YouTube Videos: A Destination Marketing Outlook

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Abstract Maintaining a presence on social media has become unavoidable for tourism destinations around the world. With numerous delivery platforms available, the challenge is deciding what to use and what type of contents to promote therein. Video contents have proven to be more engaging as they are able to influence the potential tourist demand. This article explores the use of YouTube to promote a destination from the viewpoint of users, destination marketing organizations, and influencers. For this study, visual, audio, and textual contents—along with the characteristics—of 388 videos linked to a destination were analyzed. The findings highlight significant differences between professional-generated content, user-generated content, and influencer-generated content, causing different destination image projections. Influencer-generated content is mostly a combination of the other two but is presented according to a storytelling approach; thus, it is more similar to user-generated content.

Keywords YouTube · UGC · Content marketing · Destination marketing · Azores

1 Introduction

The ongoing development of modern communication technology, coupled with the increasingly high penetration rate of the Internet, wireless systems, and mobile communications, is promoting a technological emphasis among both firms and consumers. The advantages of using the Internet-efficiency, convenience, rich information, coverage over a wider spectrum, broader selections, competitive pricing, and diversity-are well-known [1].

Tourism is an information-intensive activity [2], and the Internet has enabled access to a huge and diverse range of information with a mere click [3]. The sector

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has been able to adopt and adapt to these technological tools and social media channels to communicate with clients [4]. The widespread proliferation of emails, the Web, digital photography, social media, YouTube, websites, blogs, eBooks, Twitter, Facebook, Google+, text messages, and mobile phone usage has generated the creation and spread of huge amounts of data or content—coined as "big data" [5]. Being digitally active, especially on social media, seems to be a success formula for firms aiming to establish an interactive relationship with customers.

However, on the Web, a panoply of users can be found; they explore it in different ways by consuming, creating content, participating in discussions, sharing their vision with peers, or simply acquiring information shared by others [6–8]. Preferences for content formats vary, leading tourism and hospitality organizations to adopt multiple platform strategies.

Therefore, in the digital context, destination branding is a challenge. A destination's reputation is created by different agents, ranging from DMOs, to customers and including tourism and hospitality firms; all of these shapes the destination brand and use different digital media. Additionally, the contents created can project different images depending of the creator: tourists, social media celebrity, DMOs and tourism and hospitality firms [9]. The implications for brand theory of these images co-creation have been less attended in literature, perhaps because there is still not fully understanding of the role of all players on this new branding process. This paper addresses this gap in the literature, aiming to unveil the role of the different stakeholders on destination image projection. Acknowledging that destination images projected to potential tourists can influence the destination choice [10] and that videos are effective tools for capturing tourists' attention and projecting images [11], this article summarizes the findings of an analysis of 388 videos-created by different stakeholders-regarding the Azores (Portugal). The videos were shared on YouTube with the aim of unveiling the convergence of the brand image projected by a DMO with that conveyed through tourists' videos.

2 Background

With a more traditional marketing approach, standard products were produced and distributed in masse to anonymous consumers through a one-way communication model [12]. With technological advances, a more interactive and two-way communication model was adopted [13]. Thus, products are customized accordingly based on consumers' profiles.

Zeng and Gerritsen [14] pointed to the fact that the rapid rise of online marketing and social media in tourism follows a path similar to the one taken by other industries [15]. Mkono and Tribe [16] have discussed the rapid rise of digital marketing and social media in tourism, reporting that these changes reflect the distinctive types of experiences and behavior in cyberspace interactions. Sigala [17] reinforces the role of technology in tourism, pointing to its impacts not only on firms' processes, but also on tourism experiences and co-creation processes.

This seamless access to technology has changed the way people communicate and search for information, and tourists are no exception [18]. In this sense, a new generation, a new language, new consumption patterns (more informed and connected consumers), new uses of media, and alternative tools that replace traditional advertising methods have impelled tourism and hospitality firms to adopt a different posture. This posture is more interactive, current, ubiquitous, and customized to tourists' wants and needs. However, the paradigm shifts indicate that efforts to overcome challenges related to tools and platforms must be employed to keep up with tourists and their expectations [19].

