim of the present analysis is to reinforce that a destination branding strategy it could be structured based in the way the world sees territorial assets, tourist potential and characteristics. Expert and user generated content are fundamental to enhance the competitive position and attempt to a better economic and social performance of their communities. In advance, we acknowledge the limitation of the research as it should be carried out in a wider level by involving more documents and sources of information.

7.3. Content analysis III: performance of Visit Portugal Facebook page and website

Destination Portugal - The Beauty of Simplicity is the strapline that has been used to communicate the tourism potential of Portugal and spread through digital channels, including the Facebook page. The information shared via Facebook page, is usually from sources of information generated by experts, such as traveler bloggers and travel journalists. Other information shared on the page is user generator content, which is an opportunity to enhance the country reputation. Visit Portugal follows travel blogs or suggestions of visitors to promote the country as tourism destination, which is good to build an online community and engage with the target audience (e.g. Ben Fogle reports on surfing in Portugal, via *The Telegraph Travel*; or/and Lisbon, Portugal is one of the Best-value destinations in Europe for 2013 according to *Lonely Planet*). Visit Portugal also uses the Facebook to spread images and events that are taking place in Portugal. Visit Portugal frequently highlights the city's tourism potential (e.g. Romance in Coimbra; Historic centers of Portugal; Lisbon of the Discoveries; and short break in Porto and Northern of Portugal).

7.4. Content analysis IV: National Strategic Plan for Tourism 2013-2015

Portugal has started down a long road of economic adjustment to boost growth and correct an excessive reliance on debt. A wide range of structural reforms is required to raise productivity and rebalance the economy towards international trade and tourism as a key sector underlines the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development report (OECD 2012) and the *National Strategic Plan for Tourism 2013-2015*. Deeper knowledge is necessary about what is going on in destination Portugal, in terms of both strategies, and tactical interventions, in order to support a resilient approach able to enhance competitiveness and boost the local economy. Tourism plays a crucial role as generator of jobs and revenues. Given this facts, it is paramount to understand what the main strategic documents define as strengths and opportunities but also as weakness and threats. A critical content analysis was applied to support the article's objectives here. The *National Strategic Plan for Tourism 2013-2015*, published by Turismo de Portugal (2012) underlines the need to develop the tourist activity with quality based on authenticity and unique experiences. Furthermore, it should be integrated in environmental sound urban fabric interventions (page 7). The emergence of tourism, as a spatial activity, that to

be healthy needs to be developed within a healthy spatial environment. Tourism is an engine of social, economic and environmental development at national and regional level.

The weak economic confidence has been acknowledged on the document and measures for improvement are presented. Mechanisms to finance companies as well as entrepreneurs projects related with the tourist activity as a means to overcome economic imbalances have been identified. With critical thinking, what we lack the most is an approach to more territorial elements, such as urban and regional planning (in particular because of the relevance of Northern cities such as Porto, Braga, Guimarães, Viana do Castelo), including natural landscapes, built environment and heritage. We found references to the need to value public spaces and rational usage of natural resources as well as heritage preservation. Spatial planning is only mentioned as necessary to facilitate licensing process for tourism development, such as accommodation infrastructures. Transportation and mobility are missing on the document, both fundamental for destinations planning and territorial development, not only with tourism ambitions. Tourism will be more effective if strategically planned for the long run.

The document does underline tourism planning but from a more corporate and less spatial perspective. In terms of branding, there is a misunderstanding between the definition of place brand and a place slogan/strapline (page 70). Regarding the tourist product - gastronomy - a slogan - *Prove Portugal* (translated to English by the author - *Taste Portugal*) is mentioned as a brand to be promoted. In addition, the existence of a "called" brand – *Destination Portugal - The Beauty of Simplicity* does not block the existence of sub-brands, however, it should be clearly sustained by a strategy, and therefore consistently communicated via online channels. Our interpretation is that sounds an isolated intervention. There is no attempt to strategically integrate the tourism potential of the country in wider spatial planning process. In addition, the references to place brand, even only focused in tourism, are not really 'brands' but simply promotion exercises.

