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## Title page

### **An Instagram Content Analysis for City Branding in London and Florence**

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## **An Instagram Content Analysis for City Branding in London and Florence**

### **Abstract**

This paper aims to understand how User Generated Contents (UGC) affect the process of place branding, identifying the main associations of various actors related to London and Florence, both traditionally linked to the fashion industry. In particular, this study focuses on fashion as a city image component that contributes to the construction of the image of London and Florence. This research applies a content analysis of visual information (pictures) and textual information (hashtags) available on social networks (i.e. Instagram), typing the hashtags #London and #Florence, to reconstruct the brand image of these two cities. As the recent literature has argued for brands or products, even for places and cities, it is important to monitor the perceived city brand image resulting from the overall online experience, especially on social media. This paper is one of the first to apply content analysis on Instagram in relation to city branding, where the core of communication is based on images. Therefore, in contrast to previous studies, this work principally focuses on visual communication, as a form of textual paralinguistic communication, for the construction of a city image for London and Florence.

**Keywords:** city branding, city image, brand associations, Instagram, fashion

#### **Extended abstract**

The purpose of this study is to understand how User Generated Contents (UGC) affect the process of place branding of two important fashion cities, namely London and Florence. In doing so, firstly we investigate the relationship between the fashion association and the overall image of these two cities. Secondly, we compare fashion to the other predominant categories of associations composing city brand images. Finally, we identify the role of different types of users in the development of cities' brand images. The study moves from the relevant discussion surrounding brand image, to the diffusion of social media into users' daily life and the empirical evidence of the influence of electronic word of mouth on users' perception and decision-making. We strongly believe in the originality of this study, given that it is one of the first to apply content analysis on Instagram in relation to city branding, in contrast to previous studies (i.e. Andéhn et al., 2014).

This research applies a content analysis of visual information (pictures) and textual information (hashtags) available on social networks (i.e. Instagram), typing the hashtags #London

and #Florence, to reconstruct the brand image of these two cities. We identified a group of four researchers and one coordinator who could retrieve 1,200 pictures (600 for each city) and classify them according to the analysis protocol previously discussed within the group of researchers. The classification of pictures was based on 10 categories, identified within the literature on place branding (i.e. Choi et al., 2007). With regard to the users' identity, posts were classified in terms of consumers, brands and institutions. This associative analysis is useful for discovering how cities are perceived by different stakeholders (i.e. Netzer et al., 2012). Regarding the content analysis on textual information, we ran a word frequency query on hashtags with NVivo in order to list the 50 most recurrent hashtags both from the entire data set and for each category previously mentioned. The 50 most frequent hashtags were selected and coded into quantified data (frequency rate) in SPSS for more quantitative measures such as correspondence analysis. London reveals an appropriate coverage of the categories people and local residents (22.08%), scenic view of the city (13.65%) and historic buildings and heritage (12.07%), confirming itself as an important touristic destination. Florence emphasizes even more its attraction as a touristic destination, given that the majority of pictures relate to historic buildings and heritage (28.65%), and scenic view of the city (24.54%). Fashion represents a more relevant association than the others, since it represents about 10% of the total amount of contents shared through Instagram in both cities.

The authors then developed a cross tabulation in order to discover relationships among categories. For London, fashion has a consistent distribution across all categories. However, it presents a higher relationship with locals, which might be justified by the tendency of people to take pictures to exhibit their fashion items like models. For Florence, fashion is largely related to cultural events and locals, given that the majority of fashion-related pictures refer to the Pitti Immagine event, the most important fashion event in Florence. Data reflect the predominant role

of consumers in the fashion city branding process. After the development of a word frequency list on hashtags related to the overall data set for each city and for each category, we ran a correspondence analysis on frequency rates in order to identify a visual representation of keywords useful to reflect on insights and eventually reinforce the results of visual analysis. Correspondence analysis provides graphical information about the relative proximities of the frequently used hashtags and the ten categories. In both cases, we identified two dimensions, which divide the ten categories into fashion and touristic offer (Dimension 1) and local life and touristic life (Dimension 2). Given the importance of the management of the city branding process, this study provides an innovative methodological approach to reconstructing a city brand image. The main limitations originate from the use of a single social medium that allows us to consider only some of the overall number of associations spreading online.

