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The image of Barcelona in Online Travel Reviews during 2017 Catalan independence process

Abstract

Since the emergence of Online Travel Reviews (OTRs), the collective co-creation of a destination brand image has been more evident than ever before. Stories and emotions expressed in these platforms by experienced tourists can significantly influence other users' intention to visit. This study explores the extent to which political matters like the incidents that occurred during the last quarter of 2017 related with the Catalan independence process may have a negative impact on the brand image of a destination. This paper has used a specific methodology for content analysis of social media in the field of tourism to study the worst rated OTRs (one-star) of seven different attractions of Barcelona in three social media platforms that are able to geolocate places (TripAdvisor, Google Maps and Facebook) to determine the nature, discourses and the emotions raised. Although most complaints refer to the intrinsic problems of the attractions like high entrance prices and long queues due to tourism overcrowding, results reveal that OTR platforms also include tourists' personal opinions on such issues as politics and religion. The originality of this research paper is that it delves into users' co-creation of destination brand image through the analysis of negative OTRs and the emotions expressed in their comments.

Keywords

Destination image, online travel reviews, user-generated content, emotions, social media, Barcelona.

1. Introduction

The image that users create about tourist destinations is a key element that influences their opinions (Li *et al.*, 2015) and their decisions to visit (Kim & Perdue, 2011). For years, communication by Destination Management Organisations (DMOs) has been one of the main information sources for the creation of this image. However, in the last decade, with the development of technology and the emergence of social media and review websites, users share their experiences and reviews and they contribute to the co-creation of destinations' image (Jacobsen & Munar, 2012). This has had several implications for tourist destination brands (Sigala, 2011).

Through User-Generated Content (UGC), users share their real tourist experiences with other tourists online (Jacobsen & Munar, 2012). UGC gives credibility among prospective tourists because it is perceived as unbiased information written outside the marketing parameters of DMOs (Huertas *et al.*, 2017) or other organisations with commercial interests

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(Ayeh *et al.*, 2013; Leung *et al.*, 2013). Consequently, UGC has a higher influence on the cocreation of destinations' image (Koltringer & Dickinger, 2015; Lu & Stepchenkova, 2015) and on the tourist decisions of other users (Liu & Park, 2015) than the official information published by DMOs (Papathanassis & Knolle, 2011).

Among all the content generated by users, Online Travel Reviews (OTRs) have proliferated especially (Baka, 2016; Marine-Roig, 2017a) and are the most consulted sources of digital information by users or potential tourists when planning their trips (Yoo & Gretzel, 2008). Nevertheless, these user OTRs can be either positive or negative, which may lead to the attraction to or the rejection of brands, products, and tourist destinations. Due to their potential to influence decision-making and the creation of destination images (Li *et al.*, 2009), further research into negative OTRs is required.

Academic studies that analyse OTRs focus rather on accommodation and other services (Vermeulen & Seegers, 2009; Sparks & Browning, 2011; Leung *et al.*, 2013) than attractions and tourist destinations (Jacobsen & Munar, 2012; Fang *et al.*, 2016; Marine-Roig, 2017a). Research into the latter typology is still scarce.

This study is focused on the co-created image of Barcelona. This is a well-known tourist destination that maintains its image among the top positions of worldwide rankings (Datzira-Masip & Poluzzi, 2014) and receives a large number of tourists annually (Marine-Roig & Anton-Clavé, 2015). In fact, Barcelona is the capital of Catalonia, an autonomous community and wealthy region in the Northeast part of Spain with 7.5 million people that has its own language, parliament, and sense of identity. In 2017, the Catalan government carried out a referendum to decide whether civilians wanted the independence of Catalonia from the Kingdom of Spain also known as the '1 October Referendum.' This was declared illegal by Spain's Constitutional Court, but it was still conducted. On that day, there were several clashes in the polling stations when the Spanish National Police tried to prevent people from voting (Minder & Barry, 2017). About 90% of Catalan voters backed independence, but turnout was only 43%. The Catalan Parliament declared Catalonia's independence on 27 October. As a reply, the Spanish Senate imposed direct rule by enforcing Article 155 of the Spanish Constitution and the Spanish government completely dissolved the Catalan elected parliament and called a snap for 21 December 2017 (BBC, 2018). The National Court imprisoned most of the elected politicians and the others were exiled in European countries. All these important political issues affected the image of Barcelona and there were claims from the media warning economic losses on the tourism sector (El Periódico, 2017; Guerrero, 2018). Given the increasing importance of users' OTRs in the co-creation of destination image (Li et al., 2009; Ho et al., 2012; Jabreel et al., 2017; Marine-Roig, 2017a), there is a need to find out if negative OTRs of Barcelona reflect the political conflict and can influence its destination image.