Because of their popularity and widespread use, social media serve collectively as a platform for obtaining a competitive marketing advantage. Recent research on consumer behavior on social media found that (1) not all consumers are equally active online [20, 21], and (2) content is generated by a small number of users with specific motivations regarding concepts, products, or projects [22, 23].

In fact, there has been considerable discussion and research concerning social media and the corresponding implications for the tourism and hospitality industries [14, 24, 25]. A wide range of research explores how technology has changed the balance of power between organizations and their consumers, highlighting the inevitable loss of control from the marketer's perspective [26]. As Morgan, Pritchard and Pride [27] have suggested, all players in this industry agree that the control of DMOs in destination branding has diminished.

From a DMO perspective, several challenges must be met since (1) DMOs have little or no control of the products they are "trying to sell" [28], and (2) DMO communication must integrate private and public communications efforts to ensure unique destination storytelling [29]. Therefore, acknowledging and integrating the different marketing messages is a key task for a DMO; if neglected, it can generate a mix of confused messages. Lund et al. [29] highlighted that not only must DMOs consider the traditional sources, but also "the emergence of social media thus requires a fundamental rethink of marketing practices as brands are now co-created through informal conversations by authors largely outside marketers' control."

In this sense, the amount of information available on social media and other digital platforms not only serves as a repository for peers [30] but also communicates the brand image to appeal to a tourist's point of view. Brand management can suffer from the influence of contents created and shared by tourists and social media celebrities [22, 23]. Perceptions regarding experiences are unique; furthermore, they are affected by tourists and celebrities' personality traits.

Therefore, knowing "what" tourists and social media celebrities share on social media and how the content influences brand management is not well understood [24, 31]. Considering a brand represents all the tangible and intangible attributes associated with a brand name that can influence consumers' perceptions; accordingly, it seems relevant to consider the influence of celebrities and tourists' co-creation as an intangible attribute communicated in brand management [10, 32].

In 2012, Lim et al. [33] found evidence that social media allowed tourists to participate in the construction of a destination brand identity or image. Moreover,

their results pointed to differences between videos promoted by DMOs and other official organizations and those created by tourists, leading to questions about the possible loss of control by DMOs in destination branding, as has been chronicled by several authors [34, 35]. Similar conclusions were draw regarding bloggers, vloggers and instagrammers influence on public perception of brand images [20, 21, 36].

Mak [37] suggests that tourist-generated content (TGC) is a set of unsolicited information-not filtered and rich in tourist experiences. Duffy and Wissinger [36] noticed that social media personalities create content heavy reliant on image and video related to their passion projects, as a proxy for success and influence on other social media users. It comes in various forms. Several research studies have analyzed the different formats: textual contents as travel blogs [38, 39], website [9, 40] and social media reviews/comments [41–43]; photos [44] and videos [19].

Mak [37] emphasized that TGC reflects the "reality" perceived by tourists, whereas the DMOs strive to project desirable images and attributes of destinations online. Thus, the content is not necessarily the same.

Clearly, in light of the evolution and changes outlined above, DMOs need to keep up with users in social media [45] and integrate co-created content in destination branding [29, 46]. Lund et al. [29] stated that for DMOs, branding in social media is "not only about producing exciting stories." For DMOs to be successful, they also need to become social players. Thus, the challenge for DMOs is to identify co-creation experiences and integrate them with destination storytelling in their digital social networking spaces. Considering that in the literature the creation, reproduction, and dissemination of brand images or associations have mostly been analyzed from one-player stand of view, neglecting the combined effects of the contents, this paper addresses this gap, aiming to unveil the role of the different stakeholders on destination image projection.

3 Methodology and Results

In the tourism literature, there are many studies addressing the advantages of different content formats, but few have attempted to identify the most engaging and effective types of content. In the work of Faria et al. [47], video content was shown to be the most complete and engaging type used by all social network players. Reino and Hay [19] focused their analysis on YouTube videos, recalling that this platform allows tourists to access organic sources of information and share their own videos and experiences with third parties.