## **1. Introduction**

Like the merchant city-states of Renaissance Italy, cities are today drivers of trade and industry in a globalized world (Gilboa et al., 2015). The growing competition among cities is the result of globalization, thus many urban areas develop place branding strategies to build strong competitive identities (Deffner & Liouris, 2005). Given the importance of the city branding management enhanced by both practitioners and academia (Green, Grace & Perkins, 2016), this study leverages an innovative methodological approach for identifying and interpreting a city brand image, through the analysis of social media contents. City branding, as a subfield of place branding, finds its theoretical roots in the branding principles that traditional brand management developed for products (Yoo, Donthu, & Lee, 2000). In general, image is the mental picture that people hold about an object. Understanding these mental pictures is important because people's attitudes and actions toward the object (in this case a city) are highly conditioned by that object's image (Kotler,

1997). Literature has tried to understand what the components of mental pictures are, and in some cases to identify the sources of associations, such as the relevance of fashion, in influencing the representation of a city's image (Gilboa et al., 2015). Recently, the discussion surrounding city branding has focused on the importance of social media in the process of representing images of cities. User Generated Content (UGC) have become one of the primary forms of communication capable of influencing customers' perceptions on products and brands, thereby shaping brand image, through brand associations. The mere fact that users create contents through social media platforms makes the monitoring of brand images possible (Culotta, 2016).

Accordingly, the purpose of this research is to understand how UGC affect the process of place branding, identifying the main associations of various actors related to London and Florence, both traditionally linked to the fashion industry. The fashion industry is extremely important for the economy of London and Florence as well. These cities represent excellence globally, in terms of both production and export. As ranked by *Vogue* magazine (Vogue, 2015), Florence has become the world's fifth fashion capital after New York, London, Milan and Paris. Many factors make London and Florence reference points for fashion. Firstly, famous fashion firms were born in London and Florence, which are home to global brands such as the English Stella McCartney and the Italian Gucci (Capone & Lazzeretti, 2016); other top fashion boutiques are concentrated in the luxury shopping districts in the historical city centers. Secondly, every year these two cities host a series of fashion events that are among the most prestigious on the international scene, such as London Fashion Week and Pitti Immagine (Entwistle & Rocamora, 2006). As underlined in the London Economic Plan (2017), somewhere around half of the specialist fashion design jobs in the United Kingdom are located in and around the city of London and around 46,400 people are currently employed by the fashion industry in London in some way or another. Florence is the

heart of the leather district and it boasts many fashion museums, like the Galleria del Costume, the Capucci museum, the Gucci museum and the Ferragamo museum. Florence is also the location of important fashion institutes such as Polimoda, ranked by the Business of Fashion Global Fashion School Rankings as the best fashion institute in Italy (2016). The competitiveness of London and Florence is due to investment in innovation, product research and development, the tradition of production, know-how and synergistic collaboration between the various actors of the supply chain up to retail integration. Moreover, the fashion tourism and fashion shopping areas contribute greatly to adding value to the fashion industry, improving the visibility of London and Florence as fashion cities.

This paper focuses on fashion as a component of city image that contributes to building the overall images of London and Florence. Indeed, fashion is not only the ephemeral world of the catwalk, but also an important industry capable of affecting the urban, social and economic development of cities globally. Measuring and improving the fashion image of cities is a useful way of attracting tourists, consumers, events and investors. From this perspective, the paper proposes to answer the following research questions:

RQ1: How does social media contribute to the configuration of the image of traditional fashion cities?

RQ2: Does the fashion aspect emerge as the main fashion city image association on social media?

RQ3: How do fashion associations relate to other association categories of city branding?

RQ4: What are the roles of consumers, brands and institutions in the fashion city branding process on social media?

## **2. Literature Review**

### ***2.1. City Branding***

In recent years, cities have been searching for new ways to promote themselves. Due to fast changes in technology and the continuous shift from a local to a globalized environment, cities are forced to compete with each other in order to be an attractive destination and workplace, a culturally rich place and much more (Kotler & Gertner, 2002). In order to survive this global competition, many cities strengthen their branding strategy with a view to reinforcing their identities (Deffner & Liouris, 2005). The goal of place branding strategies is to build a symbolic, comprehensive image of a city and subsequently communicate this image both locally and internationally. Place branding literature includes studies of various entities such as cities, districts, regions, countries and groups of countries (Költringer & Dickinger, 2015; Oguztimur, S., & Akturan, U. (2016). City branding constitutes a subfield of place branding and emphasizes the branding of cities to residents (and potential residents) as a place to live, to businesses as a place to invest and to tourists as a place to visit (Merrilees, Miller, & Herington, 2009). Recalling the idea of Ruzzier and de Chernatony (2013), it is possible to extend the idea of branding products to places for several reasons. Firstly, city branding can be assimilated to product branding because in both cases, the brand represents the identity of a specific product or place. Secondly, both places and products need to be recognized and perceived in the minds of customers because of their differentiating features compared to those of competitors (Capone & Lazzeretti, 2016). However, place branding presents some peculiarities. Firstly, place brand managers have little control over the process because diverse public and private organizations participate in and influence the process. Secondly, different people might have different expectations given that laws, rather than consumers, define place boundaries (Ruzzier & de Chernatony, 2013). As a consequence, one of the biggest challenges with place brands stems from the large number of influential stakeholders (Konecnik & Go, 2008