For all of the above, this study aims to find out the image that tourists' have of Barcelona by analysing all the negative OTRs of the most important tourist attractions of the city in different social media (Facebook, TripAdvisor and Google Maps), taking into account several communicative aspects that are fundamental in influencing users' decision–making such as type of comments and emotions. The objective of the paper is to gauge the extent to which the issue of Catalonia's political instability appears in these negative OTRs, how it is treated, and to see if this issue really may have a negative impact on the image of Barcelona.

2. Literature review

2.1. OTRs and co-creation of destination image

Online Travel Reviews (OTRs) are the most consulted user-generated content by potential tourists and have multiplied in recent years (Marine-Roig, 2017a). Moreover, tourist review sites like TripAdvisor or Holidaycheck are two of the most popular travel platforms (Papathanassis & Knolle, 2011). OTRs have a high impact on tourism decisions (Yoo & Gretzel, 2008), but they also influence image perceptions of destinations and relationships between destinations and users (Papathanassis & Knolle, 2011). OTRs are important factors in the cocreation of destination image (Li *et al.*, 2009; Ho *et al.*, 2012; Jabreel *et al.*, 2017; Marine-Roig, 2017a) and, therefore, their analysis is a good method to evaluate them (Marine-Roig, 2017a), as they gather the experiences, opinions and ratings of tourists at the destination.

Several authors and studies focusing on the paradigm of the co-creation of destination image (Aitken & Campelo, 2011; Kavaratzis, 2012; Ho *et al.*, 2012) explain the influence of user opinions in co-creation. With the emergence of social media, tourists have become relevant sources of information. Aitken & Campelo (2011) understand destination image as a collective process of creation among different stakeholders. Images are created in users' minds by the confluence of several sources of information from various stakeholders (Ho *et al.*, 2012). One of the most relevant stakeholder groups is tourists who have been to the destinations who share their experiences online (Jacobsen & Munar, 2012).

Tourists contribute to the construction of others' destination image by sharing their tourist experiences, including personal aspects and subjective comments (Cutler & Carmichael, 2010). Their interactions generate emotional connections, satisfaction and even loyalty to destinations while the tourist experience is taking place (Lugosi & Walls, 2013). And this shared emotional information may influence the image of destinations that audiences construct in their minds. Consequently, DMOs (Jabreel *et al.*, 2017) must analyse usergenerated content since according to the positive or negative experiences posted (Bowen & Clarke, 2002), they will influence the entire destination image in one way or another.

As Sparks & Browning (2011) show, users publish negative online reviews when they feel disappointed by a product, organisation or by a tourist destination (Buzinde *et al.*, 2010). Consumers consult online reviews to reduce risk and uncertainty in their purchasing decisions (Chen, 2008), and negative online reviews generate negative attitudes of users towards products or destinations (Lee, Park & Han, 2008), reduce brand value and inhibit consumer purchasing decisions (Dellarocas, 2003). Moreover, negative online reviews have a major influence than positive ones (Papathanassis & Knolle, 2011; Sparks & Browning, 2011), because they alert consumers of potential problems or fraud. Although negative online hotel reviews generate negative attitudes towards accommodation, Vermeulen & Seegers (2009) also demonstrated that they increased knowledge of hotels among users and also the chances of them being considered for future bookings, slightly reducing the effect of the negative impact.

In recent years, several studies (Marine-Roig & Anton-Clavé, 2015; Marine-Roig, 2017a) have used communication-based methods to analyse big data of OTR contents. These methods analyse a large number of OTRs in an automated way and have meant a great advance both for the academic and the professional fields. But they have limitations because they do not take into consideration certain communicative aspects of OTRs such as linguistic features, topic treatment, or useful information that it is also contained which may have a high influence on other users (Xiang *et al.*, 2017). Therefore, more studies focusing on OTRs and their communicative aspects are needed (Sparks & Browning, 2011; Xiang *et al.*, 2017).

