

# WHAT CONTENT TO POST? EVALUATING THE EFFECTIVENESS OF **FACEBOOK** COMMUNICATIONS IN DESTINATIONS

**Abstract:** This study analyzes the marketing effectiveness of social media posts of DMOs based on message format and content and the moderator effect of its message appeal in order to understand the users' responses to destinations' social media posts. This paper also discusses the most appropriate social media message strategy for Facebook campaigns for DMOs. The methodology is based on the content analysis of a sample of 3,303 Facebook posts from twelve English and Spanish heritage city destinations. A Poisson regression was used to test the marketing effectiveness of the posts based on the number of Facebook reactions and message characteristics. Considering the particularities of each country, the results provide insights for DMOs for their social media message strategies. The results show that emotional messages tend to be more effective than informational messages in many cases, and **several recommendations** for Facebook usage **are** developed for the management of destinations through social media.

**Keywords:** Facebook; social media; message strategy; message format; message content; message appeal; marketing effectiveness; DMOs.

## **1. Introduction**

Technology has completely changed people's lives and the business world providing strategic and tactical tools for companies to improve their efficiency and competitiveness (Choe, Kim, & Fesenmaier, 2017). It has also transformed all economic sectors particularly tourism through the development of websites, blogs, applications and social media networks that break down geographical barriers and create new possibilities (Díaz & Martín-Consuegra, 2016; Kim & Fesenmaier, 2008; Kiralova & Pavlicecka, 2015; Munar, 2011; Tavakoli & Mura, 2018; Tuten & Solomon, 2017).

In order to better understand social media messages, it is important to recognize the changing nature of technology and how this affects travel-related information (Xiang & Gretzel, 2010). In this context, social media has emerged as an important instrument to facilitate both offers to tourists and have interactions with them (Ashley & Tuten, 2015; Choe et al., 2017; Isacsson & Gretzel, 2011; Leung, Law, van Hoof, & Buhalis, 2013; Sigala, 2012; Smith, 2013; Swani, Milne, Brown, Assaf, & Donthu, 2017; Zeng & Gerritsen, 2014). It is also an effective platform for enhancing customer engagement and business-to-customer and business-to-business interactions (Munar, 2011; Sigala, 2012; Smith, 2013). As Destination Management Organizations (DMOs) are involved in this process, their perspectives on social media use are therefore relevant and topical (Kilanova & Pavlicecka, 2015).

The social media platform most widely used in America and Europe is Facebook and it is used to promote and market many destinations throughout the world (Mariani, Mura, & di Felice, 2018). The effectiveness of social media messages from Facebook posts can be represented through user's posts being endorsed (Cervellon & Galipienzo, 2015; Kwok & Yu, 2013; Tuten & Solomon, 2017). The development of these messages in terms of format, content and appeal (emotional/hedonic or informational/functional) is essential when developing marketing strategies (Kiralova & Pavlicecka, 2015). Facebook has received significant research attention, however only a few studies have focused on the analysis of message effectiveness as a communication tool in destinations through the study of DMOs social media content (Bonsón, Royo, & Ratkai, 2015; Hays, Page, & Buhalis, 2013; Mariani et al., 2018; Swani et al., 2017). Specifically, identifying the emotional and functional appeal of messages

can provide important insights into the enhancement of marketing communications due to its moderator effect (Hudson & Thal, 2013). Thus, covering this gap by typifying the messages in destinations is a relevant goal to improve destination marketing effectiveness by DMOs (Choe et al., 2017; Leung, Bai, & Erdem, 2017; Lim, Chung, & Weaver, 2012).

Since competition among international destinations is significant, social media generated content is one way in which DMOs can differentiate themselves in the marketplace in order to attract tourists. DMOs need to understand the importance of using social media in a strategic way to distinguish themselves from other destinations (Schegg, Liebrich, Scaglione, & Ahmad, 2008). However, there has been limited research conducted on the comparison of social media content among different destinations, as the majority of these studies have been focused in just one country/destination (Choe et al., 2017; Goodrich, & de Mooij, 2014; Kiralova & Pavlicecka, 2015; Isacson & Gretzel, 2011; Reuter, Ludwig, Kaufhold, & Spielhofer, 2016).

Moreover, there have therefore been calls for empirical investigations to show the impacts of social media on marketing communication through quantitative analyses which take into account the content of messages generated by DMOs (Lu, Chen, & Law, 2018; Zeng & Gerritsen, 2014). It is also argued that research based on quantitative methods is essential to help practitioners measure the effectiveness of social media marketing (Leung et al., 2013).

For these reasons, the primary objective of this study is to identify what types of Facebook messages contribute to the marketing effectiveness for DMOs in two countries, England and Spain. The study achieves this through the analysis of these messages in terms of their format and content, and also considers the moderator effect of its appeal (emotional/hedonic or informational/functional). This empirical study aims to fill a gap in the existing literature by providing a foundation for strategic approaches to social media use in destinations by DMOs.

This paper is organized into several sections beginning with the literature review on the concepts of DMOs and social media, message strategy and marketing effectiveness. This section introduces the key themes which are pertinent to the primary research, namely, message strategy and marketing

effectiveness along with message format, content and appeal. The research methods adopted in the study are then presented. The research was conducted through analyzing the content of Facebook posts in twelve heritage-based destinations in England and Spain. Message strategy was analyzed in terms of message format, content and appeal, differentiating between the emotional and the functional. This is followed by the discussion, main conclusions and managerial implications for DMOs as well as limitations and further research. This includes a guideline for using Facebook for DMOs. The research therefore has implications for DMOs throughout the world who use social media as a communication tool in terms of developing effective social media communications strategies.

## **2. Literature review and research hypotheses**

### *2.1. DMOs and social media strategies*

In tourism, DMOs are organizations that manage destinations, designing and executing the destination marketing strategy and promoting the economic development of a destination (Bonsón et al., 2015; Lu et al., 2018). They have several functions which can include the management of marketing strategies, the improvement of the destination offers and the coordination of tourism planning. They therefore perform a complex task, acting as intermediaries between numerous stakeholders including the public, private and third sectors and visitors (Munar, 2011).

