

Travellers' virtual communities: a success story

Comunidades virtuales de viajeros: un caso de éxito

Laura Cervi

Autonomous University of Barcelona (Spain)

Department of Journalism and Communication Sciences

laura.cervi@uab.cat

Orcid code: www.orcid.org/0000-0002-0376-0609

Abstract

*This article aims at studying the Italian online travelers' community *Ho sempre voglia di partire*, which, in only two years of life, has reached more than 540 000 followers, over 7 000 000 visits per month and over all 2 700 000 interactions, becoming —according to its creators— the largest travelers' community in Europe.*

The objective is to describe the interactions that characterizes the community, to reveal the reasons why users participate, the actual and symbolical benefits they obtain, and to understand the reasons for success. Through a triangulation of methods, the article reveals how the key of all interactions is emotion and how, therefore, the benefit that the members obtain is mainly emotional.

Keywords

Social networks, on line communities, travel communities, 2.0 travellers, Web 2.0, community manager, prosumer, 2.0 tourism.

Resumen

Este artículo se propone estudiar la comunidad italiana de viajeros on line *Ho sempre voglia di partire* que, en solo dos años de vida, cuenta con más de 540 000 seguidores, más de 7 000 000 de visitas por mes y 2 700 000 interacciones.

El objetivo es describir las interacciones presentes en la comunidad para desvelar las razones por las cuales los usuarios participan, los beneficios, reales y simbólicos que obtienen, y poder comprender las razones del éxito. A través de una triangulación de métodos el artículo desvela como la clave de todas las interacciones es la emoción y que, por lo tanto, los beneficios que los miembros obtienen son principalmente emocionales.

Palabras clave

Redes sociales, comunidades virtuales, comunidades de viajeros, viajeros 2.0, Web 2.0, community manager, prosumidor, turismo 2.0.

Suggested form of citing: Cervi, Laura (2019). Travellers' virtual communities: a success story. *Universitas*, 30, pp. 95-122.

Introduction

Travel has always been a need of the individual: first with the Greeks who traveled by the desire to know, see and learn, then with the Romans who began to practice the “pleasure travel” until we arrived at our days, where the reasons that motivate us to travel are innumerable.

The use of internet and digital technologies has radically revolutionized the way of traveling: instead of going to travel agencies, we use their online sites, or we directly dispense with them when planning and organizing our own personalized trips with flights, hotel reservations and other online services.

Tourism, in fact, has been ranked as the most important industry in terms of volume of online transactions (Werthner & Ricci 2004). For tourism organizations, both private and public, therefore, the internet has become one of the most important communication and marketing channels (Wang & Fesenmaier 2006).

But the internet has revolutionized the entire information search model.

The model of vertical and unidirectional communication of the industrial society and mass media, in fact, has been replaced by a horizontal and multidirectional one, in which individuals are both producers and consumers of content, both senders and receivers.

This is what Axel Bruns (2008) called “*produsage*”, referring to the dual nature of the digital citizen who becomes a *prosumer* since he both consumes and produces information as a more communicative actor.

The same has happened in the world of travel: social media technologies have led to a change in the control of content creation processes, from a Web 1.0 mainly controlled by organizations and corporations (Li & Bernoff, 2008; Qualman, 2009) towards the more inclusive approach of Web 2.0, which to a large extent is an expression of interaction and participation of the end user (Kamboj & Rahman, 2017; Rashidi *et al.*, 2017).

Today any user can access the web to discover and discuss the experiences of other people: these “communities”, sites that connect people around the world are, in effect, eclipsing even the traditional portals and search engines (Prebensen, Kim & Uysal, 2016).

This new usage pattern was defined by Philippe Wolf, CEO of PhoCusWright Inc., in 2006, as “travel 2.0”, that is, in the use of web 2.0 tools such as blogs, social networks, recommendation systems, integration of content by mashups, audio, video, travel planners, etc. However, nowadays the concept covers much more, since it does not only mean the use of tools to search for information but, fundamentally, a change of paradigm, in the global philosophy of the use

of information: the user uses the technologies in the process of anticipation, experience and recreation of the trip (Almeida *et al.*, 2016).

Journals of economic disciplines, especially marketing (Sotiriadis, 2017, Roque & Raposo 2016), and tourism journals (see, among others, Amaro, Duarte & Henriques, 2016, Kavoura & Borges, 2016), have devoted many studies to the communities of travelers, with a clearly business-oriented approach. However, the sciences of the communication seem not to have interested much to these communities.

For this reason the article aims to study a particularly successful case, the Italian online traveler community *Ho sempre voglia di partire* (literally “I always want to leave”, but the verb *partire* in Italian is closer to “take off”, for this the most suitable translation seems to us “I always want to travel”), which in just two years of life counts, according to official data, with more than 540 000 followers, more than 7 000 000 visits per month and especially 2 700 000 interactions, becoming, according to its creators, the largest passenger community in Europe. The objective is to describe the interactions present in the community to reveal the reasons why users participate, the benefits, real and symbolic they obtain, and to understand the reasons for success in terms of interaction between users.

State of the issue

When we talk about travel and Internet, most of the studies belong to the areas of marketing, or tourism.

For decades these disciplines have described how consumers seek information (Howard, Restrepo & Chang, 2017).

Travel products are intangible and cannot be evaluated in advance, therefore, when consumers plan to travel they tend to conduct an extensive information search to reduce risk and uncertainty (Gitelson & Crompton, 1983; Mansfeld, 1992; & Jarvis, 1981; Mill & Morrison, 2002; Filieri & McLeay, 2014; Chang, Fu & Jain, 2016). In addition, traveling and taking vacations is one of the largest items in the annual budget (Mill & Morrison, 2002, Sirakaya & Woodside, 2005), so that potential travelers often try to maximize knowledge by seeking as much information as possible (Yang & Bin Guo, 2016).

The information search pattern is also often influenced by demographic profiles, experience levels, and a range of other variables (Andereck & Caldwell, 1993, Wang *et al.*, 2010; Shneiderman, 2015).

User generated content and travel

As we have already anticipated, the appearance of ICT has changed the way of buying products and services related to travel, due to its interactive and bidirectional communication functionality (Buhalis, 2003).

In particular, Web 2.0 creates new types of information sources: potential travelers are exposed to many different types of information from a large number of providers.

Beside the traditional sources of information -mainly media, institutions and companies-, the consumers increasingly generate their own content through digital cameras, webcams, picture phones, online communities and web blogs (Chen, Yang & Tang, 2013; Gretzel, Fesenmaier & O'Leary, 2006). Online community members can post their own experiences, share their opinion, give advice or find answers to their questions (Mohd-Any, Winklhofer & Ennew; 2015; Olsen & Connolly, 2000).

