



Minding the Gap Between Perceived and Projected Destination Image by Using Information and Communication Platforms and Software

Victor Alexandru Briciu, Transilvania University of Brasov, Brasov, Romania

 <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-7506-8099>

Florin Nechita, Transilvania University of Brasov, Brasov, Romania

 <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-5398-722X>

Robert Demeter, Transilvania University of Brasov, Brasov, Romania

Androniki Kavoura, University of West Attica, Athens, Greece

ABSTRACT

The article examines a double case study framework for analyzing perceived and projected destinations by using ITC solutions. First, 22,362 photos tagged with “Brasov” were collected and analyzed using the Flickr API. Second, a descriptive-explanatory research was employed, applying an instrument for the analysis and to address the online identity of place brands where a proposed online platform generates an automatic score calculation. The spatial patterns of tourist activity revealed many similarities and differences compared to promoted attractions by the DMOs, as the results indicated that geotagged photos reflect the projected image of the destination as the data provided a hotspot distribution of popular tourist attractions. The article makes a theoretical and practical contribution: (a) visual imagery may be more fully implemented in research studies; and (b) the distribution of popular tourist attractions may be in synergy between the perceived and projected image of a destination. Implications for marketing managers are presented.

KEYWORDS

Brasov, Destination Image, Identity Characteristics, IT&C Applications, Place Brands, Tourism Websites, Transylvania, Visitor Generated Visual Content, Visual Data Analysis

INTRODUCTION

Although new technologies have been frequently implemented in everyday life by visitors at tourist destinations (by taking photos, uploading them on social networks and photo sharing platforms, leaving digital footprints on the Internet) and visitor-generated visual content (VGVC) is continuously created and uploaded. Official agents such as Destination Management Organizations (DMOs) are slow to

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implement new technologies to communicate a place's online identity, relying more on traditional tourism data collection methods (surveys, interviews and focus groups), that are both expensive and time consuming. When they do so, discrepancies may exist between what is perceived by tourists and the way the destinations are communicated by the agents involved.

The purpose of this research is to examine a proposed double case study framework for analyzing perceived and projected destinations by using Information and Communication Technology (ICT) solutions with the aim to minimize possible misunderstandings that can be made for the destination.

Regarding the perceived image, 22,362 photos tagged with "Brasov" City, Romania were collected using Flickr API (Application programming interface) for an 18-year period and were analyzed with the further aim to examine the way visitors 'see' the place via the lens. In the case of projected destination images, a descriptive-explanatory research was employed focusing on a methodology depository, applying an instrument for analysing and addressing the online identity of place brands via the tourism agents' eyes. A proposed online platform generates an automatic score calculation algorithm for place brands obtained by applying the analysis grid to websites based on a ranking system.

The findings highlight similarities but also discrepancies between the images created online by marketers for Brasov, Romania and how different the same place is perceived by visitors. The paper makes a theoretical and practical contribution on the way (a) visual imagery may be more fully implemented in research studies and (b) the distribution of popular tourist attractions may be in synergy between the perceived and projected image of a destination employing an online software platform that was developed making it adaptable to any type of smart device. Implications for tourism marketing managers are provided for image assessment.

This work aims to limit the gap and extend our knowledge in regard to ways specific applications and software may be useful to the analysis of visual images and websites.

The sections of the paper are as follows: the authors present in section 2 literature works that illustrates the significance of user-generated content (UGC) in relation to photos that may be used for the creation of destination image. Section 3 presents methodology for the both case studies taken into consideration and the authors in the last section present the conclusions and provide managerial suggestions for DMOs.

BACKGROUND

Photographs play a crucial role in the promotion of tourism destinations and they should be seen as legitimate agents of inquiry although tourism research has favored textual data over visual data (Balomenou and Garrod, 2019, Kavoura and Nechita, 2017). Researchers have been relatively slow to capitalise on the potential of visual data analysis techniques (Garrod, 2007) while researchers have brought out the benefits that exist when perceived online destination images are taken into consideration in the promotional efforts of managers in charge of projected online destination images (Stepchenkova and Zhan, 2013, Michaelidou, Siamagka, Moraes and Micevski, 2013, Mak, 2017). Research (Pan, Lee and Tsai, 2014) has indicated that photos are more suited to reflect the affective images of places from tourists' perspectives. Extracting and understanding tourists' point of interest from geotagged photos has been the focus of many researchers (Kisilevich, Mansmann, Bak, Keim and Tchaikin, 2010). The image-based content sharing platforms typically have higher rates of geo-tagging. For example, 80% of images in the now-defunct Google Panoramio were geotagged, and most Flickr photos are geotagged where Flickr is the second social medium mostly used where the extraction of useful content from images and videos is easier from tags from content sharing web sites (Bae and Yun, 2017).

The call for pluralistic approaches in the way tourism analysis takes place on both the destination image promotion but also on the way this image is perceived by visitors of one destination, has brought forth visitor-employed photography (VEP) as a method of study (MacKay and Couldwell, 2004); volunteer-employed photography that entails photographic data that has been collected by

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