In terms of destination branding, DMOs have, over the years, worked on the creation of a destination brand through a number of different methods (Lim et al., 2012). However, using technology in destination branding has become increasingly important as this can be a key driver in achieving competitive advantage in destination development (Choe et al., 2017). Specifically, the adoption of social media by DMOs is a key success factor for the management of the destinations in the way it is marketed (Andreu, Aldás, Bigné, & Mattila, 2010; Lim et al., 2012). The employment of social media as a strategic marketing tool is becoming more widely used by DMOs (Hays et al., 2013). As Leung et al. (2017) state, it is also becoming the norm for information search and as an advertising tool for tourist destinations.

The acceptance of new technologies influences the way in which destinations are managed. This acceptance is necessary due to the increasing competition among destinations that exerts pressure on how DMOs develop their destinations (Andreu et al., 2010; Munar, 2011). They face stiff competition amongst each other and they have to design their social media sites as a tool for the visitors' trip planning process (Goodrich, & de Mooij, 2014; Kim & Fesenmaier, 2008). Therefore, social media is gaining prominence as a key factor when managing destinations and DMOs have realized the power of this instrument.

Social media is one of the most persuasive media for DMOs to influence the visitor's decision-making process. It is also useful for DMOs in managing customer relations and helping tourism companies to engage with potential visitors (Hudson & Thal, 2013; Wang & Fesenmaier, 2004; Yadav & Arora, 2012). Information during the trip-planning process is required in order to make decisions about destinations, accommodation, restaurants, tours and attractions (Hays et al., 2013). Social media helps in this process and provides an online tool or platform that allows peer-to-peer communication which develops interactions to form virtual communities. In this sense, customers might provide a range of both positive and negative comments on the tourism product which is marketed through the DMO. Negative comments can have a significant impact on destination image (Huang, 2012) and if social media is not managed properly it may have negative impacts on the image of businesses within destinations (Zeng & Gerritsen, 2014). This can cause potential problems for DMOs as they are not totally in control of the destination message.

DMOs can however ensure that the messages presented on social media are an effective marketing tool. Photos or narratives posted on social media which link to the destination can have an influence on how it is perceived (Govers & Go, 2005). Therefore, in order to better understand the effectiveness of DMO social media content, it can be measured through studying the amount of recommendations or [electronic word-of-mouth \(eWOM\)](#) (Hills & Cairncross, 2011; Leung et al., 2017). [eWOM is defined as any positive or negative online communication generated by consumers directed to companies, but visible to other users \(Kim & Slotegraaf, 2015; Rosario, de Valck, & Sotgiu, 2020\).](#) It is a different way of communication because of its informal character, interactive nature and broader audience without

geographic and time barriers (Hennig-Thurau, Gwinner, Walsh, & Gremler, 2004; Yen & Tang, 2019). eWOM has become a major source of information in tourism industry and facilitates interactions between visitors and tourism companies and DMOs. In a number of studies it has been found to be at the heart of the tourism communication strategies as it has influences on the perceived trustworthiness and booking intentions (Cantallops & Salvi, 2014; Kanje, Charles, Tumsifu, Mossberg, & Andersson, 2020). Through the intensive use of social media, eWOM also allows visitors to seek more information and to reduce the risk in their decision making. This can have benefits for DMOs as they look to increase the perceived value in their destination offer (Yen & Tang, 2019). However, DMOs often do not follow a strategic framework regarding social media output despite its marketing potential and this can be problematical in terms of destination image management (Huertas, Setó-Pàmies, & Míguez-González, 2015).

DMOs use several social media platforms available to consumers and organizations alike (Lim et al., 2012). Some of the most relevant types of social media sites in tourism are media-sharing sites (YouTube), photo sites (Instagram), review sites (TripAdvisor) or social networking sites (Facebook) (Ashley & Tuten, 2015; Munar, 2011). Social media has been commonly accepted by tourists to search, share or organize their trips and experiences through blogs, Twitter, TripAdvisor or Facebook (Leung et al., 2013). However, little research has been developed to analyze how DMOs are using Facebook to market destinations and engage with potential visitors (Hays et al., 2013).

## *2.2. Message strategy and marketing effectiveness*

Investigating what is projected through social media messages (message strategy) and the reaction of tourists to those messages (marketing effectiveness) can give insights to DMOs into how posts should be communicated (message format) (Govers & Go, 2005). In addition to this, what it is more appropriate to tell (message content), and its appeal (emotional vs. informational) is also communicated through these messages. By communicating with customers through social media platforms, DMOs can obtain insights into customer preferences (Huang, 2012). Appropriate message format and content from DMOs can trigger tourists to engage with the destination (Ashley & Tuten, 2015), therefore knowing the users'

emotional and behavioral responses can offer new insights to enhance DMO marketing communications. This can create an advantage to those organizations that identify how, when and where social media has an influence on consumer behavior (Hudson & Thal, 2013). Therefore, how they react to messages from consumers is linked to marketing effectiveness (Kwok & Yu, 2013). Understanding the relationship between Facebook social media content and format through metrics such as likes or comments is essential for businesses (Swani et al., 2017). By analyzing the comments, likes or dislikes of tourists or customers, organizations can offer products and services adapted to tourists' needs (de Vries, Gensler, & Leeflang, 2012; Leung et al., 2013). The typical measure of consumer response to social media are clicks, friends, likes or eWOM, among others (Ashley & Tuten, 2015; Hills & Cairncross, 2011). Swani et al. (2017) analyze brand content popularity in terms of the number of likes or comments in Facebook based on its effects on sales and awareness or loyalty, among others. They suggest that encouraging 'friends' and promoting post likes and comments is a good way to increase popularity. **This is important for two main reasons. First, brand popularity has a positive influence on consumers' purchase intentions, mainly when messages are practical, interesting and interactive (Kim, 2018; Lin, Swarna, & Bruning, 2017). Second, O'Connor (2013) argues that there can be a correlation between Facebook popularity and organizational value. Building brand popularity through 'friends' and 'likes' therefore has potential to increase both the company's economic performance and value.**