In other words, as in Web 2.0 all users can actively participate in the generation or enrichment of content (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010), in the same way, today's travelers can actively participate in consumption, production and dissemination of travel information through the Internet (Pantelidis, 2010; Sparks & Browning, 2011).

The phenomenon of tourists who create and share information online has received much attention to research. Most of the first studies, with an exploratory and descriptive approach, have focused on the same platforms (Enoch & Grossman, 2010, Litvin, Goldsmith, & Pan, 2008, Pudliner, 2007, Schmallegger & Carson, 2008, Wenger, 2008), or on specific topics, such as the main summer holidays (Bronner & de Hoog, 2011), showing how social networks are gaining in terms of emerging communication and travel practices and, on the other hand, also critically discuss quality of travelers' contributions and limitations of online communication practices (Jacobsen & Munar, 2012; Volo, 2010).

In addition, some studies have analyzed the motivating factors that affect the online behavior of travelers (Bryce, Curran, O'Gorman & Taheri, 2015, Chung, Lee & Koo, 2015). According to Hsu, Ju, Yen and Chang (2007), the willingness to share knowledge online depends on personal cognition and social influence.

In particular, the exchange of information on travel through blogs has received wide attention from researchers in tourism (Enoch & Grossman,

2010, Huang, Chou & Lin, 2010, Mack, Blöse & Pan, 2008, Schmallegger & Carson, 2008, Tussyadiah & Fesenmaier, 2008, Volo, 2010, Wenger, 2008).

The most recent studies (Ert, Fleischer & Magen, 2016, Harrigan, Evers, Miles & Daly, 2017) suggest that reviews of online travel are often perceived as more genuine and apt to provide reliable information than the content published by the tourism organizations. This is why more and more online communities are considered to be more influential sources of information (Mohd-Any, Winklhofer & Ennew, 2015), and if the membership generates good quality content and remains energetic, it is often perceived as a similar recommendation to that of friends, relatives, that is to say as mouth-to-mouth substitutes (Dedeke, 2016; Bray, Schetzina & Steinbrink, 2006).

Some communities such as VirtualTourist.com, Trekshare.com, Lonelyplanet.com, and Tripadvisor.com already play a key role in providing up-to-date information on destinations for members around the world (Litvin & Dowling, 2017; Kavoura & Borges, 2016 Beith, 2004).

Travel and online communities

An online community can be seen as a virtual agora and a market in which information is shared and consumers generate their content (Wang *et al.*, 2002).

Many researchers, in different disciplines, have tried to describe online communities and capture their characteristics (Preece, 2000, Armstrong & Hagel, 1996, Powers, 1997, Rheingold, 1991, Rosenblatt, 1997, Shelton & McNeeley, 1997, Smith & Kollock, 1999).

In particular, sociologists have tried for years to define the concept and characteristics of a community (Prebensen, Kim & Uysal, 2016; Reypens, Lievens & Blazevic, 2016), however, research on online virtual communities is still in its infancy compared to research on geographically defined and physical communities (Preece, 2000).

The key for understanding a community is to understand the motivations and needs that lie behind the participation of each member (Ayeh, 2015; Kim, Lee & Hiemstra, 2004; Kozinets, 1999): that is why many researchers have been trying to identify the perceived benefits of members in virtual communities (Bilgihan, Barreda *et al.*, 2016; Ayeh, Au & Law, 2013b).

In the world of travel, although people obviously seek information for decision-making (Amaro & Duarte, 2013; Agag & El-Masry, 2016b), it is also evident that people who collect information about travel do not necessarily have a real travel intention (Chung & Koo, 2015; Urry, 1990; Woodside, 1990) but are often simply interested in meeting like-minded people, with similar attitudes, interests or lifestyles (Agag & El-Masry, 2016a Kang & Schuett, 2013; Wang, Yu & Fesenmaier, 2002).

That is, beyond functional needs, such as the search for information necessary to make a specific trip, people use information as an occasion to share with others, or simply enjoy (Kavoura & Stavrianea, 2015). Armstrong and Hagel (1997) show that an online community provides four different values to the members: transaction, interest, fantasy and relationship. Vogt and Fesenmaier (1998) argue that information needs expand beyond functional needs, making four additional dimensions: hedonic needs, innovation, aesthetics and signs.

In line with the findings of previous research, Wang and Fesenmaier (2004b) argue that social and hedonic benefits have a greater impact on members' participation in online community activities than functional benefits. Social benefits refer to communication with other members, the building of relationships, the exchange of ideas and opinions and participation (Angehrn, 1997, Preece, 2000, Wang & Fesenmaier, 2004a).

Based on 346 Internet users from Russia and the former republics of the Soviet Union, Fotis *et al.*, (2012), for example, showed that social networks are used mainly after the holidays to share experiences.

In conclusion, to understand the phenomenon of travel communities in the online context it is important to examine what really motivates online users to get involved in these communities with positive attitudes.

Baym (2010) has proposed a conceptual framework based on seven dimensions to categorize communities: interactivity, which indicates different levels of social interactivity enabled by different communication platforms; temporal structure, which reflects on asynchronous and synchronous practices and characteristics in real time; social cues, which examine the richness of the context (for example, information about personal identities and spatial and environmental contexts); reach, which measures the audience that a medium can reach or support; mobility, which refers to the extent to which the media is portable, allowing people to communicate

almost regardless of location; storage and replicability, referring to the possibilities of recording and reproduction.

Method

To study the *Ho sempre voglia di partire* community we have applied a mixed method (Creswell, 2014, p.2), based on the triangulation of four methods: netnography, web-analysis (Rieder, 2013), content analysis and in-depth interview with its creator and creator of all content, Guido Prussia.

The word netnography, combination of “Internet” or “network” with “ethnography”, was originally created in 1995 by Robert Kozinets as a tool to analyze online fan discussions about the Star Trek franchise. The use of the method extended from market research and consumer research to a variety of other disciplines, making netnography a discipline still under construction and heir to classical disciplines such as social and cultural anthropology, sociology and even social psychology with the aim of understanding the social reality that is taking place in the online context where millions of people coexist, express themselves and interact on a daily basis.

It is defined as a specific set of research practices related to data collection, analysis, research ethics and representation, rooted in participant observation. In netnography, a significant amount of the data originates and manifests through the fingerprints of naturally occurring public conversations recorded by the networks and uses these conversations as data. For this reason, it offers a less intrusive research experience than ethnography, since it mainly uses observational data. Compared to traditional ethnography, which requires researchers to physically immerse themselves in samples to collect data, netnographic researchers can download communication data directly from an online community, allowing the researcher to investigate a large number of people.