Conclusions

Tourism is able to contribute to socio-economic development and encompasses growing number of destinations all around the world. These dynamic of growth have turned tourism into a key driver for socio-economic progress, and represents at the same time one of the main income sources for destinations. Tourism affects local economies in different ways. On one hand, tourism attracts resources such as labor, capital and housing from other sectors of the economy and, on the other hand, the income generated by tourism encourages development of other economic activities (see Kaur 2010). We have to be aware that a tourism boom may deteriorate environment and cause congestions in transportation systems and other public facilities (see Zhang 2012). Therefore, integration between tourism planning exercises and strategic spatial planning could led to new stages of development for a destination. There is a close interdependence between tourism and other economic, social, cultural and a panacea of spatial activities. Our approach examines the dynamic interdependence in a general equilibrium framework between a more corporate/business perspective to tourism, with a spatial dimension, more close to the reality and local communities. Bearing in mind the current challenges and complex issues posed to tourist destinations, such as at the digital level.

Tourism, at the global level, grew sharply in the second half of the twentieth century as result of several economic, social, and technological processes. The internet has been applied as a system of electronic intercommunication and a way of processing and presenting digital information. With intelligent thinking from people's imagination, it brings together unlimited opportunities to enhance the brand of a destination. The development of ICTs, social media, web 2.0 empowers DMOs and visitors (through user generator content). Thereafter, strategies, instruments, tools and methods are required to better prepare a response to challenges. For instance, produce and share qualitative and diverse information, offer trip planning tools and attractive visual material, always up to date, photo and video sharing. It is fundamental to support the design of a positive, focused and consistent message. Hence, the correct and coherent use of social media, web sites and travel blogs to communicate destination assets and the tourism potential of a territory will support interoperability, personalization and constant networking. Thus, increasing tourism revenues and enhancing competitiveness and destination reputation (Buhalis *et al.* 2011). DMOs, when planning the design websites or to use social networks, to communicate the tourism potential have to be sure to provide reasons and purposes for a visit, engage with potential visitors open up possibilities for a true and honest interactions (Morrison 2013). The content of the tourist message, consistency in communicating the destination brand are key to success of the destination branding process, as a whole.

Communicating a consistent message about destination assets becomes exciting when it engages a network of content generators, such as travel bloggers but also all the citizens, including locals, otherwise the

risk of producing inequality and unrest is high. Strategy-making in destination branding requires the right people, the right mindset, the right internal structures, and the right stakeholder and industry relationships where, across all of those things, innovation, decentralization, and collaboration/networks are all important (Morrison 2013). Together, they will enhance the destination's image, increase tourism revenues and improve competitiveness.

The danger of not designing a consistent destination branding strategy is visual and sound confusion from the outputs, such as destination logos, straplines and video promotion and the fail of fulfil the expectations of the visitors. Destination brands only have value if they are created by everybody. If this process is fuzzy a topo phobia may be generated. This means that repulsive feelings regarding a place/destination might be created in the mind of people. Making it simple is one of the key words to address the complexity of the digital environment tourism destinations, such as Portugal, have to deal with (Oliveira 2013c). Effectively using the multiple social media channels requires coordination and coherent communication strategies integrated with the destination branding process and with existing systems and platforms. An effective use of social networks and web sites to communicate the destination tourism potential will support interoperability, personalization and drive constant engagement with tourists (before, during, and after the visit). From the research findings, Portugal has been characterized as a less crowded and alternative tourism destination with scenario of natural landscape (e.g. beach, sun, waves, mountains, gastronomy, wine, Port Wine) and historic city centers (e.g. heritage sites, shopping opportunities). Those elements could be integrated in a future destination branding strategy for the country as a whole.

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