Based on the aforementioned literature, the current study aims to analyse certain key communication aspects other than content in the OTRs of attractions that influence the creation of destination image, such as type of comments and emotions.

2.2. The influence of emotions and type of comments on the creation of destination image

Nowadays tourist experiences lived at the destination are so important (Ihamäki, 2012; Servidio & Ruffolo, 2016) that DMOs are currently working to portray their brands as unique places at which to live memorable and satisfying experiences (Lugosi & Walls, 2013; Tung & Ritchie, 2011). OTRs are based on the experiences of tourists that have travelled to them (Jacobsen & Munar, 2012) and are widely consulted by other users. Tourists are co-creators of experience image (Tung & Ritchie, 2011; Campos *et al.*, 2016; Prebensen *et al.*, 2013) and these experiences generate emotions (Tung & Ritchie, 2011; Rihova *et al.*, 2015) that have a positive impact on other users due to the socialisation they involve (De Rojas & Camarero, 2008).

Several studies have analysed the role of emotions in tourism experiences and in their sharing (Hosany, 2012; Hosany & Gilbert, 2010; Li & Cai, 2012). According to some authors (Hosany & Gilbert, 2010), emotions have a high impact and users even associate the shared emotional experience with the attractions of tourist destinations.

In addition, tourists like to share their experiences when they go on holiday. These stories play an important role in attracting users' attention (Servidio & Ruffolo, 2016) as they use first-person narrative. According to some authors (Lambert, 2010; Lorenzetti & Lugli, 2012), apart from the personal point of view, the rhythm of narrative and the emotional content are characteristics that highly influence users' feelings and opinions.

Although few studies have analysed the influence of tourists' personal stories in destination image co-creation and tourism-related decisions (Woodside *et al.*, 2007; Tussyadiah *et al.*, 2011), all of them stand out for their important influence. First-person stories of tourists who have previously been to a destination have a major influence than content created by DMOs because potential tourists seek to live experiences that are just as satisfying as those told in the OTRs. This is why this first-person narration has such an influence on the opinions and tourism-related decisions of other users (Woodside *et al.*, 2007) and on the generation of the image of destinations (Zaltman, 2003).

3. Methodology

Barcelona is the capital of Catalonia and has a renowned long-term brand image (Datzira-Masip & Poluzzi, 2014). Moreover, in the last 25 years, Barcelona has become one of the international tourist destinations of preference (Datzira-Masip & Poluzzi, 2014; Marine-Roig & Anton-Clavé, 2015). In fact, in 1990 the city received 1.7 million tourists but in 2017 the figure was 32 million (Burgen, 2018). This means that since Barcelona held the Olympic Games in 1992, the city has significantly increased its number of tourists and it has positioned itself among the top city brands in several worldwide rankings (Marine-Roig & Anton-Clavé, 2015). However, with the events and the unstable political situation lived in Catalonia and the city of Barcelona particularly since October 2017, this strong reputation may have been undermined.

Considering the influence of OTRs, the purpose of this paper is to analyse the complaints of tourists to Barcelona in the most popular social media platforms to determine if the events related to the Catalan independence process have had a negative effect on the image of the city and on what kind of discourse and emotions such complaints are based. To do so, based on a specific methodology for content analysis of social media in the field of tourism that includes qualitative and quantitative methods has been used (Krippendorff, 2004). The current study took posts of OTRs of Barcelona attractions as a unit of analysis and focused on the type of comments and emotions.

The objective criteria followed to select the sources of information are the following: that the social media platforms are widely popular among travellers, that they are able to geolocate places and can include users' comments in the geolocations and that text is more relevant than images/videos. Consequently, TripAdvisor with over 460 million monthly active users

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(TripAdvisor, 2018), Google Maps with over 1 billion users (Gibbs, 2015) and Facebook with more than 2.27 billion monthly active users (Abbruzzese, 2018) were selected.