With the influence of ethnography, this research method allows the researcher to link communication patterns to understand the tacit and latent practices involved within and between these communities of interest online (Mariampolski, 2005). As Kozinets (1999, p.366) pointed out, “these social groups have a” real “existence for their participants, and therefore have consequential effects on many aspects of behavior, including consumer behavior” (see also Muniz & O ‘Guinn, 2001).

The free opinion of individuals on the Internet allows the researcher to access data from thousands of individuals acting freely and spontaneously, which represents an exponential increase in analytical techniques such as interviews or focus groups.

In this case study, the researcher has been a member of the group since its inception and has been observing and recording all the interactions without intervening. For this study, once the quantitative data, provided by the community itself, was collected, 33 days were selected (from October 13 to November 14, 2018), 231 post and 8000 between comments and reactions were selected, which have been analyzed quantitatively and qualitatively.

To extract and analyze the data we have used Netvizz, a program designed specifically to investigate data from Facebook, through an application interface (Rieder, 2013); then we have selected the comments and analyzed them through an analysis of the qualitative content, inspired by the methodology proposed by Toret *et al.*, (2013), which allows to take into account the emotions.

Finally, the in-depth interview with Guido Prussia, the creator of the community, has been qualitatively qualified in several aspects.

The case study: *Ho semper voglia di partire*

Ho semper voglia di partire is a Facebook page created in 2016 by Guido Prussia, travel journalist and documentalist, with a long professional career who is responsible for the content, and the young Alessandro Paradossi, blogger, who manages the technical part.

Guido Prussia is a character known at Italian level being the creator and presenter of various programs for RAI, MEDIASET and SKY television and having written several travel books (and not) for Mondadori and Sperling.

In particular, the journalist became a true star of television in the mid-90s, with the broadcast, on Mediaset channels, *Hotel California*, program of which he was author and presenter.

The program, a documentary series *on the road* on the famous *Route 66* in the US, presented the journalist traveling on a motorcycle and accompanied by several nice-looking women, usually models, visiting unusual places, such as the Hotel California, which gave the name to the series or Area 51, or mansions of Hollywood stars.

The fact of being known could have influenced the success of the page, therefore, in the in depth interview the journalist was asked how much his fame could influence the success of the page and the response was negative, since his name barely appears. Indeed, the name almost does not appear, although in reality Guido appears in different videos and the fact of being a travel journalist and having a video database undoubtedly helps the creation of content.

The page, in fact, was created for the first time on December 26, 2013 with the name *Viaggiando if impara* (Traveling is learned), changed immediately after *Viaggiare per crescere* (Travel to grow) and had few successes, until its official launch in 2016 under the name *Amo viaggiare*. According to its creator, the name *Amo viaggiare* was too generic, that's why it changed it to *Ho sempre voglia di partire*.

The literal meaning of this name would be “I always want to leave”, but the verb *partire* in Italian is much closer to Spanish “take off”, so the most appropriate translation seems to us “I always want to travel”, but the phrase it is less generic, suggesting, in some way, a kind of urgency to take off, to travel far away.

This message is clearly represented on its initial page, where you can read:

We are the ones who love to travel, we know that only by knowing different worlds, different cultures, different people can we feed the hunger of conscience and knowledge. We are those who feel alive when they move. We are those for whom the world represents an infinite possibility of being surprised. We are the ones who always want to leave/take off/travel.

Figure 1
Header of the page

Ho sempre voglia di partire



HO SEMPRE VOGLIA DI PARTIRE - WEDNESDAY, APRIL 4, 2016

Siamo quelli che amano viaggiare.

Che sanno che solo conoscendo mondi diversi, culture diverse, persone diverse si può nutrire la fame di consapevolezza e conoscenza.

Siamo quelli che quando sono in movimento si sentono vivi.

Siamo quelli per cui il mondo rappresenta un'infinita possibilità di sorprendersi.

Siamo quelli che hanno sempre voglia di partire.

Source: <https://goo.gl/hTGLiJ>

In September 2016, just after the holidays, he started advertising on his Facebook page with the new name and people were interested because, according to what he says in the interview, they just wanted to “go out” again, to travel again.

Currently the page has reached 6 257 209 people, 3,430,000 weekly views 650,000 weekly interactions.

The page, in fact, is a travel magazine that -from its beginning- was conceived as a “free space, where you can talk freely about travel without media and commercial constraints” (interview with Guido Prussia, 2018). The journalist devised this project to be able to do what he likes, that is, talk about travel, without having to respond to editorial logics that, in his own words, “often kill creativity” or advertisements.

The page proposes seven post per day: a video related to travel but not necessarily about a destination, three photographs or memes, normally, but not necessarily related to the world of travel, and three articles about one or more destinations.

The videos can be either videos of trips, often journalistic pieces of the creator, Guido Prussia, or video-memes. Pictures are often made *ad hoc* aphorisms to be shared. In Figure 2 an example that says, “When you are sad, travel should be provided by Social Security”.

Only articles are always journalistic style. Normally a destination is presented, adding suggestions on what to see, what kind of experiences to do, etc.

Figure 2
Example of pictures



Source: <https://goo.gl/815iu5>

In Figure 3 we see an example “Heidi’s house really exists”, where the journalist suggests visiting the Alps where there is a hut built equal to Heidi’s house, a popular cartoon from the 80s.

Figure 3
Example of article



Source: <https://goo.gl/7iGHpj>

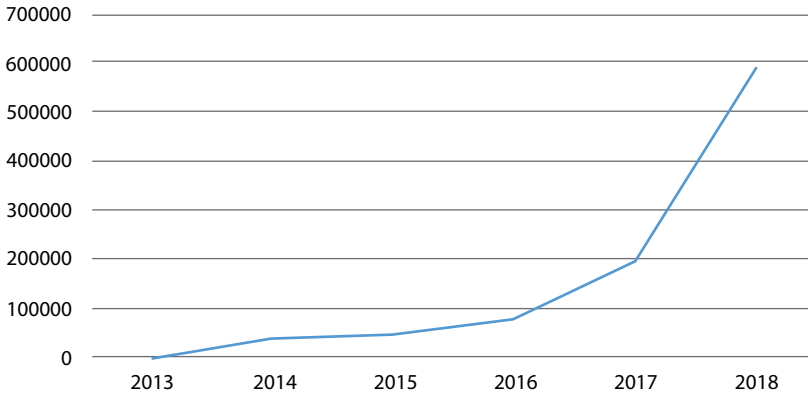
Results

After having broken down the structural data (number of followers, evolution, gender and ages) we will move on to the analysis of the 33 selected days.