## ***2.2.City Branding: Brand Identity and Brand Image***

Cities can use branding as a way to unite their stakeholders around a new competitive identity and to communicate their message to target audiences (Gilboa et al., 2015). Indeed, city identity – which comprises the way a city is experienced by its various stakeholders (residents, tourists and business people) – may be different from its image as perceived by its audiences. Klage (1991) defines city identity similarly to corporate identity, as “the sum of its characteristic features and activities which differentiate it from other entities” (Klage, 1991, p. 27). Other authors describe city brand identity as a supply side perspective of city branding that eventually influences the demand side perspective, that is to say, the city image (Merrilees, Miller, & Herington 2009). Consequently, image is the projection of the city’s identity in the minds of recipients (Kapferer, 1992). In general, image is the mental picture that people hold about an object. Identifying these mental pictures is important because people’s attitudes and actions toward the object (in this case a city) are highly conditioned by that object image (Kotler, 1997). Baloglu and McCleary (1999) define place image as a set of values, ideas and perceptions that people have of a place or destination and these elements may be built on facts, inferences or stereotypes that depend upon the individual’s personal familiarity with the place. Literature has tried to understand what the components of mental pictures are; according to Gilboa et al. (2015), some associations are common to the majority of city branding, such as culture, entertainment, infrastructure, shopping centers, safety, sports facilities and services. In particular, some of the literature has focused on the relevance of fashion in influencing the representation of a city image. Back in the 1990s, literature underlined how fashion cities played an important role in strategic transnational networks (Sassen, 1991), hosting the corporate headquarters of the largest international fashion goods and fashion conglomerates, which contribute to regional development. Moreover, fashion cities

influence consumption processes, which in turn affect tourism practices qualitatively and quantitatively (Skivko, 2016). City tourism is connected to city branding, through which a city's image is aimed at attracting visitors and consumers (Lazzeretti et al., 2017). As suggested by Jansson and Power (2010, p. 892), "positive connections between product images and place may create a kind of monopoly rent and therein can create entry barriers for products from competing places and give firms an incentive for being in the right place." In this way, fashion helps to build a certain identity for its followers through its trending and branding (Donvito et al., 2013).

### ***2.3. User Generated Contents (UGC)***

Given the relevance of social media platforms in everyday users' lives, UGC have come to represent one of the richest and most diverse sources of online information (Költringer & Dickinger, 2015). UGC include online information sources that are conceived transmitted and used by consumers who intend to communicate with each other and share information about products, brands or services (Alcázar, Pinero, & de Maya, 2014). According to Deloitte (2014), individuals are now actively looking for inspiration by exploring other consumers' experiences, rather than expecting brands or more institutional sources to inspire them through traditional advertising (81% of consumers read customer reviews and ratings, while 57% read online forums). Moreover, UGC can affect brand image, and more broadly brand knowledge (Keller, 1998), through brand image associations (Fitchett, 2005), influencing brand perceptions (Zhang & Sarvary, 2014). As with products or brands, even cities manifest themselves on social media as "user generated" and become the result of how consumers, or users, project them on various social media platforms (Andéhn et al., 2014). Since UGC represent a reliable source of information, they can help users (i.e. travelers, investors, potential residents) to form the image of a destination. Given the relevance of UGC to the city branding process and to the formation of a city brand image capable of affecting

individuals' perceptions and behaviors, this paper proposes a new methodology that integrates visual and textual online communications to monitor the city branding process development on Instagram. To date, studies on online city branding have mainly focused on textual communications analyzing Facebook or Twitter posts (e.g. Andéhn et al., 2014; Smith, Fischer & Yongjian, 2012). This paper seeks to go a step further by integrating textual and visual communication for the analysis of the emerging images of two renowned fashion cities (i.e. London and Florence). Indeed, visual communication as a form of textual paralanguage communication (Luangrath, Peck, & Barger, 2016) has been understudied to date and needs further investigation in relation to the city branding process. Moreover, this paper, in contrast to previous studies (e.g. Andéhn et al., 2014; Choi et al., 2007), carries out its analysis on Instagram, which is an underinvestigated social network, despite its growing relevance. Accordingly, the following paragraphs will provide an in-depth description of the methodology applied, followed by a discussion of the main results achieved from both cities and both analyses. Finally, the managerial implications and research limitations will be included in the discussion and conclusions paragraphs.