Message strategy is a "guiding approach to a company's promotional communication efforts for its products, its services, or itself" (Taylor, 1999: 7). In other words, "how to say" and "what to say" (Leung et al., 2017). Social media messages are a mixture of fact, opinions, impressions, experiences or even sentiments (Blackshaw & Nazzaro, 2006). Narratives about destinations are therefore important and can be enhanced in a number of ways including graphic materials which can enhance text. Consequently, not only the narrative, but also how it is presented can have an effect on visitors. Hirschman & Holbrook (1982) state that when presenting texts to tourists they should be presented with photographs where appropriate as both format and content are relevant in message strategy. Both these elements (format and content) therefore contribute to the creation of a destination's image. DMOs should decide which format and content elements contribute best to what it is they are promoting (Hall, 1996). Urry (2003)

adds that since the introduction of online publications regarding destinations, the analysis of the marketing format and content can provide better insights into the ways in which destinations project themselves online. Ashley & Tuten (2015) suggest the importance of creativity in the development of messages to be more effective in engagement. Social media enables engagement, which can be seen as the intensity of the connection between customers and organizations. Specifically, social media engagement refers to customer behaviors through social media which have an effect on the quality of the relationship between the company and the customer (Gómez, Lopez, & Molina, 2019). In the tourism context, social media interaction represents an opportunity to enhance brand engagement with DMOs in terms of brand evaluations, trust and loyalty (Harrigan, Evers, Miles, & Daly, 2017). This is posited as a key reason why companies use social media platforms such as Facebook to engage with tourists (Ashley & Tuten, 2015).

Both, message format and content should be appropriately designed to enhance the receiver's motivation to engage with the destination in a positive way in order to improve message effectiveness. Therefore, the development of a strategic plan which establishes message priorities is fundamental to increase a destination's competitiveness and long-term success (Kiralova & Pavlicecka, 2015). Those destination marketers that monitor social networks will be able to understand travelers' experiences in a better way to enable them to make more informed decisions. This is a strategic tool cheaper than other traditional instruments (Bruhn, Schoenmueller, & Schäfer, 2012) and therefore has significant benefits to DMOs. However, while social media can be a cheap form of marketing, it does have lower conversion rates than other tools which can reduce the financial benefits. Thus, measuring the effectiveness of social media marketing is an important challenge for organizations because there is limited quantitative research to support these assertions. Moreover, old metrics for traditional media and online advertising are not found to be useful when analyzing the marketing effectiveness. In the context of social media, marketing effectiveness can be seen as the measure of how effective a social media strategy/plan is in achieving short and long-term results linked to objectives. For DMOs, one possible way to determine the effectiveness of social media marketing is the evaluation of consumers' purchasing decisions through the creation of indicators based on consumer comments on products on a Facebook page (Boon-Long



& Wongsurawat, 2015). Therefore, analyzing Facebook posts can help managers better understand customer behaviors and decision-making processes and in turn improve marketing effectiveness.

### *2.2.1. Message format and marketing effectiveness*

Message format represents the design of the message (Cervellon & Galipienzo, 2015). It is the way in which the message is framed or delivered. Message format can also refer to visual components that enhance users' attention and allow for a better understanding of messages (Niu, Wang, Yin, & Niu, 2016). The various characteristics of message formats provide opportunities for a more integrated approach to communication. Message format also allow companies to predict the effectiveness of messages and encourage positive responses to social media comments (Pino, Peluso, del Vecchio, Ndou, Passiante, & Guido, 2019).

Message content can therefore use a variety of formats. The content of the message should be communicated through new emerging technologies such as virtual tours which can shape the message format (Govers & Go, 2005). For example, these authors highlight the importance of photographs for visitors who want to capture the real experience, while several researchers [suggest alternatives to photos such as the relevance of maps or videos in social media](#) (de Vries et al., 2012; Hays et al., 2013; Huertas et al., 2015; Kiralova & Pavlicecka, 2015; Zeng & Gerritsen, 2014). According to Kim and Fesenmaier (2008), there are people who are goal-oriented in their information searches who positively value message formats such as maps, calendars of local events and so on. Hays et al. (2013) add other categories for the study of message format in their content analysis such as links, tags or hashtags, or even fact sheets or brochures, newsletters and news. Noone, McGuire, and Rohlfs (2011) highlight the importance for DMOs to include links which promote the direct booking of hotels or other tourism businesses through their websites or social media networks (Tavakoli & Mura, 2018).

Depending on the message format, the marketing effectiveness will vary (Leung et al., 2017). According to several authors, dependent variables such as the number of likes, comments or shares are an appropriate measure of marketing effectiveness (de Vries et al., 2012; Huertas et al., 2015; Kwok & Yu, 2013). These authors also analyze the impact of post characteristics such as photos, videos or links on

those dependent variables. The benefits and effectiveness of social media on destinations is enhanced by the increase in eWOM or friends/likes (Hennig-Thurau et al., 2004; Kiralova & Pavlicecka, 2015; Rosario et al., 2020).

To summarize, the literature points to a number of characteristics of message format which include photos, maps, videos, links, news, promotion of other websites and social media (de Vries et al., 2012; Hays et al., 2013; Huertas et al., 2015; Kim & Fesenmaier, 2008; Kiralova & Pavlicecka, 2015; Noone et al., 2011; Tavakoli & Mura, 2018; Zeng & Gerritsen, 2014). Furthermore, and consistent with the previous literature, a recent study by Pino et al. (2019) presents a research framework which specifies that the main variables related to message format are those listed above. The characteristics identified in the literature have been used to formulate the following hypothesis.

**H1.** Message format (H<sub>1a</sub>: photo, H<sub>1b</sub>: map, H<sub>1c</sub>: video, H<sub>1d</sub>: link, H<sub>1e</sub>: news, H<sub>1f</sub>: promotion of another website, H<sub>1g</sub>: promotion of another social media) has an influence on marketing effectiveness.

### *2.2.2. Message content and marketing effectiveness*

Message content represents what is communicated through social media's messages (Leung et al., 2017) and marketing effectiveness depends on the message content generated by the destinations. Message content is the key information inserted in the message (Niu et al., 2016). Tafesse & Wien (2018) assert that message content usually incorporates multiple themes within individual posts and that these themes act as critical antecedents of message effectiveness. Gao & Feng (2016) state that understanding the principal content of messages in terms of marketing communication is critical for consumer engagement, while Tafesse & Wien (2018) develop this argument asserting that message content is one of the most crucial elements of a social media post and needs to be aligned to consumer needs.

There are a number of key features regarding message content. One important aspect being the interactivity which includes a call to action (de Vries et al., 2012; Golan & Zaidner, 2008; Hays et al., 2013). Interactivity is a two-way communication between companies and customers (de Vries et al., 2012) and can be seen as one of the outcomes of an effective social media approach. One example is the

possibility of reward or chance to win something which can be considered an important element to attract customers' attention (Kiralova & Pavlicecka, 2015). These authors describe several Facebook campaigns such as "Snow at the First Sight" in 2009 in Colorado, or "Sunshine Moments" in 2011 in Florida where prizes represented an important element to encourage visitors' participation with resultant marketing effectiveness.

