The digital complexity in destination branding: the case of Portugal as tourism destination

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The Digital Complexity in Destination Branding: The Case of Portugal as Tourism Destination

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Tourism destinations are demanding strategic thinking and dynamic methods to address the contemporary digital challenge. The application of information communication technologies (ICTs) by tourism destinations, when correctly articulated with a destination branding strategy, could be a driving force to improve their strategic positioning, competitiveness, image and to optimise the benefits they derive from tourism. The novelty of this paper lies in the strategic approach to the digital complexity in destination branding by researching developments in branding Portugal as a tourism destination. A content analysis and text mining were applied as research methodology. Perceive how tourism-oriented promotional channels characterize destination Portugal, and further discuss the best branding strategies, is a central element along the study.

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

Introduction

In today's competitive environment a wide range of challenges are confronting tourism destinations. Destinations are currently requested to improve their own features, attributes and unique elements to become more attractive places (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 (Alvarez and Asugman, 2006).

The plethora of information communication technologies 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, tripadvisor*) have changed market conditions for tourism agencies and destination marketing organisations (DMOs) and the destination branding process itself (Buhalis, Leung, & Law, 2011; Page, 2009).

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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, Pritchard, and Pride, 2011).

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. Upgrading of their communication channels, articulated with an effective strategy, can fulfil the requirements of the destination stakeholders and (potential) visitors, allowing more 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, Leung, & Law, 2011). The internet has revolutionised 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 (ETC) through the New Media Trend Watch, the World Tourism Organization, the digital marketing agency eMarketer and recently the report Attitudes of Europeans Towards Tourism conducted by TNS Political & Social at the request of the European Commission (EC) have been publishing statistics regarding the ICTs usage in travel and tourism.

According to eMarketer (2013) in the United States of America (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 (IAB) 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).

According to the Digital Portal of the European Travel Commission, nearly 183 million European internet users visited travel web sites in March 2013 (Travel Daily News, 2013):

- Internet: 76% (up from 13% in 2003);
- Travel agent: 18% (down from 65% in 2003);
- Phone: 5% (down from 22% in 2003).

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According to the survey Attitudes of Europeans Towards Tourism (2013) the most frequently used sources of information for trip planning are:

- Recommendations from friends, colleagues or relatives – 56%;

- Internet web sites – 46%;

- Personal experience about a destination - 34%;

- Travel agencies and tourism offices - 21%;

- Tourism brochures and catalogues - 11%.

The Internet web sites are the most important source of information for respondents in seven countries: The Netherlands - 63%, Finland - 63%, Iceland - 60%, Denmark - 57%, Luxembourg - 51% , Malta - 46%, and Cyprus - 42%.

The Internet remains the most common way to arrange holidays (preparation stage), with 53%. The utilization of the internet to research and plan holidays is mentioned by respondents located in: Norway - 80%, The Netherlands - 75%, and Ireland - 73%.

The digital complexity in destination branding challenges DMOs to enhance their efficiency and to re-engineer their communication strategies. Hence, devising agile and effective strategies for tourism destinations is required, either at a strategic level, or at tactical and operational management levels (Buhalis, Leung, & Law, 2011).

The present research applies the methodologies of text mining (see Lau, Lee, & Ho, 2005; Singh, Hu, & Roehl, 2007) and content analysis (see Hannam & Knox, 2005; Govers & Go, 2005). Aimed at understanding what is going on in terms of the utilization of the online channels to promote Portugal as a tourism destination - by searching key words on online sources such as Visit Portugal web site, and facebook page. Additionally, a content analysis on the travel page of The New York Times, and The Guardian was conducted. Thereafter, an exercise of comparing what has been written about Portugal in a tourism-oriented perspective with the National Strategic Plan for Tourism (2007). This paper aims 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.

A Strategic (Planning) Approach to Destination Branding

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An 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, Wang & Garrod, 2012). In that regarding, the use of branding is considered to be a powerful tool available to develop tourism destinations (Morgan, Pritchard & Piggott, 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 behaviour 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, Pritchard and Pride (2011), Pike (2005; 2009), Caldwell and Freire (2004) define a tourism destination in multiple ways. Traditionally, destinations are geographical areas (i.e. a country, a region, a city, or an island; see Hall, 2000; Davidson & Maitland, 1997). Moreover, a destination can be recognised as a perceptual concept, which can be interpreted subjectively by consumers, depending on their travel itinerary, cultural background, purpose of visit, level of studies and past experience (Buhalis, 2000). According to Buhalis (2000) a 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, Pritchard and Pride (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. The authors Fyall, Wang and Garrod (2012) states that destinations are inherently complex, inter-related nature and are best understood as composite entities.