### **3. Research Methods**

#### ***3.1. Context of Analysis***

Given the purpose of this study, the authors decided to focus on Instagram as one of the most popular UGC platforms. In particular, the authors believe that Instagram has many strengths. Firstly, it is one of the most widely used forms of social media across the world. Currently Instagram has more than 700 million active users (Statista, 2017) and over 60% of them log in daily, making it the second-most used social network after Facebook (Brandwatch, 2016). The total number of photos shared has reached 40 billion and there are reported to be, on average, 3.5

billion daily “likes,” with approximately 80 million daily photo updates (Brandwatch, 2016). Given these facts more marketers are now using Instagram; according to 2016 Instagram survey the 45% of managers consider Instagram as part of their social media strategy. Moreover, Instagram de-emphasizes textual description and replies in favor of images (Marwick, 2015), thereby differentiating it from other social networks. Furthermore, visual impressions are able to influence mid- and long-term human behavior (Bergkvist, Eiderbäck, & Palombo, 2012), but visual communication as part of the textual paralanguage communication is understudied (Luangrath, Peck, & Barger2016). Generally, an in-depth analysis of social network contents is useful for identifying social, cultural and environmental issues concerning people’s activities (Ellison, 2007; Sheldon, 2017). In this sense, as has happened with previous social network sites, the analysis of Instagram photos leads to the identification of topics that feature cities as well as products, brands or people (Lee et al., 2015). Moreover, an image is worth a thousand words (in contrast, for example, Twitter and Facebook are mainly text-based communication platforms), given that images usually lend more credibility, which text can lack. Looking at more recent social network sites such as Snapchat, the comparison is overwhelming. In 2016, Instagram totally eclipsed Snapchat in terms of daily users, given that more people use the Instagram Stories function (the new Instagram feature that has the same name, look and premise as Snapchat’s main feature) than the entirety of the Snapchat app (Business Insider, 2017). Additionally, the structure of Instagram posts enhances the connections with other users, by including the name of other users in the form of “mentions” or by using specific tags called “hashtags” (words starting with a “#” character), which are useful for denoting topics and for making posts more easily accessible to the public (Small, 2011).

### ***3.2. Process of Analysis***

This research collects all posts related to the hashtags #London and #Florence published on Instagram during two different days, corresponding to three different time slots (9–10 a.m., 2–3 p.m., 9–10 p.m.). A total of 1,200 pictures (600 for each city) were downloaded with the software 4K Stogram. With the purpose of investigating the main associations related to London and Florence, the authors carried out a content analysis on visual (Instagram pictures) and textual (hashtags related to the pictures) information. Accordingly, an analysis protocol was developed. It included for each picture the collection of various elements, namely the date and the time slot of the download, the url – useful for tracking the picture whenever the authors want – the comments, the hashtags, the user’s identity and the classification of visual contents in terms of different categories of associations. In particular, 10 categories were considered for the classification of visual contents, based on previous literature on place branding. We adopted the 10 categories proposed by Choi et al. (2007), namely: Historic buildings and heritage (ancient palaces, monuments, works of art); Cultural events (traditional events); Parks and gardens (natural landscapes); Fashion (clothes, accessories, shopping centers); Tourism facilities and infrastructure (hotels, museums, touristic attractions); Entertainment (concerts, parties); Scenic view (bird’s eye); Local cuisine and dining (food, drinks, restaurants, grocery stores); Recreation and sport (matches, stadiums, sporting activities); and People and local residents (locals, everyday life). Furthermore, the authors added two more categories to the 10 categories of Choi et al. in order to identify pictures not related to previous categories (Others1) and pictures not related to the city under analysis (Others2). Each picture was assigned to a maximum of three categories depending on its content, allowing researchers to identify connections between them. The authors decided to classify pictures, linking them to a maximum of three categories because they wanted to consider the main aspects of the city that represented by users; indeed, the aim of this classification is to

identify which dimensions of London and Florence mostly emerge from the images and to understand users' associations with these cities. Posts were also classified in terms of users' identity (consumers, brands, institutions). This associative analysis is useful for discovering how cities are perceived by different stakeholders (Netzer et al., 2012). In order to ensure the internal validity of the coding process, four researchers carried out the content analysis separately (Weber, 1990); subsequently, the results were compared, leading to an inter-rater reliability (Cohen, 1960), measured with Cohen's kappa coefficient (0.8).

