

Destination Image Gaps Between Official Tourism Websites and User- Generated Content

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Introduction

- **Online sources** have become crucial when planning a trip, taking tourism decisions and forming images.
- Increasing interest is being given to the different online images provided by users on UGC, and how different they are from the ones produced by DMOs
- Although some studies have been conducted comparing official tourism websites (OTWs) and UGC (Chen et al., 2008; Choi et al., 2007), no studies have analysed online destination image gaps at different geographical levels at the same time.
- Moreover, OTWs have usually been analysed in terms of effectiveness, usefulness, design, and information and website quality, but not so often in terms of the image they contain.

Background

- With the Internet, image formation agents have multiplied and parallels can be drawn between traditional forms of information and OTWs or between organic sources and e-WOM or UGC.
- Issue of the **dissonance of the representations** of a destination and of **image congruency** (projected vs. perceived)
→ **destination image gaps**.
- Today, one of the most important tools that destinations have to disseminate or project their image are **OTWs**



DMOs should assess the efforts put in OTWs through comparison with tourists' perceived images online → assess image congruency & identify destination image gaps

Aims

Analyse and compare destination image on OTWs and UGC sources (travel blogs and reviews, TBRs), in order to assess image congruency and identify image gaps at different geographical brand levels at the same time.

Target attraction factors and geographical elements from a Quantitative perspective → computerized semi-automatic content analysis of OTW pages and more than 45,000 TBR entries of Catalonia and its sub-regional brands.

Case study



- Catalonia and its sub-regional brands were selected as the case study region.
- Catalonia is the third European region as regards bed nights (Eurostat, 2014).

- **TBR selection:** TripAdvisor (TA), VirtualTourist (VT), TravelBlog (TB), and TravelPod (TP).



- **OTW selection:** Then the OTWs of Catalonia and its sub-regional brands were selected.
- Methodology used for the **analysis** of OTWs and TBRs follows the steps proposed by Marine-Roig and Anton Clavé (2015a) consisting of: **1) semi-automatic downloading, 2) arranging, 3) cleaning, 4) debugging and 5) analysis** of large scale online UGC and official website data.

- **1) Data downloading:**
 - websites were manually browsed to identify the initial pages containing hyperlinks which lead to the individual blogs and OTR pages).
 - Filter application and massive downloading of the HTML pages of each website through HTTrack Website Copier
- **2) Data arrangement:**

root\website\brand\destination\date_lang_pagename_[theme].htm.
- **3) Data cleaning:** Eliminating noise and repetitive content, while preserving the HTML format to assess potential impact
- **4) Data debugging:** Amending most common mistakes in TBRs

Methodology

- **5) Content analysis** was conducted through Site Content Analyzer → frequency, density and weight of keywords
- **Categories:**
 - **Geographic dimension:** names of the sub-regional brands, counties, cities, small towns/villages and residential areas
 - **Functional dimension** (attraction factors): (1) Food and Wine, (2) Intangible Heritage, (3) Leisure and recreational activities, (4) Nature and active tourism, (5) Sports, (6) Sun, Sea, Sand, (7) Tangible Heritage, and (8) Urban Environment

Results

Geographical dimension

- Significant dissonance or gap between the presence of the different destinations and brands in OTWs and TBRs
- OTWs mention all destinations more or less equally while in the case of TBRs, the mentions are very much centred on a specific popular destination → the rest of territories are invisible

Brand	Official tourism website pages			Travel blog and review entries in 2014			
	Count	Sitewide density	Average weight	Files	Count	Sitewide density	Average weight
Bama	12,491	1.0467 %	26.24	40,156	91,359	2.8612 %	66.97
cBarc	6882	0.5767 %	5.70	731	1638	0.0513 %	65.18
cBrav	29,428	2.4659 %	32.86	1907	5281	0.1654 %	55.28
cDaur	8379	0.7021 %	11.09	3067	5715	0.1790 %	71.08
pBarc	5232	0.4384 %	14.34	512	5476	0.1715 %	57.62
Pyren	14,624	1.2254 %	17.57	143	548	0.0172 %	40.80
tEbre	8403	0.7041 %	28.90	22	145	0.0045 %	43.73
tLlei	8309	0.6963 %	8.86	36	122	0.0038 %	43.85
vAran	1658	0.1389 %	9.20	2	17	0.0005 %	32.94