Enhancing the line of reasoning along this paper, 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 or strategy making (see Oliveira, 2013). 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 (see 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 place branding strategy, namely for tourism destinations (i.e. destination branding).

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.

The growing competition in the global marketplace puts hard pressures on tourism destinations that try to guarantee long-run economic success as well as sustainability (Kastenholz, Eusébio and Carneiro, 2013). On the other hand, the complexity of the destination branding exercises requires digital strategies to face the advancement of digital technologies.

The Complexity of the Digital Environment in Destination Branding

It is a difficult and time-consuming task to persuade tourists and costumers to change their minds/perceptions about a certain territory as a tourism destination. Nowadays, there are a large number of channels to communicate the tourism potential of places (e.g. web sites, social media). Every conceivable tourism destination wants to improve, reverse, adapt, or in some way manage its international image (Morgan, Pritchard and Pride, 2011). Manage its international image and reputation asks for the design of strategies capable to leave a clear and unique image. Leave a clear image, trough digital destination branding (e.g.) 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 (Balakrishnan, 2009). Furthermore, to foster momentum and competitiveness, the quality of the experience and service must live up to the promised level (the communicated content/message) 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 regional economy (Buhalis and Spada, 2000). For better economic performance and split them through the host communities is necessary to develop suitable strategies. Destination branding strategies requires a strong vision, focus and commitment of time. The right people, resources and changes in policy decision-making, culture and mindset (Balakrishnan, 2009; Balmer, 2001; de Chernatony and Riley, 1998).

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Successful destination branding strategies in the digital and networked environment relies on a collaborative approach among destinations stakeholders. 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 & Richards, 2011); collaboration plays an important role.

From Tools to Strategies in Destination Branding

A tourism destination it should be positively positioned in the minds of the consumers and potential visitors. A key component of this positioning process is the creation, management and communication of a distinctive and appealing image (Echtner & Ritchie, 2003). 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 of floods) and increasing marketing and promotion costs.

Tourism 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 & Beritelli, 2013). Appling 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 emphasise the need for a strategic thinking in whole destination branding process.

The present paper 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 in destination branding.

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Portugal as a tourism destination

Tourism in Portugal is a key growth driver for the national economy and the social, economic and environmental development of the Portuguese regions (i.e. North, Centre, Lisbon and Tejo valley, Alentejo, Algarve, Madeira Island and Azores Island), says the National Strategic Plan for Tourism (Turismo de Portugal, 2007).

The total contribution of tourism to the Gross Domestic Product (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 (see table 1). It 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 Portuguese Gross Domestic Product and employment, The World Travel and Tourism Council (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).

Portugal	2011 % of total	2012 Growth (1)**	2022 % of total**	2020 Growth (2)**
Direct contribution to GDP	5.3	-2.2	5.4	1.7
Total contribution to GDP	15.2	-2.1	15.7	1.8
Direct contribution to employment	6.6	-0.3	7.0	1.2
Total contribution to employment	17.8	-0.3	18.9	1.2
Visitor exports*	17.3	0.6	15.1	1.6
Domestic exports	3.8	-6.5	3.8	1.9
Leisure exports	8.7	-1.8	8.9	1.7
Business exports	1.3	-5.2	1.2	1.8
Capital Investment	11.5	2.7	12.4	3.4

***Visitor exports -** spending within the country by international tourists for both business and leisure trips, including spending on transport - (% of total exports). **(1)** 2012 real growth adjusted for inflation (%); **(2)** 2012-2022 annualised real growth adjusted for inflation (%). ******forecast. Source: WTTC (2012).

From the analyses of the table 1, we underline the direct contribution of the tourism to the GDP in 2011 that was 9.2 billion euros (5.3% of the total GDP), and 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 the restaurant and leisure industries directly supported by tourists.