Chart 1 shows the evolution in the number of followers.

The data seems to confirm the statements of Guido Prussia in the interview: the followers increase exponentially from 2016, that is to say from the change of name.

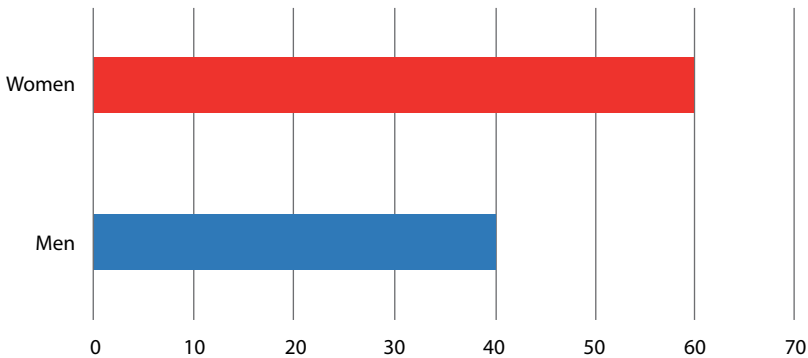
Chart 1
Evolution of followers



Source: Elaborated by the authors based on data provided by *Ho semper voglia di partire*.

Chart 2 shows the gender of the followers, which is predominantly female. Research confirms that women tend to be more willing to share on a network and the interview with the creator of the page confirms that from the beginning the target was clearly feminine.

Chart 2
Gender of the followers

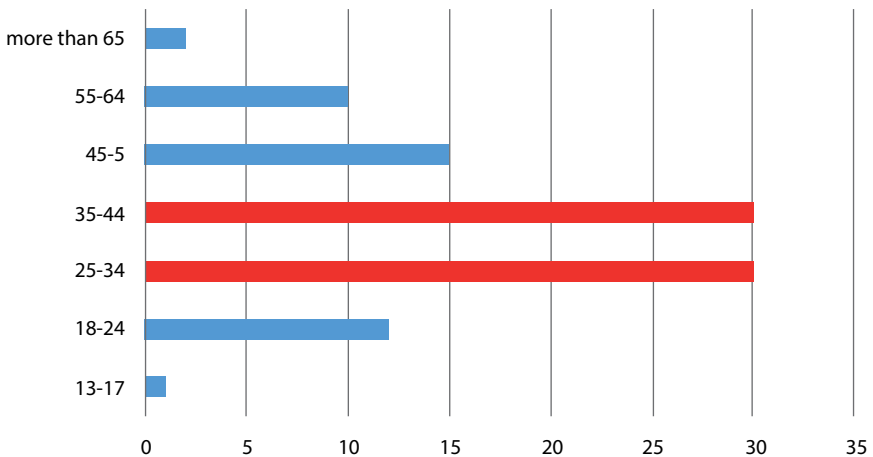


Source: Elaborated by the authors based on data provided by *Ho semper voglia di partire*.

Regarding the ages, Chart 3 shows that, despite having followers of all ages, most of them are between 25 and 44 years old, that is, those who define themselves as adults and young adults. On the one hand, the very choice of the platform marks a target. And Facebook is becoming increasingly defined as a platform for adults: according to the latest eMarketer report (2018), in the United States alone, Facebook will lose 2 million users under the age of 25 during 2018 as, feeling expelled by the presence of adults (parents, uncles, grandparents, teachers) and, in some way, harassed by transgenerational friendship requests, the youngest are migrating to Snapchat and Instagram.

Guido Prussia in the interview confirms, in effect, to feel more comfortable, creating content on Facebook (text, video and photos) than for Instagram, and assumes the risk of losing the younger ones.

Chart 3
Ages of followers

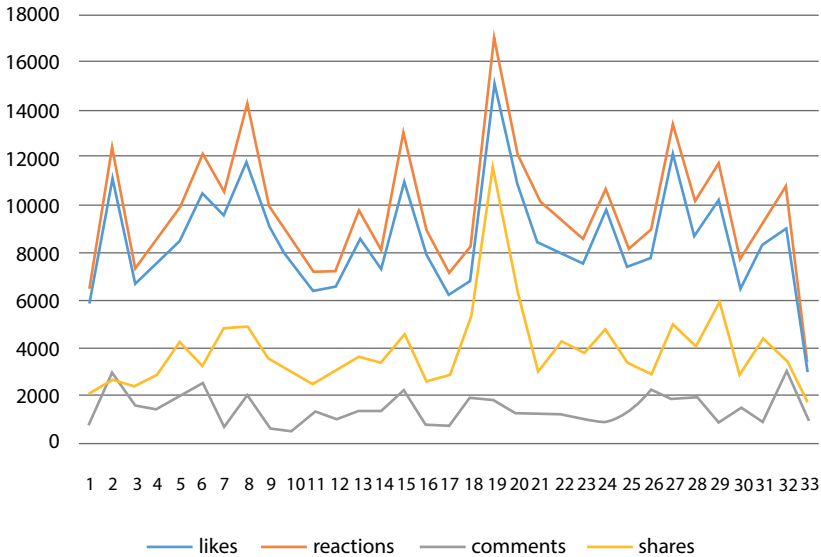


Source: Elaborated by the authors based on data provided by *Ho semper voglia di partire*.

As you can see, likes and “reactions” go together and make up the largest number, followed by the share, the number of times a content has been shared.

The comments, however, although in smaller numbers, seem to follow another dynamic.

Chart 4
Number of interactions from October 13 to November 14, 2018

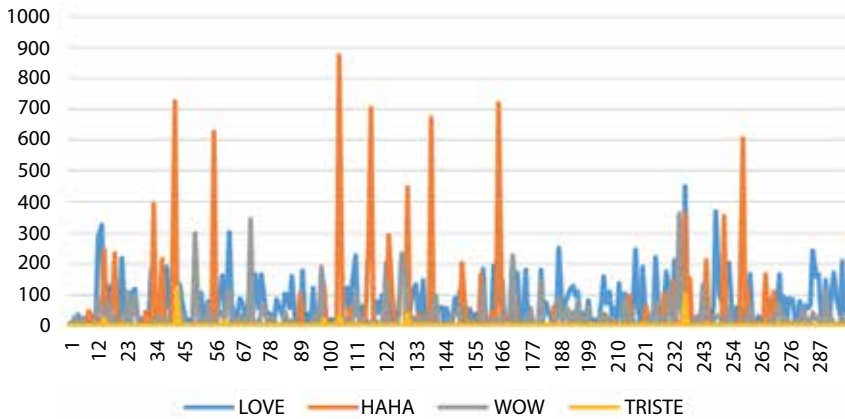


Source: own elaboration

Chart 5 breaks down the type of emotion expressed in the reactions. As we can see most reactions belong to the emoticon called “ahahah”, represented by a face that laughs, followed by the emoticon “love”, love, “Wow” and only in a small part the sad face.