It should be noted that these platforms do not offer a general page/review for the city of 'Barcelona' but give information on particular attractions. The sum of the discourses of all the attractions may generate a complete overview of Barcelona's image. Therefore, it was considered as a research objective criterion to select the seven most preferred attractions of Barcelona according to the users of these social media platforms. Only TripAdvisor suggests this classification (to see attractions of Barcelona according to travellers' preferences). These were Basilica of the Sagrada Família, the Gothic Cathedral, the Casa Batlló and Casa Milà art nouveau houses, the football stadium of F.C. Barcelona, known as Camp Nou, the street La Rambla and the modernist Parc Güell. All the attractions have official profiles in Google Maps except for La Rambla, as this platform geolocates places and this promenade comprises five different streets (Rambla Canaletes, Rambla dels Estudis, Rambla de les Flors, Rambla dels Caputxins and Rambla Santa Mònica) but does not have one entry for the umbrella concept.

The most tumultuous events related with the Catalan independence process took place during the last quarter of 2017 from 1 October, with the referendum on Catalan independence that ended up with several police charges and injured civilians, to 21 December, with parliamentary elections imposed by the Spanish government. Meanwhile, apart from the 1 October episodes of violence, there were two general strikes (3 October and 8 November), the unilateral declaration of Catalan independence (27 October) and numerous demonstrations for and against the independence. Thus, this study gathers all the posts uploaded between 1 October and 31 December 2017. Data collection was conducted during the third week of January 2018.

In short, this study concentrates on all the worst rated OTRs (one-star) written about seven different attractions of Barcelona in three social media platforms (TripAdvisor, Google Maps and Facebook) during the last trimester of 2017.

The units of measurement of the analysis covered the ratings of each attraction offered by the platforms as the authors of the study wished to verify the general levels of users' negativity in each platform and the typology of the OTRs, whether the reviews were written in the first person and shared a personal experience lived at the attraction (first-person stories) or they were comments that did not explain what had happened during their visit to the attraction (opinions). The topics described in the reviews and the objects of criticism were also issues covered in the analysis. They allowed discovering what kind of complaints users had and who they blamed for their resentments. This would help to identify if there were negative reviews unrelated to the services and responsibilities of the attractions and who were the affected actors. These two variables revealed negativity towards the Catalan conflict. Finally, the analysis also covered the emotions expressed by users. To do so, the analysis took into consideration previous studies that stressed the connection between emotions and tourist experiences through narratives (Bigné & Andreu, 2004) and used the list of six basic emotions of Servidio & Ruffolo (2016) to classify the reviews.

Table 1: Guide to units of measurement and categories covered in the analysis.

Theoretical basis	Units of measurement	Categories			
Gretzel et al. (2007); Gretzel & Yoo (2008)	Ratings and negative indexes	Total rating of the platform Total number of opinions			
GICLEGI & 100 (2000)	mackes	Total one-star opinions (most negative			
Hlee et al. (2018)		First-person stories			
	Typology of the OTR	Opinions Others			
De Ascaniis (2012); Marine-Roig (2017b)		Prices			
		Appearance			
		Service in situ			
	Contents described in the OTR	Service on the Internet			
		Overcrowded			
		Safety			
		Catalan independence			
		Others			
Marine-Roig (2019)		Tourist attraction			
	Actors that are being	Destination (Barcelona)			
	criticised in the OTR	Catalonia or Catalans			
		Others			
Bigné & Andreu (2004); Servidio & Ruffolo (2016)		Anger			
		Disgust			
		Fear			
	Basic emotions	Happiness			
		Sadness			
		Surprise			
		None			

Source: Own elaboration.

4. Results

4.1. Profile of the sample

The study gathered a total of 208 OTRs of the lowest-rated comments on seven attractions in Barcelona between October and December 2017. Most users (97%) wrote only one OTR message and the remaining 3% wrote between two and four OTRs. Therefore, users' negativity focuses on only one attraction.

In terms of platforms, TripAdvisor (51%) and Google Maps (46.2%) are the most represented platforms, whereas the number of comments found on Facebook during the last quarter of 2017 is limited to 2.9% of the sample. These results may suggest that Facebook is not a platform used for uploading tourist reviews, but to relate with other people even though Facebook is the platform that receives most posts on a general scale (see Table 3).