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 The Authority on World Travel & Tourism (2012).

The Travel and Tourism Competitiveness Report 2013 revels 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. The TTCI is composed of three sub-indexes: The Travel and Tourism (T&T) regulatory framework; the T&T business environment and infrastructure; and the T&T human, cultural, and natural resources. The TTCI is calculated on the basis of data derived from the Executive Opinion Survey and quantitative data from other sources (World Economic Forum, 2013). Switzerland, Germany and Austria occupied the first three positions. According with the same report, Portugal received 7,412.2 international tourist arrivals in 2011 with 11,338.6 US$ (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 position of 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. Given these facts, the positioning of the country is enhanced and reinforces the importance of tourism to economic and social development.

Research Methodology

Deepen the knowledge about what is going on in certain destination in terms of both strategies or 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 (see Hannam & Knox, 2005), hospitality (see Singh, Hu & Roehl, 2007) and destination image online (see Govers & Go, 2005) are using specific research methods that are often conveniently grouped together 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 & Knox, 2005).

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. places visited). Text mining works with an unstructured or semi-structured collection of text documents (e.g., corporate documents, web sites, newsgroup postings, see Berson, Smith & Thearling, 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, Lee and Hu, 2005). According to Lau, Lee and Hu (2005) tourism agencies and DMOs may find the text mining methodology valuable in several areas of their operations, including:

- scanning of customer intelligence by analysing customer newsgroups, online bulletin boards, and online customer surveys;
- acquiring customer intelligence by analysing personal home pages, customer comment cards, and qualitative survey data; and
- improving efficiency of internal knowledge management by analysing e-mail, patent databases, and corporate documents.

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.

Content analysis

Content analysis is concerned with categorizing and counting occurrences of aspects of content (Hannam & 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 to be significant. Content analysis calls for the categorization of the various elements or components to help researchers explain trends (Kassarjian, 1977; 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, Hu & Roehl, 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 has been mentioned while describing a travel experience (e.g. relaxing holidays; stunning landscape). These key words were collected in previous studies (see Oliveira, 2013).

Sample the Data

In Portugal the entity in charge of the planning and development of tourism, at the national level, is the Tourism of Portugal (Visit Portugal*)*. The Tourism of Portugal, integrated in the Portuguese Ministry of the Economy and Employment, is the national tourism authority responsible for:

- enhancement and sustainability of the tourism activities (e.g. effective promotion);
- aggregating within a single entity all the institutional competencies related to stimulation of tourism activities, from the supply sector to demand;
- coordinating Portugal's domestic and international promotion as a 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 website, available at http://www.visitportugal.com/ and the facebook page, available at https://www.facebook.com/Visitportugal. The content analysis of the three most read articles that mention Portugal, between 1st of February and 15th of May, on the travel page of the The New York Times, available at http://www.nytimes.com/pages/travel/index.html and the travel page of The Guardian, available at http://www.guardian.co.uk/travel.

Thereafter, a cross comparative study linking the findings of the content analysis with what is written on National Strategic Plan for Tourism, the main document for the tourism in Portugal (Turismo de Portugal, 2007) was elaborated. Is the information widespread by online channels connected with the National Strategic Plan for Tourism? The findings will attempt to some clarifications.

Research Findings

Three articles, out of the six, are analysed and research findings for each one are presented (table 2). The software ATLAS.TI (version 7) was been used. The tool – "word cruncher" was been applied to set out the frequency of words. 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.

Table 2.
Content analysis

The New York Times

Article title	*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" (…)
Link	http://www.nytimes.com/2013/02/25/world/europe/on-portugal-beach-riding-a-wave-that-hits-like-a-quake.html?_r=0
Key words frequency	**4 times**: Nazaré (place); Portuguese; Surfing. **8 times**: Norte (north); Praia (beach). **12 times**: McNamara (the surfer); Waves.

Article title	*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".
Link	http://travel.nytimes.com/2013/04/21/travel/on-trails-less-traveled-in-europe.html?_r=0
Key words frequency	**4 times**: Vicentina (name of the route); Mountain; Rural; Travelers. **8 times**: Route; Walks.