In this context and for the purpose of this study, videos were considered the most suitable format since they can combine textual content in titles, subtitles, and reviews with sound and image contents. With the aim of understanding how destination promotion videos and TGC on YouTube can promote and shape the image of a destination, the Azores destination was chosen as a case study. This work followed a five-stage approach, similar to that designed by Hou et al. [48]. In the initial phase (May 2018), a YouTube search was conducted using the most common keyword—

Table 1 Key dimensions communicated by the different stakeholders

(% on videos)	Marketing generated video		User generated video	
	DMO	Tourism and hospitality firms	Tourists	Vloggers
Sightseeing	100	88.73	96.4	94.69
Entertainment	100	67.61	54.59	66.37
Food	37.5	38.03	33.67	33.4
Transportation	25	30.7	63.31	71.68
Accommodation	0	12.68	13.27	23.01
Shopping	0	15.49	8.16	9.73

Azores—associated with the destination chosen for the purpose of this study. The search delivered 160,300 videos, from which YouTube allowed access to 941 videos. By applying a random sampling procedure, 388 videos were evaluated and identifying information was processed. The second phase involved an analysis of the videos' properties in terms of their popularity and creators; the third stage was a visual content analysis. The last two phases included an audio and textual content analysis of the videos, titles, subtitles, and comments associated with each video.

The longest-standing posting regarding the Azores as a destination was on YouTube. It first appeared in 2007 and has been managed by a tourism and hospitality firm. The most recent contributions were from tourists, accounting for more than half (51%) of the published video content related to the Azores as a destination; influencers (vloggers) uploaded 29% of the videos, whereas tourism and hospitality firms created 18% of them. Finally, DMOs were responsible for 2% of the videos related to the destination. The videos posted by vloggers accounted for 69.29% of the total video visualizations, followed by marketing-generated video from DMOs with 8.86% of visualizations. Vloggers' videos generated more reactions from the YouTube audience, accounting for 90.84% of the "likes" and generating 83.59% of the total comments. Interestingly, DMO videos provoked less reaction from the audience (Table 1).

When looking at the video contents, DMO-projected images were significantly different from those projected by other players. As in Hou et al. [48], the percentage of time given in the videos to "sightseeing" and "entertainment" held top values for those produced by DMOs, but changes regarding "sightseeing" and "transportation" were noted when tourists and influencers told their stories. "Shopping" came last, having the shortest duration or possibly not being featured at all. Most videos generated by tourists and influencers included voiceovers. In the case of marketing-generated videos, music was combined with pictures; sometimes, a voiceover was used to enhance the content of the message. Most comments were made in English and Portuguese regarding vloggers' and tourists' videos. In 28% of the comments, emojis were used; further, 86% had a positive tone.

4   Final Considerations

Maintaining a presence on social media has become unavoidable for destinations around the world. With numerous delivery platforms available, the challenge posted to DMOs is deciding what to use and what type of contents to promote on these platforms. More recently, the research discourse points to the need to rethink DMO activity since DMOs have lost control of destination branding with images projected online. Thus, they must consider and integrate UGC to guarantee more engaging and effective destination branding.

Of all content formats available, videos are the most complete and influential image creators. YouTube as a social media platform offers DMOs and tourism and hospitality firms an opportunity to present their brands and identity. However, it simultaneously gives spaces to tourists and influencers to co-create identity in their videos. By analyzing 388 videos regarding the Azores uploaded on YouTube, some interesting findings were retrieved that point to the increasing role of vloggers in defining a destination image and—to a somewhat less extent—exploring and exposing tourists' contributions. From the overall results, the following should be considered: not all content formats are adequate for stimulating and forming mental images; some players have a more active posture; and certain users and contents can be more engaging than others, even when employing the same format. Although this study is rich in descriptive data, some gaps allow for valuable input from future research in this field; thus, enlarging the study to include videos uploaded on other social networks would be useful.

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