Although it is difficult to interpret the meaning behind the emotions (for example: sadness is related to the message or the nostalgia of a site?), It is evident that positive emotions win.

Chart 5
Recounting the emotions expressed in the reactions



Source: own elaboration

The most shared content, with more “likes” and more reactions has been the video-meme of a puppy dancing accompanied by the phrase “That unstoppable happiness you feel when you book a new trip”, reported in Figure 5.

Figure 5
Video with more “likes” and “shares”



Source: <https://goo.gl/xL4vAD>

Interestingly, this video, while representing an emotion referred to travel has nothing to do with the world of travel *strictu sensu*.

On the other hand, the most commented content has been represented in Figure 6, in which users are asked to choose a “magic” potion that would take them to different trips.

Figure 6
Most commented post

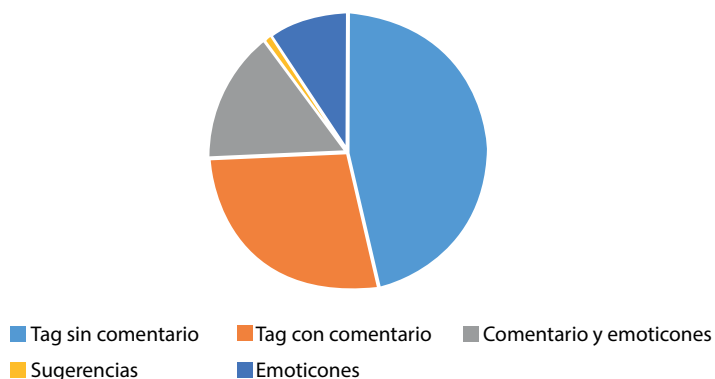


Source: <https://goo.gl/9eMTVC>

While both contents talk about travel, curiously none of the two content gives suggestions, specifies or provides information on any specific destination.

Chart 5 shows the quantitative analysis of all the comments collected during the 33 days. Almost half are tags without comments, that is, a user simply tags another without specifying. We can assume that the tag could mean an intention to share the trip to a destination with that person or the willingness to share a shared memory, still in the absence of more information it is impossible to establish it with certainty.

Chart 6
Types of comments



Source: own elaboration

In the second place we find the tags with comments that effectively confirm the aforementioned hypothesis.

In Figure 7 we can see some examples of comments: the user tags another user to say, I want to go here with you, or to remember a past trip. Other users comment and add emojis. In almost all cases it is about positive comments with emojis of positive emotions.

Figure 7
Example of comments



Source: <https://goo.gl/ShqQ1b>

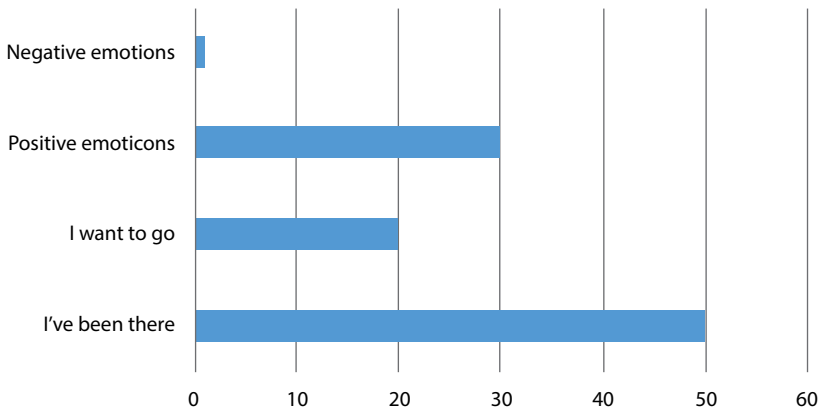
As we can see in the corresponding Chart, curiously, once again, the most frequent comment is “I’ve been there” in all its forms, especially expressed with a check (the green v emoticon) or with a “fatto”, fact, similar to English “done”.

Figure 8
Comment example



Source: <https://goo.gl/DVBoHQ>

Chart 7
Qualitative comment analysis



Source: own elaboration

The second is “I want to go”, usually accompanied by the tag to the person with whom one plans to make the trip and positive emotions respecting the destination, expressed with emojis or in words such as “spectacular” “marvelous”, etc. Negative emotions are

virtually nonexistent. In the 33 days we only find two: one, referring to gardens in the city of Amsterdam, simply says “I do not like them, I prefer other things”, and the other is a crying emoticon that could mean many different things (longing for the site, cry of emotion, etc.).

Conclusion and discussion

The results of this case study are somewhat surprising since in a travel community we have found few samples of functional information exchange (for example, suggestions on places to visit, experiences, hotels or restaurants). On the contrary, the members participate mainly by sharing the contents and especially by tagging other users, claiming to have been or expressing their willingness to visit a site and their emotions.

The obtained results, therefore, are undoubtedly in agreement with the cited findings of Wang and Fesenmaier (2004b) and with the recent discoveries of Xiang, Du, Ma and Fan (2017), since it is evident that the social benefits (see the number of tags) and hedonic (the amount of “I’ve been there”) have a greater impact on members’ participation in online community activities than functional benefits.

In particular, this apparent need to “inform” the other members of having visited a site with a simple “check”, as if it were a list of tasks, and without offering additional comments seems to underscore this hedonistic value, of belonging, well above the functional value of offering the experience for the benefit of others.

More than three decades ago, Marshall McLuhan explained that the “cold” and inclusive “electric media” would “retribalize” the human being by dividing society into affiliation groups (see, for example, McLuhan & Watson, 1970), and this type of social and hedonistic consumption seems to prove his theory, as well as seems to agree with the idea that social networks have expanded the perspective of web technology by transforming users into “technocontactors” (Kozinets, 1999), who use technology as a mediated provider of individual realization.

However, if we define social benefits such as communication with other members, the construction of relationships, the exchange of ideas and opinions and participation (Angehrn, 1997, Preece, 2000, Wang & Fesenmaier, 2004a), we would miss the most important part of these interactions: emotions.

As we have seen, in effect, most of the comments are limited, beyond linking other users, to expressing emotions, either through the text, or using emojis.

For this reason, we can say that the key to the understanding of this community are the emotions: travel is not so much talked in information or functional terms, but in images, videos and at the end of the sensations that are shared.