In reference to the representation of the attractions, over a quarter of the negative comments correspond to Camp Nou, the football stadium of F.C. Barcelona and its museum (25.5%); followed by Parc Güell, the public park designed by Antoni Gaudí to which entrance is no longer free-of-charge (22.6%); the Basilica of the Sagrada Família (19.2%), and with less presence are Casa Batlló (12%), Casa Milà (8.7%), La Rambla (8.2%) and the Cathedral in the Gothic Quarter (3.8%). Therefore, Camp Nou is the attraction that concentrates the most negative reviews.

4.2. Attraction ratings and negativity

Before focusing on the analysis of the negative OTRs, the distribution of negative and positive OTRs in the different platforms was observed. In general, all the attractions are very well rated by users in all the platforms analysed as the lowest rated is 4.0 out of 5 stars for La Rambla (on TripAdvisor) and the highest is a 4.8 out of 5 stars for the Basilica of Sagrada Família, Casa Batlló and the Cathedral (on Facebook). Thus, all the attractions enjoy high scores and this analysis is based on just a tiny fraction of the negative reviews that these attractions are given.

Table 2: General ratings of all the attractions according to platforms.

Attractions	Rated in TripAdvisor	Rated in Google Maps	Rated in Facebook		
Camp Nou	4.5 out of 5	4.5 out of 5	4.7 out of 5		
Parc Güell	4.5 out of 5	4.4 out of 5	4.5 out of 5		
Basilica of Sagrada Família	4.5 out of 5	4.7 out of 5	4.8 out of 5		
Casa Batlló	4.5 out of 5	4.6 out of 5	4.8 out of 5		
Casa Milà	4.5 out of 5	4.5 out of 5	4.7 out of 5		
La Rambla	4.0 out of 5	Does not exist	4.7 out of 5		
Cathedral	4.5 out of 5	4.5 out of 5	4.8 out of 5		

Source: Own elaboration. Data collection: 15-21 January 2018.

Apart from examining ratings, the total number of OTRs of each social media platform was also considered (see Table 3). The results show that the platform with the most online opinions is Facebook (with 316,763 OTRs), but users are more likely to use TripAdvisor (319,390) to rate attractions. This is because 90.4% of OTRs on Facebook are concentrated on only one attraction whereas the number of OTRs on TripAdvisor is more balanced among all the attractions. The attraction that concentrates most Facebook reviews is Camp Nou. It should be noted that it is not only an attraction, it is also home to F.C. Barcelona and it is widely known that sports stir passions. Hence there are more conversations. This is the reason why Camp Nou not only excels on Facebook but also on Google Maps.

Results also show that users of Facebook focus on this social media platform to express their discontent as the highest level of negativity focuses on this attraction with 4.86%, whereas on TripAdvisor it is 1.29%. Apart from Camp Nou, the other two worst-rated attractions with the lowest scores were La Rambla (3.41% on TripAdvisor and 3.49% on Facebook) and Parc Güell (1.44% on TripAdvisor and 2.40% on Facebook). However, the attractions with fewest low scores were Sagrada Família (0.59% of negativity on TripAdvisor and 1% on Facebook), Casa Batlló (0.61% on TripAdvisor and 1.20% on Facebook), and Casa Milà (0.74% on TripAdvisor and 0.93% on Facebook).

In the case of Google Maps, general negativity percentages could not be calculated as the platform does not provide the exact number of one-star opinions. However, this missing data has not affected the subsequent analysis.

Table 3: Number of negative OTRs of the attractions in relation to total number of OTRs per platform.

	Camp Nou	Parc Güell	Sagrada Família	Casa Batlló	Casa Milà	La Rambla	Cathedral	Total OTRs
Total opinions TripAdvisor	30,378	60,830	126,881	46,346	18,211	29,148	7,596	319,390
Total one-star opinions TripAdvisor	393	879	755	286	136	995	66	3,510
Negativity percentage TripAdvisor	1.29%	1.44%	0.59%	0.61%	0.74%	3.41%	0.86%	1.09%
Total opinions Google Maps	29,973	25,022	12,614	14,565	9,890	N/A	2,597	94,661
Total one-star opinions Google Maps	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
Negativity percentage Google Maps	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
Total opinions Facebook	349,768	3,788	14,080	16,081	2,349	315	382	386,763
Total one-star opinions Facebook	17,000	91	142	194	22	11	6	17,466
Negativity percentage Facebook	4.86%	2.40%	1.00%	1.20%	0.93%	3.49%	1.57%	4.51%

Source: Own elaboration. Data collection: 15-21 January 2018.