With regard to the analysis of textual information, a content analysis on post titles (the text that goes with each picture) was run with the software NVivo. In particular, a word frequency analysis was carried out on hashtags, given that they should represent the auto-categorization directly performed by individuals who post the image. Then, the 50 most frequent words of the entire data set and for each category were selected and coded into quantified data (frequency rate) in SPSS for more quantitative measures such as correspondence analysis (Choi et al., 2007).

## **4. Results**

### ***4.1. Analysis of Visual Information***

#### *London*

The 600 pictures related to #London were coded according to the classification explained in the methodology part. The majority of pictures are related to local people and tourists (22.08%), scenic view of the city (13.64%) and historic buildings and heritage (12.07%), confirming London as an important touristic destination. The weight of fashion association on the overall amount of associations is remarkable, since it results in the first five main associations (10.40%). Consequently, the link between the fashion industry and London is grounded. The Chi-square test confirms a significant difference across categories in representing London's image ( $\chi^2 = 290.627$ ;

$p < 0.001$ ), whereas it shows a nonsignificant difference across different time slots in terms of contents (categories) posted. In terms of the users' identity, the majority of posts published belong to individuals (87.6%), whilst the rest principally belong to brands (12.42%). Although the diverse weight of posts of brands and individuals does not allow any rigorous statistical analysis to be conducted, the authors ran a Chi-square test ( $\chi^2 = 205.555$ ;  $p < 0.001$ ) in order to obtain insights into the terms of contents published by brands and those published by individuals (the percentage of contents published by institutions is not significant). The significance of the test indicates a difference in the category of contents shared by the two types of users. Indeed, the majority of brands' contents were classified in the fashion category (43%), since the largest proportion of brands relates to the fashion industry. Although the category Others2 was useful for filtering results to run the analysis only on London-related posts, it gave interesting insights. Indeed, in this case, this category mainly relates to pictures published by fashion models or aspiring fashion models who try to get more visualizations and followers by using hashtags related to global capital, such as #London, #NewYork, #Milan, #Paris, #LosAngeles, #Miami and #Tokyo. The majority of these cities are strictly related to the fashion industry, since London, New York, Milan and Paris are also renowned locations of Fashion Week events. This phenomenon provides important evidence: London's image is strictly related to the fashion industry because of the acknowledgements expressed by the global society.

With the purpose of identifying relationships among categories, particularly between fashion categories and the others, the authors developed a cross-tabulation (Table 1) on the first two classification columns (the third classification column has few values assigned).

PLACE TABLE 1 ABOUT HERE

As shown in Table 1, fashion has a consistent distribution across all categories. Indeed, there is a slight relationship with categories related to historic buildings and heritage, cultural events, parks and gardens, tourism facilities and infrastructures, scenic view, and cuisine and dining, whereas there is a higher relationship with locals, which can be justified by the variety of pictures showing local people who exhibit their own fashion items. This phenomenon inevitably reinforces the association between London and the fashion industry, stabilizing its role as a fashion capital.

### *Florence*

In order to analyze #Florence posts, 600 pictures were retrieved and coded according to the classification explained in the methodology part. The majority of pictures are related to historic buildings and heritage (28.65%) and scenic view of the city (24.54%), whilst there are few images related to recreation activities and sport (0.9%), and parks and gardens (2.85%). Fashion is well represented since clothes, accessories and shopping centers appear in one in every ten pictures. A Chi-square test confirms a significant difference across categories in representing Florence's image ( $\chi^2 = 741.352$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ). Moreover, the Chi-square test shows a nonsignificant difference across different time slots in terms of contents (categories) posted. In order to investigate how the fashion association relates to other categories of city branding considered in the analysis, the authors developed a cross-tabulation (Table 2). In this case, however, given that the majority of pictures were assigned to two categories only, the cross-tabulation does not take into consideration the third one.

PLACE TABLE 2 ABOUT HERE

As indicated in Table 2, fashion is largely related to cultural events and locals. This phenomenon can be interpreted by recalling Jansson and Power's (2010) idea that cool clothes come from cool places. Indeed, the link between fashion and local traditional life might enhance



the value of cities as well as that of brands. The tendency to show the daily outfit surely contributes to increasing the presence of fashion pictures on social networks, improving the fashion association of city image; in this sense, people really participate in creating a fashion city image. As regards the roles of consumers, brands and institutions in the fashion city branding process, data indicate that there are very few pictures posted by institutions and around 10% posted by brands. The majority of brands belong to the fashion industry and a minor percentage to food and beverage.