In particular, as Peyton (2014) underlines, with the emergence of the “like” button, the notion of liking has undergone a semiotic change, shifting from the intimate and emotional sphere of individuals to the public sphere. More than a feeling, now it’s an action, because:

Instead of being linked to an internal sensation that tacitly reacts to an external stimulus, ‘like’ has now become a rational action that connotes an external connection between an individual, a discursive element and a social instance (Peyton, 2014, p. 113).

In other words, the need to understand the cultural significance of online communities has grown exponentially since the appearance of Web 2.0 interfaces, and it seems that online communities, regardless of the topic they address, or in general, the social networks, are capitalizing on the emotional influence of that exchange of feelings that has been called “culture of transmission” (Buss & Strauss, 2009) or “culture of exposure” (Munar, 2010).

Therefore, although this study reflects only on a specific case, with specific characteristics, it highlights the need, on the part of the social sciences, and especially the communication sciences as a whole, to strengthen research, beyond analysis of consumption and consumers, on emotions in the online context.

If it is true, paraphrasing Scolari, that all these transformations are not merely technological but affect the world and the understanding of it by the subject, for future research, it would be important to compare different cases and contexts, to confirm that these features are shared. In this sense, it is necessary to take hypermediations into account, establishing a paradigm that “must know how to move in a discursively marshy terrain, consolidating a solid network of interlocutors from which to begin to build their own epistemological journey” (Scolari, 2008, p. 144).

Acknowledgements

The staff of *Ho semper voglia di partire* is gratefully acknowledged in the person of its creator, Guido Prussia, for having expressly granted us the right to consult the information on his page and to reproduce his images.

Bibliography

- Almeida García, F., Peláez-Fernández, A. M., Macías, R., & Balbuena, A. (2016). Residents' perceptions of tourism development in Benalmádena (Spain). *Tourism Management*, 54, 259-274. 10.1016/j.tourman.2015.11.007.
- Agag, G., & El-Masry, A. (2016a). Understanding Consumer Intention to Participate in Online Travel Community and Effects on Consumer Intention to Purchase Travel Online and WOM: An Integration of Innovation Diffusion Theory and TAM with trust. *Computers in Human Behaviour*. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.chb.2016.02.038>.
- _____ (2016b). Understanding the Determinants of Hotel Booking Intentions and moderating Role of Habit. *International Journal of Hospitality Management* 54, 52-67. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.ijhm.2016.01.007>
- Amaro, S., & Duarte, P. (2013). Online Travel Purchasing: A Literature Review. *Journal of Travel & Tourism Marketing*, 30(8), 755-782. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/10548408.2013.835227>
- Amaro, S., Duarte, P., & Henriques, C. (2016). Travelers' use of social media: A clustering approach. *Annals of Tourism Research*, 59, 1-15. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.annals.2016.03.007>
- Andereck, K. L., & Caldwell, L. L. (1993). The influence of tourist's characteristics on ratings of information sources for an attraction. En M. Uysal & D. R. Fesenmaier (Eds.), *Communication and Channel Systems in Tourism Marketing* (pp. 171-190). London: The Haworth Press.
- Angehrn, A. (1997). Designing mature internet business strategies: The ICDT model. *European Management Journal*, 15(4), 361-369. [https://doi.org/10.1016/S0263-2373\(97\)00016-9](https://doi.org/10.1016/S0263-2373(97)00016-9)
- Armstrong, A., & Hagel, J. (1996). The Real Value of On-line Communities. *Harvard Business Review*, 74(3), 134-141, May-June. <https://doi.org/10.1016/B978-0-7506-7293-1.50009-3>

- Ayeh, J. K. (2015). Travellers' Acceptance of Consumer-Generated Media: An Integrated Model of Technology Acceptance and Source Credibility Theories. *Computers in Human Behavior*, 48, 173-80. <https://doi.org/117.724915>
- Ayeh, J. K., Au, N., & Law, R. (2013). Predicting the Intention to use Consumer Generated Media for Travel Planning. *Tourism Management*, 35, 132-143. <https://doi.org/95.05557>
- Baym, N. (2010). *Personal Connections in the Digital Age*. Malden, MA: Polity Press.
- Beith, M. (2004). Living like locals. *Newsweek* (19-04-2004) <https://bit.ly/2S4Q9YM>
- Bilgihan, A., Barreda, A., Okumus, F., & Nusair, K. (2016). Consumer perception of knowledge-sharing in travel-related Online Social Networks. *Tour. Manag.*, (52), 287-296, <https://doi.org/62.478733>
- Bray, J., Schetzina, C., & Steinbrink, S. (2006). Six travel tech trends for 2006. En Christou, E., Sigala, M. (Ed.), *Social Media in Travel, Tourism and Hospitality*. London: Routledge, <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315609515>
- Bronner, F., & de Hoog, R. (2008). Agreement and Disagreement in Family Decision-making. *Tourism Management*, (29), 967. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tourman.2007.12>
- Bruns, A. (2008). *Blogs, Wikipedia, Second Life, and Beyond: From Production to Prodisage*. New York: Peter Lang.
- Bryce, D., Curran, R., O'Gorman, K., & Taheri, B. (2015). Visitors' Engagement and Authenticity: Japanese Heritage Consumption. *Tourism Management*, (46), 571-581. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.tourman.2014.08.012>
- Chang, H. H., Fu, C.S., & Jain, H.T. (2016). Modifying UTAUT and innovation diffusion theory to reveal online shopping behavior: Familiarity and perceived risk as mediators. *Information Development*, 32(5), 1757-1773. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0266666915623317>
- Chen, G., Yang, S., & Tang, S. (2013). Sense of virtual community and knowledge contribution in a P3 virtual community: Motivation and experience. *Internet Res.*, 23(1), 4-26. <https://doi.org/10.13140/2.1.4684.0960>
- Chung, N., & Koo, C. (2015). The Use of Social Media in Travel Information Search. *Telemat. Informatics*, 32. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tele.2014.08.005>
- Chung, N., Lee, H., Lee, S. J., & Koo, C. (2015). The Influence of Tourism Website on Tourists' Behavior to Determine Destination Selection: A Case Study of Creative Economy in Korea. *Technological Forecasting and Social Change*, 96, 130-143. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.techfore.2015.03.004>