Article title	*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 (…).
Link	http://travel.nytimes.com/2013/04/28/travel/haute-hostels-put-to-the-test-in-europe.html?pagewanted=all
Key words frequency	**4 times**: Paris; Young. **8 times**: Barcelona. **12 times**: Lisboa (Lisbon).

theguardian

Article title	*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".
Link	http://www.guardian.co.uk/travel/2013/may/09/10-family-holidays-summer-school?INTCMP=SRCH
Key words frequency	**4 times**: Algarve; Alternative. **8 times**: Beaches; Family. **12 times**: Children; Sleeping.

Article title	*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 *Pena Palace*, the medieval splendour of the National Palace of Sintra and the lush, botanical gardens" (…)
Link	http://www.guardian.co.uk/travel/2013/may/10/summer-school-holidays-without-kids?INTCMP=SRCH
Key words frequency	**4 times**: Sintra; Summer; Breakfast. **8 times**: Medieval; Marseille.

Article title	*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"(…)
Link	http://www.guardian.co.uk/travel/2013/may/06/day-trips-from-lisbon-portugal-

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	sintra?INTCMP=SRCH
Key words 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 travel pages of the online version of the international edition of the newspaper - New York Time 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 are mentioned. 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 should be structured also 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.

Content analysis on the performance of Visit Portugal Facebook page and website

The beauty of simplicity - destination brand has been used as tagline. Usually the sources of information are expert-generator content and also some user generator content, which is a opportunity to enhance the reputation. It means the Visit Portugal follows travel blogs or suggestions of visitors to promote the country as tourism destination (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). The Visit Portugal also use the facebook to spread images and events that are taking place in Portugal. The Visit frequently highlights the city's tourism potential (e.g. Romance in Coimbra; Historic centres of Portugal; Lisbon of the Discoveries; and short break in Porto and Northern of Portugal).

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Content analysis on the National Strategic Plan for Tourism

Our reflection on the content analysis of the National Strategic Plan for Tourism highlights some connected elements with the analyses conducted on social media and websites of Visit Porugal. The Plan underlines the need to organize and implement one a two mega events in order to contribute towards improving the tourism offer and increasing the destination's projection and notoriety. In the framework of this product, circuits that incorporate and foster locations that have unique natural, landscape, historical and cultural heritage value in Portugal it should be promoted. As recommendation, more them promotion the correct integration of the stated goals with the digital destination branding strategy will enhance the expected results.

The relevance to create thematic routes (e.g. Discoveries), fostering a national calendar of events that will guarantee an authentic tourist experience. The overall benefits for Portugal as tourism destination in link the digital channels and branding efforts as part of a wider strategy are effective direction of scarce resources to key economic revenues that influence stakeholder and visitors satisfaction. A strategy provides a process for the destination to articulate and execute its mission with regard to visitor's preferences (analysed by using different methodologies) and identification of key issues and focus on priorities, strategic activities, budgets and projects.

Conclusions

Tourism is closely linked to development and encompasses a growing number of new destinations. 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, 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 help from people's imagination, it brings together unlimited opportunities to enhance the brand of a place, such as a tourism destination (Muñiz-Martínez & Cervantes-Blanco, 2009).

The development of ICTs, social media, web 2.0 empowers DMOs and visitors (user generator content). Thereafter, strategies and methods are required to better prepare a response to challenges. 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, personalisation and constant networking. Thus, increasing tourism revenues and

enhancing competitiveness (Buhalis, Leung, & Law, 2011). When planning the design of websites or to use social networks to communicate their destinations to the outside and inside alike, DMOs and tourism agencies need to be sure to provide reasons and purposes for a visit (Morrison, 2013).

Communicating a consistent message about destination assets becomes exciting when it engages a network of content generators, such as travel bloggers. Making strategies 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, decentralisation, and collaboration/networks are all important (Morrison, 2013). The dangerous of not designing the destination branding strategies is visual and sound confusion from the outputs, such as logos, slogans and video promotion and the fail of fulfil the expectations of the visitors. All contacts between destination marketing organizations and tourists should be oriented to the satisfaction of their expectations (i.e. before, during, and after the visit), for they will also determine the image of the destination perceived by the tourist.

From the research findings, Portugal has been characterized as a less crowded and alternative tourism destination with scenario of natural landscape (e.g. beach, mountains) and historic city centres (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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