4.3. Typology of the negative OTRs

In terms of typology, 56.7% of the analysed negative OTRs contained opinions and 39.4% contained first-person stories as their comments included first-person experiences that occurred at the attractions. Opinions state facts which influence users less because they are less personal narrations and seek to give a false sense of objectivity. An example of an opinion is the following review:

Now looks like a Leroy Merlin's church. The modernity is stealing the romantic appeal of the best modernist churches [sic.] (OTR 118, Sagrada Família, Google Maps).

On the other hand, first-person stories' posts explain the experiences of users at the attraction. The way they are written – in the first-person and with a story contextualising users' opinions and emotions– leads to major credibility levels among the target audience (Pera, 2017; Woodside *et al.*, 2007).

Far too many people are allowed at once creating a claustrophobic atmosphere where you can't move, and you certainly cannot see or appreciate anything. My worst museum experience ever (OTR 40, Casa Batlló, TripAdvisor).

Even though the nature of OTR platforms is to share users' experiences, the results show that the number of negative opinions was higher than negative first-person stories' reviews.

Finally, although OTR platforms are meant to contain only reviews about tourist attractions, a few statements (8) were found that could neither be classified as opinions or as first-person stories' reviews (3.8%) because their content was not directly related to the attraction. These eight posts were related to football and political ideologies and indirectly linked to the Catalan independence process. In the case of football, there were four posts by

users of the Camp Nou attraction who stated that they were not fans of Barça. For instance, one user stated: 'I am a Real Madrid supporter' (OTR 165, Camp Nou, Google Maps), the team that is the natural antagonist of FC Barcelona.

The other four posts were direct disagreements with the Catalan independence process. One of them was a personal justification as to why the user was leaving the fan page of Casa Batlló, a Catalan iconic attraction, due to his disagreement with the ideological movement. The post said: 'I am unsubscribing from this page. I do not support independence' (OTR 205, Casa Batlló, Facebook). Another OTR was a justification about users' political reasons for not visiting the stadium of Camp Nou, 'I have never been there and I doubt I will as long as they don't applaud the national ANTHEM WHICH IS THE SPANISH ONE' [sic] (OTR 154, Camp Nou, Google Maps). The remaining two political messages were quite disturbing as the sentences belong to extreme right positions like 'I wish tanks would knock it [Sagrada Família] down' (OTR 114, Sagrada Família, Google Maps) or the salute used by soldiers during Franco's dictatorship 'Up Spain!' (OTR 157, Camp Nou, Google Maps).

4.4. Content of the negative OTRs

In relation to content, seven different topics emerged from the data: four of them were related with the attraction itself (appearance, price, service received in situ and service received through the Internet), two with the consequences and perils of tourism overcrowding (crowds of tourists or long queues and safety risks like pickpockets) and the last one about Catalan independence. Some of the OTRs could be classified into more than one theme.

The results show that users mostly complained about the high prices of the attractions (47.6%) whereas bad service or bad attention in situ (29.3%), the ugliness of the attractions (28.4%) and crowds of tourists or long queues at the entrances (22.6%) received a similar number of complaints. OTRs related with the Catalan independence process were covered in a minority of reviews (12%), but this topic received more attention than safety (5.3%) or bad service through the Internet (4.8%).

Some OTRs referred to events and inconveniences related to politics and the Catalan independence movement. In terms of attractions, the one that included most complaints on this topic is Camp Nou (24.6%), the stadium of F.C. Barcelona. This is mainly for two reasons: the first is that the team is popularly identified with the Catalan nation, even though it has not publically positioned itself in favour of Catalan independence, and the second is because of a wrongly managed crisis event with supporters at the match against U.D. Las Palmas that occurred on 1 October. That day, a match was scheduled but after the serious incidents between the Spanish security forces and voters at the polling stations, the football team decided to make a political statement against violence and sought to cancel the match. However, television rights prevailed over La Liga's interests and finally, the match was held behind closed doors. The supporters that were waiting outside Camp Nou were not duly informed of this decision and tickets were not refunded.