Cohen (1988) recommends that cultural identity should be included in DMOs communications. A number of authors have developed this, suggesting the importance of communicating cultural-specific elements of the tourism product including food, entertainment and sport activities through social media (Cervellon & Galipienzo, 2015; Hsu, Tien, Lin, & Chang, 2015; Kim, Sohn, & Choi, 2011). Other activities such as those aimed at children have also been suggested as they often receive positive remarks and constructive comments (Isacsson & Gretzel, 2011), while Ashley & Tuten (2015) suggest that social causes such as breast cancer or environmental efforts are also relevant content. Message content in experiential products such as tourism refers to a complex sequence of attractions, events, activities, tours or hotels, etc. (Govers & Go, 2005). Promotion related to restaurants was examined in the study of Hays et al. (2013), while Cohen (1988) indicates that commercial activities such as the tourist consumption of activities can be included in DMOs communications. Finally, Kiralova and Pavlicecka (2015) refer to shopping plans in the list of possible actions promoted in destinations. Therefore, there are a whole array of organizations, events and activities which can be used by DMOs when promoting their destination. They therefore need to be aware that marketing effectiveness measures such as likes, comments or shares depend on message content (de Vries et al., 2012; Leung et al., 2017). Thus, narrative texts have an influence on the dependent variables of effectiveness which determines eWOM in destinations (Kange et al., 2020; Kim & Slotegraaf, 2015; Kiralova & Pavlicecka, 2015).

The literature on message content shows that the most used characteristics are the following: call to action, reward, cultural activity, food activity, fun activity, sport activity, children activity; and call to social cause. Recent research on this area by Moran, Muzellec, and Johnson (2019) and Pino et al. (2019) confirms these characteristics and therefore based on this, the following hypothesis was proposed:

**H2.** Message content (H<sub>2a</sub>: call to action, H<sub>2b</sub>: reward, H<sub>2c</sub>: cultural activity, H<sub>2d</sub>: food activity, H<sub>2e</sub>: fun activity, H<sub>2f</sub>: sport activity, H<sub>2g</sub>: children activity; H<sub>2h</sub>: call to social cause) has an influence on marketing effectiveness.

### *2.2.3. Message appeal*

Message content in social media can be either emotional/hedonic or informational/functional and determines its appeal (Ashley & Tuten, 2015; de Vries et al., 2012). Further research by Swani et al. (2017) highlighted the categorization between the emotional and the functional appeals as different types of content. They argue that messages can contain both hedonic and informational appeals depending on the expressive nature of the post. In this sense, some authors differentiated between emotional and informational messages in traditional advertising media (Aaker & Norris, 1982; Bruhn et al., 2012). This categorization has been applied in the study of content posts of social media (Jahn & Kunz, 2012) and specifically, applied in Facebook pages relative to international product brands (de Vries et al., 2012), restaurants (Kwok & Yu, 2013), hotels (Cervellon & Galipienzo, 2015) or destinations (Hays et al., 2013). Cervellon and Galipienzo (2015) state that for some companies, Facebook is mainly used to communicate objective information as opposed to emotional experiences; however, other businesses project emotional-dominant messages.

Emotional messages are connected with fantasy, feelings, experiential or hedonic aspects of an experience/product (Hirschman & Holbrook, 1982). According to Ashley & Tuten (2015), most branded social content can be classified as functional. However, emotional messages also have an effective role to play (Kiralova & Pavlicecka, 2015). Informational messages convey the information rationally and can refer to dates of an event or location of an attraction, among others (Hays et al., 2013). Informational or functional messages are more effective when the product or service is associated with utilitarian or logical elements (Ashley & Tuten, 2015; Golan & Zaidner, 2008).

The typology of social media messages determines the effectiveness of these message strategies. Most researchers argue that there is a dichotomy of message content and message format depending on whether messages are primarily emotional or informational (Leung et al., 2017). In this sense, four

different combinations can be found: format-emotional, format-informational, content-emotional and content-informational, with each having different effects on marketing effectiveness (Vries et al., 2012). Thus, message appeal (emotional vs. informational) moderates the influence of message strategy (message format and message content) on marketing effectiveness (Wu & Wang, 2011). Coursaris, van Osch, & Balogh (2016) highlight the importance of studying the intensity of the relationship between message format and content and marketing effectiveness depending on its emotional vs. informational appeal. Both variables moderate the impact of message content and format on marketing effectiveness achieving different levels of efficiency (Swani et al., 2017).

Based on the above, the following hypothesis was proposed:

**H3.** Message appeal (emotional vs. informational messages) moderates the influence of message format (H<sub>3-1a</sub>: photo, H<sub>3-1b</sub>: map, H<sub>3-1c</sub>: video, H<sub>3-1d</sub>: link, H<sub>3-1e</sub>: news, H<sub>3-1f</sub>: promotion of another website, H<sub>3-1g</sub>: promotion of another social media) and content (H<sub>3-2a</sub>: call to action, H<sub>3-2b</sub>: reward, H<sub>3-2c</sub>: cultural activity, H<sub>3-2d</sub>: food activity, H<sub>3-2e</sub>: fun activity, H<sub>3-2f</sub>: sport activity, H<sub>3-2g</sub>: children activity; H<sub>3-2h</sub>: call to social cause) on marketing effectiveness.

Figure 1 presents the conceptual framework that guides the hypotheses developed in this research. It illustrates the impact of message content and message format on marketing effectiveness and the moderation of informational/emotional messages.

### **Insert Figure 1**

### **3. Research methodology**

The approach to this study used a number of stages which are highlighted below.