#### ***4.2. Analysis of Textual Information***

##### *London*

The authors developed a word frequency list on hashtags related to London identifying the 50 most frequent words related to #London's entire data set and to each category (Table 3).

PLACE TABLE 3 ABOUT HERE

Table 3 gives an idea of how the authors proceeded to obtain insights from the content analysis of textual information. In this case, only hashtags have been analyzed, given their importance in categorizing contents by users. Indeed, users use hashtags to denote topics on Instagram, thereby improving the visualizations of their posts categorized by topics. The results indicate that #uk, #love and #travel are the most frequent hashtags, suggesting that London is one of the major touristic destinations. Although the presence of #paris in the most recurrent words might appear weird, the authors interpret this phenomenon as a consequence of many users' attempt to obtain more visualizations and followers by adding hashtags related to the most important fashion cities (i.e. Paris) to their pictures. #paris is also present in the fashion category as the third-most frequent word. This interpretation is also confirmed by the presence of #fashion as one of the most recurrent words of the database, suggesting that London is one of the most renowned fashion cities. In the

fashion category, Paris is not the only fashion city that appears, given the presence of other fashion cities such as New York, Milan, Los Angeles, Miami and Tokyo. In order to provide a visual representation of the attributes of city brands, correspondence analysis can be used to reduce the multidimensional frequency data into a two-dimensional map. Indeed, correspondence analysis is often used by academia to explore the relationships between (city) brands and attributes (Whitlark & Smith, 2001). In this research, a correspondence map was used to analyze the associations of the projected images on social media by repeated word representation and the different categories. As explained by the proportion of inertia results (Table 4), two dimensions may not be sufficient to describe all of the relationships between variables. However, by achieving a clear interpretation of axes it is possible to overcome this limitation (Whitlark & Smith, 2001).

PLACE TABLE 4 ABOUT HERE

PLACE FIGURE 1 ABOUT HERE

Figure 1 provides graphical information about the relative proximities of the frequently used hashtags and the ten categories (clusters). On the graph, the horizontal axes (Dimension 1) accounted for 40.2% and the vertical axes (Dimension 2) for 18.7%. Accordingly, the association between the frequent words and each category was mostly explained in Dimensions 1 and 2 (58.9%). Given that the inertia accounted by Dimension 1 is very high, it is easier to provide an interpretation for this dimension than for Dimension 2. Indeed, Dimension 1 divides the ten categories into fashion (right side) and (on the left side) all the elements that include different facets of the milieu (Donvito et al., 2013). The “milieu” has been defined as “the ‘sedimentation’ of specific and interrelated historical, social and cultural factors in local areas which generate significantly different processes of development directly due to local specifications” (Garofoli, 1993, p. 24). Indeed, on the right side of the graph is the fashion category with the recurrent

hashtags related to the fashion category (e.g. #luxury, #style, #model). On the other side, the categories are very close to each other in qualifying the main elements of the milieu (e.g. #bigben, #londonlife, #architecture). Dimension 2 includes a set of very concentrated elements that are difficult to interpret, according to the low inertia accounted by the correspondence analysis. However, they seem to qualify the experiential value offered by the city (Snell, Gibbs, & Varey, 1995), which can be distinguished into elements related to self-determined experiences (lower side) and elements related to the public sphere of the experience (higher side).

### *Florence*

A word frequency list on hashtags related to Florence was developed to identify the 50 most frequent words related to #Florence's entire data set and to each category (Table 5).

PLACE TABLE 5 ABOUT HERE

#italy and #italia are the most frequent hashtags that recur, reinforcing the strong link with the Italian and Tuscan culture. #travel, which is included in many posts, confirms that Florence is one of the major touristic destinations. The image of Florence as a fashion city is strongly linked to Pitti Uomo (which is the most frequent hashtag related to the fashion category), which represents one of the most important fashion events in the city of Florence, attracting thousands of people every year (Aiello et al., 2016; Kim, Shimizu, & Donvito, 2016). Even in this case, in order to provide a visual representation of the attribute of city brands, correspondence analysis was applied to reduce the multidimensional frequency data into a two-dimensional map (Table 6).