- Creswell, J. W. (2014). *Research Design: Qualitative, Quantitative and Mixed Methods Approaches* (4th ed.). London: Sage Publications Ltd.
- Dedeke, A. (2016). Travel Web-site Design: Information Task-fit, Service Quality and Purchase Intention. *Tourism Management*, 54, 541-554. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tourman.2016.01.001>
- Enoch, Y., & Grossman, R. (2010). Blogs of Israeli and Danish Backpackers to India. *Annals of Tourism Research*, 7(2), 520-36. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.annals.2009.11.004>
- Ert, E., Fleischer, A., & Magen, N. (2016). Trust and Reputation in the Sharing Economy: The Role of Personal Photos in Airbnb. *Tourism Management*, 55, 62-73. <https://doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.2624181>
- Filieri, R., & McLeay, F. (2014). E-WOM and Accommodation: An Analysis of the Factors That Influence Travelers' Adoption of Information from Online Reviews. *J. Travel Res.*, 53 (1), 44-57. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0047287513481274>
- Fotis, J., Buhalis, D., & Rossides, N. (2012). Social media use and impact during the holiday travel planning process. *Information and Communication Technologies in Tourism*, 13-24. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-7091-1142-0_2
- Gitelson, R. J., & Crompton, J. (1983). The planning horizons and sources of information used by pleasure vacationers. *Journal of Travel Research*, 21(3), 2-7. <https://doi.org/10.1177/004728758302100301>
- Gretzel, U., Fesenmaier, D. R., & O'Leary, J. T. (2006). The transformation of consumer behaviour. En D. Buhalis & C. Costa (Eds.), *Tourism Business Frontiers*. Amsterdam; London: Butterworth Heinemann.
- Harrigan, P., Evers, U., Miles, M., & Daly, T. (2017). Customer Engagement with Tourism Social Media Brands. *Tourism Management*, 59, 597-609. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tourman.2016.09.015>
- Howard, R., Restrepo, L., & Chang, C. (2017). Addressing individual perceptions: An application of the unified theory of acceptance and use of technology to building information modelling. *International Journal of Project Management*, 35, 107-120. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.ijproman.2016.10.012>
- Hsu, M.H., Ju, T.L., Yen, C.H., & Chang, C.M. (2007). Knowledge sharing behavior in virtual communities: The relationship between trust, self-efficacy,

- and outcome expectations. *International Journal Human-Computer Studies*, 65(2), 153-169. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.ijhcs.2006.09.003>
- Jacobsen, J. K. S., & Munar, A. M. (2012). Tourist information search and destination choice in a digital age. *Tourism Management Perspectives*, 1, 39-47 <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tmp.2011.12.005>
- Kamboj, S., & Rahman, Z. (2017). Measuring customer social participation in online travel communities: Scale development and validation. *Journal of Hospitality and Tourism Technology*, 8(3) 432-464. <https://doi.org/10.1108/JHTT-08-2016-0041>
- Kang, M., & Schuett M. (2013). Determinants of Sharing Travel Experiences in Social Media. *J. Travel Tour. Mark.*, 30(1), 107-127. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10548408.2013.751237>
- Kaplan, A., & Haenlein, M. (2010). Users of the world, unite! The challenges and opportunities of social media. *Business Horizons*, 53(1), 59-68. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.bushor.2009.09.003>
- Kavoura, A., & Stavrianea, A. (2015). Following and Belonging to an Online Travel Community in Social Media, its Shared Characteristics and Gender Differences. *Procedia - Soc. Behav. Sci.*, 175, 515-521. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.sbspro.2015.01.1231>
- Kavoura, A., & Borges, M. T. T. (2016). Understanding online communities on social networks via the notion of imagined communities: the case of Tripadvisor. *International Journal of Web Based Communities*, 12(3), 238-261. <https://doi.org/10.1504/IJWBC.2016.077759>
- Kim, W. G., Lee, C., & Hiemstra, S. J. (2004). Effects of an online virtual community on customer loyalty and travel product purchases. *Tourism management*, 25(3), 343-355. [https://doi.org/10.1016/S0261-5177\(03\)00142-0](https://doi.org/10.1016/S0261-5177(03)00142-0)
- Kozinets, R. V. (1999). E-tribalized marketing?: the strategic implications of virtual communities of consumption. *European Management Journal*, 17(3), 252-264, [https://doi.org/10.1016/S0263-2373\(99\)00004-3](https://doi.org/10.1016/S0263-2373(99)00004-3)
- Li, C., & Bernoff, J. (2008). *Groundswell. Winning in a world transformed by social technologies*. 1st ed., Boston, MA, Harvard Business Press.
- Litvin, S. W., & Dowling, K. M. (2017). Tripadvisor and hotel consumer brand loyalty. *Current Issues in Tourism*, 1-5. 10. <https://doi.org/1080/13683500.2016.1265488>
- Litvin, S. W., Goldsmith, R. E., & Pan, B. (2008). Electronic word-of-mouth in hospitality and tourism management. *Tourism Management*, 29(3), 458-468. [https://doi.org/10.1016/0160-7383\(92\)90127-B](https://doi.org/10.1016/0160-7383(92)90127-B)

- McLuhan, M., & Watson, W. (1970). *From Cliché to Archetype with Wilfred Watson*. New York: Pocket Book.
- Mayo, E. J., & Jarvis, L. P. (1981). *The Psychology of Leisure Travel*. Boston: CBI Publishing.
- Mariampolski, H. (2005). *Ethnography for marketers: A guide to consumer immersion*. London: Sage.
- Mansfeld, Y. (1992). From motivation to actual travel. *Annals of Tourism Research*, 19, 399-419. [https://doi.org/10.1016/0160-7383\(92\)90127-B](https://doi.org/10.1016/0160-7383(92)90127-B)
- Mill, R. C., & Morrison, A. M. (2002). *The tourism system* (4th ed.). Dubuque, Iowa: Kendall/Hunt Pub.
- Mohd-Any, A. A., Winklhofer, H., & Ennew, C. (2015). Measuring Users' Value Experience on a Travel Website (e-value): What Value is Co-created by the User? *Journal of Travel Research*, 54(4), 496-51. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0047287514522879>
- Munar, Ana Maria (2010). Digital Exhibitionism: The Age of Exposure. *Culture Unbound*, 2, 401- <https://doi.org/22.10.3384/cu.2000.1525.10223401>
- Muniz, A. M., Jr., & O'Guinn T. C. (2001). Brand Community. *Journal of Consumer Research*, 27(4), 412-432. <https://doi.org/10.1086/319618>
- Olsen, M. D., & Connolly, D. J. (2000). Experience-based Travel. *Cornell Hotel and Restaurant Administration Quarterly*, 41(1), 30-40. <https://doi.org/10.1177/001088040004100121>
- Pantelidis, L. S. (2010). Electronic meal experience: A content analysis of online restaurant comments. *Cornell Hospitality Quarterly*, 51(4), 483-91. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1938965510378574>
- Peyton, T. (2014). Emotion to action?: Deconstructing the ontological politics of the "Like" button. En T. Benski & E Fisher (Eds.), *Internet and Emotions* (pp. 113-129). New York: Routledge.
- Powers, M. J. (1997). *How to program a Virtual Community*. Emeryville, Calif.: Ziff-Davis Press.
- Preece, J. (2000). *Online communities: designing usability, supporting sociability*. New York, John Wiley.
- Prebensen, N. K., Kim, H., & Uysal, M. S. (2016). Co-creation as Moderator Between the Experience Value and Satisfaction Relationship. *Journal of Travel Research*, 5(7), 934-945. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0047287515583359>
- Pudliner, B. A. (2007). Alternative literature and tourist experience: travel and tourist Weblogs. *Journal of Tourism and Cultural Change*, 5(1), 46-59. <https://doi.org/10.2167/jtcc051.0>