#### *3.1. Data collection*

This study uses content analysis to analyze what types of social media messages published in Facebook contribute to the marketing effectiveness in the two chosen countries, England and Spain. This analysis is based on the analysis of the various DMOs' social media strategies. Facebook was chosen because it

has become a relevant tool in customer relationship management programs (Cervellon & Galipienzo, 2015; Hudson & Thal, 2013), is presented as an effective marketing tool for organizations (Hays et al., 2013) and is an alternative to traditional advertising for tourism enterprises (Leung et al., 2013). Facebook is a channel to present products or services to a wider audience (Huang, 2012) and customers can appreciate three different experiences with brands on Facebook: cognitive, sensorial and emotional experiences (Cervellon & Galipienzo, 2015; Rapp, Beitelspacher, Grewal, & Hughes, 2013; Smith, 2013). It is an efficient way for organizations to connect with customers and to receive feedback on customer service (Cervellon & Galipienzo, 2015; Hays et al., 2013). The decision-making process of many travelers can be ascertained through the comments published on Facebook sites (Hudson & Thal, 2013; Leung et al., 2013).

The study was developed in both England and Spain as both countries share a conceptual equivalence which allows for comparison. England and Spain present similar rates in internet penetration (England: 95%; Spain: 85%); Social Media Penetration (England: 66%; Spain: 58%); and Average Facebook Engagement (England: 3.75%; Spain: 3.99%) (We Are Social, 2018).

Data for this research was generated from twelve destinations from these two countries. The selection of the destinations was based on three requirements: (1) World heritage cities (unique places in cultural or physical aspects selected by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO)); (2) number of 'friends'; and (3) minimum number of posts in Facebook. The cities chosen in England were: Bath, Cambridge, Canterbury, Chester, Oxford and York; and in Spain: Cáceres, Córdoba, Salamanca, Santiago, Segovia and Toledo. The twelve cities selected as cases share a similar tourism product based around heritage which allows for comparison.

The sample included 3,303 messages posted and generated from the Facebook pages of DMOs of the selected destinations, listed above (England: 1,577; Spain: 1,726). Both message strategy and marketing effectiveness were studied in this research. The information was manually collected from the Facebook pages published between June and December 2017. Those messages posted by tourists were eliminated, and only messages posted by the DMOs were included in this study (Table 1).

## **Insert Table 1**

### *3.2. Content analysis*

Content analysis was used to collect and examine the messages. This is a technique used to systematically collect the characteristics of social media messages in order to transform the information into quantitative data (Wang, Kim, Xiao, & Jung, 2017). This method has been used in a number of previous studies (Ashley & Tuten, 2015; de Vries et al., 2012; Kwok & Yu, 2013). It is therefore a useful and increasingly used tool to analyze and identify the characteristics of messages and data from social media (O’Leary & Deegan, 2005). It can also provide DMOs with an understanding of the marketing effectiveness by measuring the number of replies to posts. In this context, Neuendorf (2002: 141) points out that “given that a goal of content analysis is to identify and record relatively objective (or at least intersubjective) characteristics of messages, reliability is paramount. Without the establishment of reliability, content analysis measures are useless”. For this reason, the Inter-coder Reliability (ICR) as a validity criterion was calculated on a randomly selected subsample of 20 messages from each city. All values of ICR were higher than 0.70, exceeding the recommended guideline (0.7) (Perreault & Leigh, 1989; Xiang & Gretzel, 2010), which indicates that the coding is reliable and replicable, which therefore strengthens evidence that the findings of the research are valid (Kurasaki, 2000).

The analysis began with a review of the previous contributions cited in the literature to ascertain measures for the key variables. These variables were then adapted to the context of this analysis and the instrument was divided into three sections. First, information relative to the post was included (Facebook site, text of post, number of characters and the date of collection). Second, the popularity measures of message effectiveness provided by Facebook (i.e. number of likes or shares) as eWOM was noted. Third, message strategy based on message format; message content; and its emotional or informational appeal was recorded (Table 2). A pilot study was developed to differentiate the types of format, content and appeal of messages. Specifically, the following items were considered for the examination of message format: photo, map, video, link, news, promotion of another website or promotion of another social media (such as Twitter or Instagram). The following items were used for the study of the message

content: call to action, get a reward, type of activity (cultural, food, fun or sport), activities for children and calls to a social cause. Emotional or informational appeal was also differentiated based on hedonic or functional messages. Emotional messages are those relative to feelings and experiential aspects, and informational messages refers to useful information about dates, events and so on.

As Hays et al. (2013) state, categories are not mutually exclusive as any Facebook post could be classified in several groups. All the measures used a nominal scale with values of 1 or 0 depending on the presence or absence of each item. Thus, a separate dichotomous variable was created in SPSS per each item (1=Yes, present; 0=No, absent).

All the characteristics of messages were manually coded to establish the type of message strategy. For example, the following message: “Today is your last chance to enter our competition and win a break in Bath for two”. This message was classified as informational. And had different characteristics of format, content and appeal that were coded. For example, photo, map, video in relation to the format; call to action, get a reward relative to the content; and also the informational/emotional appeal. Two researchers independently reviewed each message, and any discrepancies between the two were reviewed by a third researcher for resolution.

## **Insert Table 2**

### *3.3. Statistical analysis*

The purpose of this study was to identify what types of social media messages posted in Facebook determine marketing effectiveness. A three-step procedure was adopted. First, content analysis was used to categorize the Facebook messages by format, content and its appeal (Swani et al., 2017). Second, quantitative information was used to measure marketing effectiveness from the message strategy of social media. This paper addresses issues related to the message communicated by the host and how potential or actual visitors responded to the message (Govers & Go, 2005). Third, the characteristics of Facebook messages in terms of effectiveness were compared.



In order to achieve this, a Poisson model was run to compare the popularity of Facebook messages (number of positive reactions) across English and Spanish destinations (de Vries et al., 2012). A Poisson regression was used because it is deemed appropriate when there is a high correlation between two dependent variables (Tsonas, 2001). We followed this regression specification:

$$\begin{aligned} Count_{ki} = & \exp(\alpha + \beta_{k1} \times PH_i + \beta_{k2} \times LI_i + \beta_{k3} \times WE_i + \beta_{k4} \times SM_i + \beta_{k5} \times CA_i + \beta_{k6} \times RE_i + \\ & \beta_{k7} \times CU_i + \beta_{k8} \times FO_i + \beta_{k9} \times FU_i + \beta_{k10} \times SP_i + \beta_{k11} \times KI_i + \beta_{k12} \times EI_i + \beta_{k13} \times (EI_i \times \\ & PH_i) + \beta_{k14} \times (EI_i \times LI_i) + \beta_{k15} \times (EI_i \times WE_i) + \beta_{k16} \times (EI_i \times SM_i) + \beta_{k17} \times (EI_i \times CA_i) + \\ & \beta_{k18} \times (EI_i \times RE_i) + \beta_{k19} \times (EI_i \times CU_i) + \beta_{k20} \times (EI_i \times FO_i) + \beta_{k21} \times (EI_i \times FU_i) + \beta_{k22} \times \\ & (EI_i \times SP_i) + \beta_{k23} \times (EI_i \times KI_i)) \end{aligned}$$