PLACE TABLE 6 ABOUT HERE

PLACE FIGURE 2 ABOUT HERE

In Figure 2 it is possible to observe the relative proximities of the most frequently used hashtags and the ten categories (clusters). On the graph, the horizontal axes (Dimension 1) accounted for

38% and the vertical axes (Dimension 2) for 19%. Accordingly, the two dimensions explained 57.4% of the association between the frequent words and each category, but even in the case of Florence, Dimension 1 offers an easier interpretation, given the higher inertia accounted. Similarly to London, Dimension 1 divides the ten categories into fashion (left side) and all the elements that include different facets offered by the milieu (right side). Indeed, on the left side of the graph is the fashion category with the most recurrent hashtags related to the fashion category (e.g. #fashiondesigner, #pittiuomo, #menswear). On the other side, the categories are very close to each other, qualifying the main elements of the sociocultural and historical environment (e.g. #art, #church, #instatravel). The co-creation activities of specific communities of locals in improving the touristic offer is displayed by pictures signed with the hashtags #ig, #igers, #igersfirenze and #igerstoscana. These hashtags mostly relate to pictures of beautiful places located in Florence or near Florence with the aim of enhancing their attractiveness. Even in Florence's case, the elements qualified by Dimension 2 are very close to each other and identify the experiential value offered by the city. Indeed, on the higher side, elements are linked to self-determined experiences, whereas on the lower side, they are related to the public sphere of the experience (Snell et al., 1995).

## **Discussion**

With reference to the empirical results presented above, the answers to the research questions are now considered and discussed.

With regard to RQ1 (“How does social media contribute to the configuration of the image of traditional fashion cities?”), the authors discovered that social media deals strongly with contents related to fashion cities. The 1,200 posts considered in this study are indeed self-evidence of how “cool” places and locations – such as fashion cities – are the perfect background and the setting for users’ plots. Like movie directors or painters, users depict facets and traits of the cities, creating

visual and textual information that they directly post on social media. In this sense, the study confirms how social media users contribute to the construction of traditional fashion city images. Even if with a different impact level (not analyzed in the current research), these UGC play a role in affecting brand image, and brand knowledge (Keller, 1998). Furthermore, they reinforce existing city brand image associations or promote new ones (Fitchett, 2005), with a direct influence on brand perceptions (Zhang & Sarvary, 2014).

As regards RQ2 (“Does the fashion aspect emerge as the main fashion city image association on social media?”), the authors, adopting the categories proposed by Choi et al. (2007), discovered the composite nature of the image of London and Florence, which are indeed fashion capitals, but not only this. Both cities have a long and dense history that probably determines the specific relevance of the categories “historic buildings and heritage” and “scenic view of the cities.” So even if fashion is an essential part of London and Florence, it is not first in the category rank. More specifically, the analysis of visual information displays a significant weight of the fashion category, compared to the other categories, representing about 10% of the total amount of contents shared through Instagram both for London and Florence. This has also been confirmed by the textual analysis that shows words related to fashion in the top 50 most recurrent words. Moreover, the visual representation of correspondence analysis developed for London and Florence presents the fashion category and its related associations as a very distinctive area of the graph. These empirical results appear to be in line with Skivko’s (2016) perspective, i.e. that fashion creates and influences city branding, strongly affecting both city identity and image.

In terms of the relationship between fashion and other categories (“RQ3: How do fashion associations relate to other association categories of city branding?”), the analysis confirms fashion as an integrated category. The majority of pictures classified as fashion-related present recurrent

links with cultural events and locals, as shown by the cross-tabulations developed among classification categories. This phenomenon may be justified by the tendency of users to post and exhibit their daily outfits and clothes like models (McQuarry, Miller, & Phillips, 2013). An important point to stress in considering the relationship between fashion and other categories is provided by the correspondence analysis carried out for both cities: the distance between fashion-related items and other categories is very large compared to the other distances. This insight confirms the importance of analyzing city representations not in an isolated way, but as a part of a dense network of associations depending on stakeholders' perceptions (Virgo & de Chernatony, 2006).

Finally, in order to give an answer to the last goal of this study (RQ4: "What are the roles of consumers, brands and institutions in the fashion city branding process in social media?"), the authors believe that given the great amount of posts belonging to consumers, they represent the main contributor to the city image development on social media. This empirical result confirms how social media has empowered individuals, enabling users to actively respond, participate and create content and messages (Kim & Ko, 2010; Andéhn et al., 2014). Therefore, as theorized by Andéhn et al. (2014), even cities are increasingly manifesting themselves on social media as "user generated" becoming the result of consumers' perception and representation.

Although specific thoughts have been formulated in order to answer the four research questions, this study presents some limitations. Here below the authors highlight the main ones and the future research path coming directly from these limitations.