- Qualman, E. (2009). *Socialnomics: how social media transforms the way we live and do business*. New Jersey: John Wiley & Sons.
- Rashidi, T.H., Abbasi, A., Maghrebi, M., Hasan, S., & Waller, T.S. (2017). Exploring the capacity of social media data for modelling travel behaviour: Opportunities and challenges. *Transportation Research Part C: Emerging Technologies*, 75, 197-211. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.trc.2016.12.008>
- Reyppens, C., Lievens, A., & Blazevic, V. (2016). Leveraging Value in Multi-stakeholder Innovation Networks: A Process Framework for Value Co-creation and Capture. *Industrial Marketing Management*, 56, 40-50. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.indmarman.2016.03.005>
- Rieder, B. (2013). Studying Facebook via data extraction. En *Proceedings of the 5th Annual ACM Web science conference. WebSci'13*. Paris, May. 2-4, pp. 346-355. <https://doi.org/10.1145/2464464.2464475>
- Rheingold, H. (1991). *Virtual reality*. New York: Summit Books.
- Roque, V. & Raposo, R. (2015). *Social media as a communication and marketing tool in tourism: an analysis of online activities from international key player DMO*. Anatolia. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13032917.2015.1083209>.
- Rosenblatt, B. (1997). *Virtual Communities: The benchmark for success online?* Recuperado de <https://bit.ly/2GuKSIE> (18-05-2006).
- Shneiderman, B. (2015). Building Trusted Social Media Communities: A Research Roadmap for Promoting Credible Content. En *Roles, Trust, and Reputation in Social Media Knowledge Markets*. Springer Cham Heidelberg, New York, Dordrecht, London: Springer International Publishing.
- Scolari, C. (2008). *Hipermediaciones. Elementos para una teoría de la comunicación digital interactiva*. Barcelona: GDISA.
- Shelton, K., & McNeeley, T. (1997). *Virtual communities companion*. Albany: Coriolis Group Books.
- Sirakaya, E., & Woodside, A. G. (2005). Building and testing theories of decision making by travellers. *Tourism Management*, 26(6), 815-832. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tourman.2004.05.004>
- Smith, M. A., & Kollock, P. (1999). *Communities in cyberspace*. London; New York: Routledge.
- Sparks, B. A., & Browning, V. (2011). The impact of online reviews on hotel booking intentions and perception of trust. *Tourism Management*, 32(6), 1310-1323. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tourman.2010.12.011>
- Sotiriadis, M. (2017). Sharing tourism experiences in social media: A literature review and a set of suggested business strategies. *International Journal*

- of *Contemporary Hospitality Management*, 29(1), 179-225, <https://doi.org/10.1108/IJCHM-05-2016-0300>
- Toret, J. *et al.*, (2013). Tecnopolítica: la potencia de las multitudes conectadas. *Catalunya: IN3 Working Paper Series*. Recuperado de <https://goo.gl/VqGK3t>
- Tussyadiah, I. P., & Fesenmaier, D. R. (2008). Marketing places through first-person stories. An analysis of Pennsylvania roadtripper blog. *Journal of Travel & Tourism Marketing* 25, <https://doi.org/10.1080/10548400802508358>
- Urry, J. (1990). *The Tourist Gaze*. London: Sage.
- Vogt, C., & Fesenmaier, D. R. (1998). Expanding the functional information search model. *Annals of Tourism Research*, 25(3), 551-578. [https://doi.org/10.1016/S0160-7383\(98\)00010-3](https://doi.org/10.1016/S0160-7383(98)00010-3)
- Volo, S. (2010). Bloggers' reported tourist experiences: Their utility as a tourism data source and their effect on prospective tourists. *Journal of Vacation Marketing*, 16(4), 297-311. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1356766710380884>
- Wang, Y., Yu, Q., & Fesenmaier, D. R. (2002). Defining the virtual tourist community: implications for tourism marketing. *Tourism Management*, 23(4), 407-417. [https://doi.org/10.1016/S0261-5177\(01\)00093-0](https://doi.org/10.1016/S0261-5177(01)00093-0)
- Wang, Y., & Fesenmaier, D. R. (2004a). Modeling participation in an online travel community. *Journal of Travel Research*, 42(3), 261-270. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0047287503258824>
- _____ (2004b). Towards understanding members' general participation in and active contribution to an online travel community. *Tourism Management*, 25(6), 709-722. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tourman.2003.09.011>
- Wang, D., Fesenmaier, D. R., Werthner, H., & Wöber, K. (2010). The journal of information technology & tourism: A content analysis of the past 10 years. *Information Technology & Tourism*, 12, 3-16.: <https://doi.org/10.3727/109830510X12747489979547>
- Werthner, H., & Ricci, F. (2004). E-commerce and tourism. *Commun. ACM*. 47, 101-105. <https://doi.org/10.1145/1035134.1035141>.
- Woodside, K. (1990). An approach to studying local government autonomy: The Ontario experience. *Canadian, Public Administration*, 33, 198-213. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1754-7121.1990.tb01393.x>
- Xiang, Z., Du, Q., Ma, Y., & Fan, W. (2017). A comparative analysis of major online review platforms: Implications for social media analytics in hospitality and tourism. *Tourism Management*, 58, 51-65. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tourman.2016.10.001>

Yu, Z., Xu, H., Yang, Z., & Guo, B. (2016). Personalized travel package with multi-point-of-interest recommendation based on crowdsourced user footprints. *IEEE Transactions on Human-Machine Systems*, 46(1), 151-158, <https://doi.org/10.1109/THMS.2015.2446953>

Date of receipt: 2018/11/20; Date of acceptance: 2019-02-18;

Publication date: 2019/03/01