where  $Count_{k=1i}$  or  $Count_{k=2i}$  is a variable that represents the number of reactions per post  $i$ . The independent or predictor variables indicate whether the post contained photo ( $PH_i$ ), link ( $LI_i$ ), website ( $WE_i$ ), social media ( $SM_i$ ), call to action ( $CA_i$ ), get a reward ( $RE_i$ ), information about cultural ( $CU_i$ ), food ( $FO_i$ ), fun ( $FU_i$ ) or sport ( $SP_i$ ) activities, information about activities for children ( $KI_i$ ). The variable emotional vs. informational ( $EI$ ) takes the value of 1 when the post is emotional and 0 when it is informational. The remaining variables represent the interaction between emotional vs. informational and each of the characteristics of the Facebook messages.

## 4. Results

### 4.1. Descriptive statistics

The data set comprises 1,577 messages from England and 1,726 messages from Spain (3,303 in total). There exists a high degree of variation in the number of reactions among Facebook pages (Table 3). For instance, Bath in England and Salamanca in Spain present the higher mean number of reactions (136.64 and 100.81, respectively). On the other hand, Cambridge and Oxford in England, and Segovia in Spain have the minimum mean (3.31, 4.60 and 11.09, respectively). De Vries et al. (2012) pointed out that it is common to find a variation in the popularity of messages.

**Insert Table 3**

With regard to the characteristics of the message format, the percentages obtained show that there are differences in the presence or absence of the following characteristics: photo, link to DMO's website, promotion of another website or promotion of another social media outlet. The rest of the characteristics map, video and news show homogeneity in both countries because these characteristics are not used in the majority of messages. Consequently, these characteristics cannot be considered in the analysis because they do not discriminate between favorable and unfavorable behavior in order to increase or decrease the number of reactions.

In relation to message content, there are differences in the presence or absence of the following characteristics: call to action, get a reward, cultural, food, fun or sport activities, and activity for children. The rest of the features (social cause) show homogeneity in both countries because this characteristic is not used in the messages. Consequently, this characteristic cannot be used in the analysis (Table 4).

#### **Insert 4**

In relation to the message appeal, the data set included 1,583 emotional (England: 938; Spain: 645) and 1,720 informational messages (England: 639; Spain: 1,081). The mean and standard deviation of the number of reactions for emotional messages are 59.50 and 78.658, respectively; while for informational messages are 41.15 and 72.658, respectively. In the case of England, the mean and standard deviation for emotional messages are 59.02 and 110.680; and for informational are 39.71 and 94.357. In the case of Spain, the mean and standard deviation for emotional messages are 60.20 and 122.796; and for informational are 42.00 and 56.047. The data presents a high degree of variation across emotional and informational messages for the number of reactions.

#### *4.2. Poisson regression results: main and interaction effects model*

In relation to the Poisson regression results, two models were run: the main effects model and the interaction effects model. The main effects model was run with the message characteristics of format and content, and the message appeal (emotional vs. informational) (Table 5). A 4-type message format and 7-type message content classification was identified.

The results indicate that, in the English destinations, the use of photo ( $H_{1a}$ :  $\beta = -0.485$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ), the inclusion of information about other websites ( $H_{1f}$ :  $\beta = -0.016$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ) or social media ( $H_{1g}$ :  $\beta = -0.924$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ), call to action ( $H_{2a}$ :  $\beta = -0.314$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ) and information about sport activities ( $H_{2f}$ :  $\beta = -0.321$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ) reduced the number of reactions. However, the use of links ( $H_{1d}$ :  $\beta = 0.540$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ), information about culture ( $H_{2c}$ :  $\beta = 0.630$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ), fun ( $H_{2e}$ :  $\beta = 0.418$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ) and children's activities ( $H_{2g}$ :  $\beta = 0.609$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ) increased the number of reactions.

Consequently, in terms of format, links generate positive marketing effectiveness among users. However, the promotion of other social media sites was the worst message format type in terms of marketing effectiveness. In terms of content, cultural and children's activities present the highest contribution to marketing effectiveness, followed by fun activities. The promotion of sport activities was the worst message content type in terms of marketing effectiveness, followed by call to action.

Furthermore in the Spanish destinations the messages with the promotion of another social media ( $H_{1g}$ :  $\beta = -0.520$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ), with information about food ( $H_{2d}$ :  $\beta = -0.483$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ) and sport activities ( $H_{2f}$ :  $\beta = -0.607$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ) reduce the number of reactions. However, the use of links ( $H_{1d}$ :  $\beta = 0.228$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ), the inclusion of information about another website ( $H_{1f}$ :  $\beta = 0.457$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ), call to action ( $H_{2a}$ :  $\beta = 0.074$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ), get a reward ( $H_{2b}$ :  $\beta = 0.637$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ) information about culture ( $H_{2c}$ :  $\beta = 0.116$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ) and children's activities ( $H_{2g}$ :  $\beta = 0.694$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ) increase the number of reactions.

Thus, in terms of format, the promotion of another website generates positive marketing effectiveness among users, as well as the use of links. The promotion of other social media sites was the worst message format type in terms of marketing effectiveness and is in line with the results from the English cities. In terms of content, activities for children and get a reward present the highest contributions to marketing effectiveness, followed by cultural activities and call to action. Thus, results from both countries show that enhancing cultural and children's activities enhance marketing effectiveness. The promotion of sport activities, as well as in England, was the worst message format type in terms of marketing effectiveness. Contrasting the two destinations, contradictory results emerged: for English users the

promotion of another website and call to action both presented a negative influence while being positive for the Spanish.

Consequently, H1 (Message format has a positive influence on marketing effectiveness) and H2 (Message content has a positive influence on marketing effectiveness) were tested as it has been shown from the results that both message format and message content have a partial influence on marketing effectiveness in positive terms, increasing its effectiveness. Thus, both hypotheses were partially supported.