Firstly, the paper adopts a static perspective to analyze city brand images. Visual and textual contents have been interpreted and accounted (prevalently in a descriptive way) in a limited time

frame. Future analysis may consider a longer period of analysis in order to compare results and to draw a dynamic interpretation of the UGC related to fashion cities.

Secondly, the research is concentrated on discovering the “building blocks” of fashion city images, but it does not deal with the potential image impact on users’ behaviors. It may be very interesting to analyze and discover eventual associations between city image factors and user behaviors such as feedback activation, city visiting, the decision to become a resident of the city, the decision to invest in the city, etc.)

Thirdly, the paper explores only a single analysis context, i.e. Instagram. Therefore, given the importance of UGC in shaping city brand image, future research should integrate simultaneously different social networks in assessing the city brand associations in order to monitor the overall city brand image in the online context. Indeed, by integrating different social networks, such as Facebook, Twitter or LinkedIn, the role of brands in communication on social media may be further analyzed. Furthermore, the use of multiple analysis contexts helps to overcome the bias related to the use of different social networks depending on population age.

## **5. Conclusion**

Given the importance of the development and management of the city branding process, this study provides an innovative methodological approach to reconstructing a city brand image. Indeed, the participation of different stakeholders in the city branding process makes it difficult to control it. In particular, this holds for the huge number of actors that the fashion industry involves: consumers, travelers, brands, events, stores and so on.

In terms of *academic contribution*, this paper empirically explores and discovers the relevance of social media platforms and UGC in the process of place branding. Relying on the results gathered for the very first time with reference to two world fashion capital cities (London and

Florence), it has been possible to find out how place brands – here conceptualized according to Zenker and Braun (2010) “as a network of associations in the consumers’ mind based on the visual, verbal, and behavioral expression of a place” – are now largely shaped and co-created through the lens of UGC. Place brands, especially those related to iconic cities with a dense production of UGC, are now fully crossed by this process. The findings confirm that, even in this field, social media contributes to and accelerates place brand identity and brand image formation, facilitating and enabling stakeholders who constitute and live the brand in expressing their mental picture of a specific place. Still in terms of academic contribution, this paper applies a methodology that jointly combines visual and textual online communications in order to detect the city branding image. Previous studies have mainly concentrated their attention on textual elements analyzing Facebook or Twitter posts (Andéhn et al., 2014). Simultaneously, visual communication as a form of textual paralinguage (Luangrath, Peck & Barger, 2016) has been understudied and requires deeper investigation into the perception formation process, which is also due to social media platform configurations where images and video are becoming more and more relevant in the communication process. This research is one of the first to apply a content analysis on Instagram contents related to cities in order to show the importance of social media and UGC in the development of a city brand image. Indeed, the analysis shows how recurring are associations related to places or cities that arise from UGC in the form of images or in the form of textual information. The relevance of studying UGC stems from their capacity to influence other customers’ decision-making process, given that social media content is very often perceived to be more trustworthy than other sources of communication. As regards the main association categories related to traditional fashion cities, both are strongly related to the traditional imagery of touristic destinations where cultural heritage plays the most important role. However, users generate



contents related to fashion linking their posts to fashion items, fashion events, fashion style, fashion bloggers and other fashion cities. Moreover, fashion association refers to other association categories, especially those that configure the main image of the cities, thereby contributing to reinforcing the cultural heritage of the cities through fashion. This research, differently from previous studies on city branding, fosters the importance of different stakeholders in the production of a city brand image, conferring the major role to consumers for the production of contents on Instagram. Finally, this study produces several *managerial implications*, for at least three main categories of decision-makers: local government authorities, fashion brand managers, individuals. Local Government Authorities (LGAs) and/or city managers could activate or reinforce their social media monitoring tools, adopting the methods proposed herein; hence, we strongly recommend that LGAs should strategically include social media in their research data collection and analysis, given its importance in city image building. As the potential of social media is double-edged, it is crucial for LGAs to interact and co-create with users, taking advantage of their innovation and brand-building capabilities (Andéhn et al., 2014). Fashion brand managers may consider the results of this study for developing a more active presence on social media (which, according to our empirical results, is quite low), with a view to reinforcing the linkage between their brands and “cool” places. Practitioners could consider what Jansson and Power (2010) report regarding positive connections between product-brand images and place: they may create a sort of monopoly and entry barriers giving the firms an incentive to be in the right place at the right time. Finally, individuals (tourists, citizens, businesspeople) may take advantage of this research, particularly those who are interested in interpreting city images in order to take more aware decisions to become (or confirm being) visitors, citizens, investors in a specific fashion city.

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