Results

Atraction factors

- Partial congruency at a regional level: parallels in terms of site-wide density in most cases (Food & Wine, Intangible Heritage, Leisure & recreation, Sports, Tangible Heritage and Urban environment).
- Main difference: Nature and the Sun & Sea are much more mentioned by OTWs

Categories	Official tourism website pages			Travel blog and review entries		
	Count	Sitewide density	Average weight	Count	Sitewide density	Average weight
Food and wine	12,272	1.0283 %	24.09	24,068	0.7538 %	18.47
Intangible heritage	2361	0.1978 %	17.82	4167	0.1305 %	36.03
Leisure and recreational activities	10,028	0.8403 %	19.12	28,044	0.8783 %	31.48
Nature and active tourism	23,842	1.9978 %	10.68	10,556	0.3306 %	17.32
Sports	4835	0.4052 %	25.52	11,121	0.3483 %	37.16
Sun, sea, sand	13,641	1.1430 %	13.85	16,713	0.5234 %	27.20
Tangible heritage	60,037	5.0308 %	18.26	145,782	4.5656 %	37.23
Urban environment	13,330	1.1170 %	10.36	55,221	1.7294 %	37.43

Results

Attraction factors

Findings at sub-regional level (some examples):



- Congruency in the main elements (Tangible Heritage, Urban Environment and Food & Wine).
- But the elements are mentioned much more intensely in OTWs



- Important image gap, as for tourists, Leisure and recreational activities is the most central and differential element of the brand, while for OTWs this element is not emphasized.



- Image seems to be congruent as in both cases Nature and active tourism is seen as the most prominent element and Tangible Heritage is also prominent.
- Remarkably, tourists mention Intangible Heritage far more than the OTWs.

Results

OTWs
Table 5 OTWs site-wide density of attraction factor categories per brands

OTWs	Barna	cBrav	cDaur	Pyren	cBarc + pBarc
Food and wine	1.481 %	1.301 %	1.977 %	0.692 %	1.628 %
Intangible heritage	0.107 %	0.210 %	0.122 %	0.393 %	0.275 %
Leisure and recreational activities	0.694 %	1.066 %	1.381 %	0.453 %	0.765 %
Nature and active tourism	0.616 %	2.016 %	2.086 %	4.522 %	4.030 %
Sports	0.882 %	0.298 %	0.486 %	0.454 %	0.424 %
Sun, sea, sand	0.701 %	2.034 %	2.252 %	0.352 %	1.687 %
Tangible heritage	8.496 %	3.130 %	2.970 %	2.829 %	3.328 %
Urban environment	2.334 %	0.718 %	0.454 %	0.388 %	0.644 %

TBRs
Table 6 TBRs site-wide density of attraction factor categories per brands

TBRs	Barna	cBrav	cDaur	pyren	cBarc	pBarc
Food and wine	0.796 %	0.430 %	0.342 %	0.405 %	1.583 %	0.457 %
Intangible heritage	0.118 %	0.025 %	0.220 %	2.080 %	0.097 %	0.019 %
Leisure and recreational activities	0.739 %	1.034 %	2.612 %	0.215 %	1.371 %	0.425 %
Nature and active tourism	0.266 %	0.748 %	0.145 %	3.225 %	0.253 %	1.886 %
Sports	0.395 %	0.098 %	0.050 %	0.150 %	0.318 %	0.026 %
Sun, sea, sand	0.334 %	2.287 %	1.296 %	0.190 %	2.271 %	0.094 %
Tangible heritage	4.908 %	5.160 %	0.911 %	1.415 %	1.589 %	5.562 %
Urban environment	1.892 %	1.104 %	0.682 %	0.870 %	0.724 %	1.356 %

Concluding remarks

- This research has contributed to identify destination image gaps in terms of territorial representation and perception.
- OTWs represent all territories more or less equally but tourists represent or perceive only very specific locations and regions
- In terms of attraction factors this research finds that image congruency may be different at different geographical levels → it is highly congruent between UGC and OTWs at a regional level but not at sub-regional level.

Image gaps should be studied carefully at different geographical levels to obtain an idea of the general picture. A general image congruency does not mean that this image is congruent at all geographical levels or that the intensity of place brand representation is similarly distributed in official and tourist images.



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