### Insert Table 5

In order to test H3 (Message appeal (emotional vs. informational messages) moderates the influence of message format and content on marketing effectiveness), the interaction between emotional and message format and content was added. The results are in Table 6. In England, the variables representing the format were positive and significant in the case of including links (H<sub>3-1d</sub>:  $\beta = 0.373$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ) the promotion of other social media (H<sub>3-1g</sub>:  $\beta = 0.613$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ); call to action (H<sub>3-2a</sub>:  $\beta = 0.457$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ), get a reward (H<sub>3-2b</sub>:  $\beta = 0.304$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ), cultural (H<sub>3-2c</sub>:  $\beta = 0.113$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ) and children's activities (H<sub>3-2g</sub>:  $\beta = 0.821$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ) in message content. The results present positive and nonsignificant values in fun (message content) (H<sub>3-2e</sub>:  $\beta = 0.021$ ,  $p > 0.10$ ) and sport activities (message content) (H<sub>3-2f</sub>:  $\beta = 0.113$ ,  $p > 0.10$ ); negative and nonsignificant values in food activities (message content) (H<sub>3-2d</sub>:  $\beta = -0.006$ ,  $p > 0.10$ ); and negative and significant values in photos (message format) (H<sub>3-1a</sub>:  $\beta = -0.398$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ) and promotion of another website (H<sub>3-1f</sub>:  $\beta = -0.297$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ) (message format).

In Spain, the variables presenting the format were positive and significant in the cases that include photos (H<sub>3-1a</sub>:  $\beta = 0.449$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ), link (H<sub>3-1d</sub>:  $\beta = 0.049$ ,  $p < 0.05$ ) the promotion of other social media (H<sub>3-1g</sub>:  $\beta = 0.554$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ); call to action (H<sub>3-2a</sub>:  $\beta = 0.641$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ), get a reward (H<sub>3-2b</sub>:  $\beta = 0.977$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ), food (H<sub>3-2d</sub>:  $\beta = 0.280$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ) and children's activities (H<sub>3-2g</sub>:  $\beta = 0.457$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ) in message content. The results present positive and nonsignificant values in cultural activities (message content) (H<sub>3-2c</sub>:  $\beta = 0.008$ ,  $p > 0.10$ ); negative and nonsignificant values in promoting another website (message format) (H<sub>3-1f</sub>:  $\beta = -0.009$ ,  $p > 0.10$ ) and sport activities (message content) (H<sub>3-2f</sub>:  $\beta = -0.019$ ,  $p > 0.10$ );

and negative and significant values in information about fun activities (message content) ( $H_{3-2c}$ :  $\beta = -0.144$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ).

Thus, the findings of this study show that the use of format and content messages have a higher level of marketing effectiveness based on the number of reactions in messages with emotional appeal (value=1). H3 was partially supported in both countries as six characteristics out of a total of eleven present positive and significant values in the case of England (link, promotion of other social media, call to action, get a reward, cultural and children's activities) and seven out of a total of eleven in the case of Spain (photos, link, promotion of other social media, call to action, get a reward, food and children's activities).

### **Insert Table 6**

In order to test the robustness of the model, a sensitivity analysis was conducted to compare the results. To do this, it was necessary to evaluate the distributions on the parameters of the variance. In this sense, three alternatives were tested: gamma (0.01, 0.01), gamma (0.01, 0.1), and gamma (0.1, 0.1). All three have been used in many previous studies and are an accepted test for distribution variance (Swani et al., 2017). No differentiated behaviors were found.

## **5. Discussion and conclusion**

The high level of competition between destinations and developments in the internet have led to new ways of doing business and have implications for digital communication strategies for DMOs. Social media is relatively new and the way in which DMOs use social media and manage marketing efforts is significantly different to traditional marketing approaches (Hays et al., 2013). Implementation of new media technologies is vital for the success of destinations, but social media marketing strategies are still emerging within DMOs. This study provides empirical support regarding social media message strategy for DMOs. A total of three hypotheses were tested on Facebook based on the drivers and moderating variables that determine brand posts and consequently, marketing effectiveness. This paper focuses on social media strategies in tourism and contributes to expanding the knowledge available to DMOs in the planning of their marketing efforts. DMOs need to understand the importance of format, content and the

moderating effect of appeal in messages to promote their destinations to online tourists (Fesenmaier, 2007). This study offers useful insights to DMOs as they can use the findings from this research to enhance the interaction with their customers through their message strategy.

The results of this study suggest relevant theoretical and empirical conclusions.

### *5.1. Theoretical conclusions*

This study contributes to the academic literature in a number of ways. First, the theoretical background on the marketing effectiveness of social media is under-developed. This study explores marketing effectiveness in one of the more used social networks: Facebook, and its link to tourism (Hays et al., 2013; Kiralova & Pavlicecka, 2015). This research contributes to the literature by examining how message strategy is a key factor in determining marketing effectiveness.

Second, this research increases the understanding of DMO social media strategies and it expands the knowledge of marketing in destinations from a traditional to a digital perspective (Hays et al., 2013). It helps academic researchers gain a better understanding of the role that Facebook plays in tourism as a strategic tool providing an agenda for future research.

Third, this paper contributes to the definition of message strategy, a concept that includes both format and content perspectives. This research provides new insights to the social media literature by identifying the factors that influence the popularity and engagement of posts in terms of format and content evaluation (de Vries et al., 2012; Kim, 2018; Lin et al., 2017). Moreover, this study presents an analysis of the moderating role emotional vs. information messages have on marketing effectiveness (Kiralova & Pavlicecka, 2015).

Fourth, a contribution to the understanding of marketing effectiveness was analyzed (de Vries et al., 2012; Kwok & Yu, 2013; Leung et al., 2013). The number of reactions to posts on Facebook is a sign of engagement which is an important metric that the literature shows to be an indicator of marketing effectiveness. Given their importance, researching the type of message that drives users to “like” posts

on Facebook is valuable (Swani et al., 2017), therefore this study contributes to the creation of a theoretical framework to understand the marketing effectiveness of social media in destinations.

Finally, this paper provides insights based on the application of the Poisson regression analysis that tests marketing effectiveness based on the number of reactions and the interaction between message characteristics. The integrated analysis of Facebook posts on destinations proposed in this study represents an important advance in the theoretical research relating to social media marketing based on the analysis of the Poisson regression (de Vries et al., 2012; Swani et al., 2017).

### *5.2. Empirical conclusions*

The findings of this study support previous claims and offer relevant empirical conclusions linked to Facebook and message strategies for DMOs. A number of key findings emerged. First, message format and message content determine marketing effectiveness in the context of social media. The findings correlate with a number of previous studies showing that both are relevant in marketing effectiveness development (de Vries et al., 2012; Hays et al., 2013; Kiralova & Pavlicecka, 2015). They also show that in England, links included in the message format and information about cultural and children's activities increased the number of reactions. This was followed by fun activities, all of which were contained in the message content from the DMO. However, in Spain the inclusion of links, the promotion of other websites as features of message format; activities for children, get a reward, followed by cultural activities and call to action as elements of message content led to an increase in the number of reactions, thus enhancing marketing effectiveness.

English and Spanish Facebook users show similarities and differences in their liking behaviors. On the one hand, links, cultural and children's activities show the best results in increasing the number of reactions in both countries (Bonsón et al., 2015). On the other hand, both countries match in highlighting the promotion of other social media sites and the promotion of sport activities represent the worst results in marketing effectiveness. Analyzing posts from these twelve destinations present numerous examples of the best way to use Facebook and could offer relevant suggestions for other places who use this site for marketing purposes (Hays et al., 2013).

Second, it was shown that there is a **moderator** effect of marketing effectiveness depending on emotional vs. informational messages (Swani et al., 2017). Facebook messages that contain emotional appeal have a higher number of reactions in the case of England and Spain than those that contain informational appeal. This is consistent with the literature, as users are more likely to be motivated to like emotional messages. However, this is contrary to previous research findings based on Facebook hotel pages that indicates that informational appeal is more effective in increasing the attitude towards hotels (Cervellon & Galipienzo, 2015). Moreover, the use of emotional cues in destinations is likely to increase marketing effectiveness providing a differential advantage and enhanced relationships with social media users (Hudson & Thal, 2013; Kiralova & Pavlicecka, 2015). Social media channels appear to be more suitable for building relationships when messages present emotional or passionate appeals (Rapp et al., 2013). Regardless of the message format, both English and Spanish users share messages that contain emotional cues especially when there is a link or a promotion to another social media site and in the case of Spanish users when a photo is included in the message. In relation to the message content, English and Spanish social media users share emotional messages mainly when there is a call to action, get a reward and activities for children; and food activities in the Spanish context and cultural activities in the English.

Consequently, links and activities for children are important in both countries, and the number of reactions is even more enhanced with messages that present an emotional appeal. However, the promotion of other social media sites tends to reduce the number of reactions in the main effects model, but presents the opposite result when a passionate appeal is considered in the interaction effects model, positively influencing the number of reactions.

## **6. Practical implications**

Important practical implications can be drawn from the findings of this research about how to increase marketing effectiveness and how to gain insights regarding the differences observed in the results. First, this study can be used by DMOs regarding how they use Facebook. The research provides relevant suggestions to DMOs through the creation of message formats and content based on the norms and values of social media users. Destinations should therefore examine their Facebook message format and



content choosing the most appropriate information to enhance the number of reactions. Second, DMOs need to manage social media as an integrated marketing strategy that differs from traditional marketing strategies. Destinations' Facebook pages must be active, interesting and project dynamic activities (Hays et al., 2013). Social media managers must also analyze how consumers interact with the messages. **Third, it is important to note that DMOs can also test the results of this study themselves by measuring their own engagement of these types of content and formats.** Fourth, the differences in the results could be a consequence of the post characteristics, the motivations of social media use or cultural differences. For instance, there are differences between posts from the English and Spanish DMOs which could be a consequence of the cultural differences between the two countries. These differences could be critical in determining the number of reactions beyond the message strategy (Goodrich & de Mooij, 2014). Isacson & Gretzel (2011) note that cultural differences in how Facebook is used can influence marketing effectiveness. This means that the way individuals use social media varies worldwide and can relate to the format, content or appeal of messages. Consequently, DMOs should consider the differences among users and countries to enhance the effectiveness of social networks (Bonsón et al., 2015; Reuter et al., 2016). **Finally, as Facebook is part of an overall social media strategy, DMOs should investigate marketing effectiveness in other social media platforms (Instagram, YouTube, Pinterest, Twitter). This needs to be done on their key target markets in order to prioritize their marketing strategies.**

## **7. Limitations and further research**

This research presents some limitations that should be considered for future research. This analysis which is based on social media strategies for DMOs sets a challenge for further research. First, data collection was limited to the content produced during a specific time frame. A second data collection at a different time point would be useful to see if there are any differences in results. This could then link into longitudinal studies which could show changes over time.

Second, this study was developed in England and Spain. The investigation involved a limited number of destinations. It was interesting to notice the cultural differences in the use of Facebook between English and Spanish users. Furthermore, future studies could focus on expanding this analysis to other

destinations and geographic areas to identify cultural differences from other countries. This could also allow additional comparisons and analysis of social media messages and their effectiveness. As Hays et al. (2013) point out, similar research with a sample from other countries and different time period could offer new insights to the use of social media by DMOs.

Third, this study only focuses on Facebook. Future research could be broadened by including other social media platforms such as Twitter, LinkedIn, [YouTube](#) or Instagram. In addition, the study of marketing effectiveness has been measured by the number of clicks on the “like” button. However, sentiment analysis techniques to analyze the content of the comments could be taken into account in future research. The study of the motives behind the positive (likes, shares) or negative (dislikes) reactions could be also studied. Moreover, new forms of engagement or emotions (love, sadness, anger and so on) could be analyzed.

Fourth, this research only analyzes the Facebook messages initiated by DMOs but it does not pay attention to Facebook users’ own communications. Research on social media needs to explore not only the interactions between companies and users but also interactions among users (Kwok & Yu, 2013; Yadav & Arora, 2012). Thus, future research could also include this second perspective of interaction and try to identify individual characteristics of network members who liked specific messages. It could be also relevant to study the reactions of different demographic groups of Facebook users. Finally, although content analysis does not capture the effectiveness of innovative strategies across social media, it was beneficial to identify the use of social media channels and the interaction between destinations and visitors (Ashley & Tuten, 2015).

Fifth, an extensive list of items was included in the message format and message content analysis. However, there are others indicators that could be also included due to their influence on marketing effectiveness. Moreover, the measure used for marketing effectiveness was the number of positive reactions. Additional measures such as comments could be used in future research.

Finally, the findings from this research were limited to destinations, but it could be replicated across different tourism sectors that involve hedonic experiences, such as hotels, wineries, restaurants and so on.

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