Place where politics is carried out and people are indoctrinated. My experience is terrible. Be careful if you go to this place, it is very dangerous. Very sad (OTR 146, Camp Nou, Google Maps).

Cancelling the game for the fans vs Las Palmas and not announcing it until 30 minutes before kick off when they clearly knew this was an option 3-4 hours before was poor. [...] It was extremely sad to see young kids (many tourist supporters) in tears with their parents not knowing what to do or say. There was no communication out of the ground for supporters, and if it wasn't for social media we would all still be there now waiting! (OTR 65, Camp Nou, TripAdvisor).

It must be highlighted that F.C. Barcelona is more than a soccer team. It is a civil religion and a national identity builder (Xifra, 2008). Shobe (2008) showed the important role of F.C. Barcelona in the construction of Catalan nationalism and national identity. There are many

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connections between F.C. Barcelona and Catalan nationalism. Consequently, we must take into consideration the bias of anti-Catalan sentiment in many of the negative comments of this attraction. Moreover, we also have to bear in mind that another bias related with the rivalry between football team clubs may be also present in negative OTRs.

Apart from the football stadium, Casa Batlló (8.3%) and Sagrada Família (7.7%) also received complaints related with the Catalan independence process. In their case, the reason is that on the 3 October, there was a general strike to protest against the violence exerted by Spanish law enforcement authorities, and these two attractions joined the strike. Most of the negative OTRs received in this category are accusations, without much context or reasoning about what motivated users to write them. The expressions were 'radicalisation,' 'dangerous' and 'shameful.' An anti-Catalan bias is shown in the following OTRs, more centred on political beliefs than on the tourist attractions.

Barcelona is not only modernism in architecture; it is also radicalism and deception. A place that denies its origins cannot be the support of any nation. Casa Batlló is a simple example of modernism with blue tiles. A city can't lean on such banal examples as Casa Batlló. Disappointing and dangerous the visit to Barcelona (OTR 32, Casa Batlló, TripAdvisor).

It was closed. They went on strike and closed museums and Sagrada Familia. So, Catalonians shooting themselves in the foot? Oh no, they can afford it. Sagrada Familia only: 3.000.000 visitors each year, paying between 15−29€. So about 60.000.000€ a year. For that one day, they lost 'just' about 150.000€. Well done! (OTR 21, Sagrada Família, TripAdvisor).

Because of Tuesday's strike, it was closed. Shameful (OTR 108, Sagrada Família, Google Maps).

The analysis has also observed if OTRs contained bad language. None was used in 94% and 6% included insults like 'scoundrels,' 'idiots,' 'diarrhoea,' 'trash' and 'catalufos,' in reference to Catalan people, and 'livestock' and 'zoo' to refer to the massification of tourists.

Results show that 92.8% of the OTRs complain about the attractions themselves and only 3.4% about Catalans or Catalonia and 2.9% about Barcelona as a tourist destination. However, we must take into account that an anti-Catalan bias may influence in many negative OTRs with evident or underlying ways. Even though this, it is evident that most of the OTRs really refer to the attraction.

4.5. Analysis of emotions

According to Servidio & Ruffolo (2016), basic emotions can be classified as disgust, happiness, fear, anger, surprise, or sadness. The current research used this list to classify the negative OTRs. Some of them encountered mixed emotions in the same review. Those cases were allocated in more than one theme.

As expected, none of the negative OTRs fell into the *happiness* feeling as the sample focused only on the lowest-rated posts. The results show that *disgust* (45.5%) and *sadness* (43%) were the most remarkable feelings. The first category included expressions such as 'ugly,' 'dirty' and 'horrible,' whereas the latter collected expressions like 'what a shame,' 'disappointment' and 'pity.' *Anger* was also a prominent feeling in the OTRs (35.5%). It included the expressions 'hate,' 'dreadful,' 'outraged' along with some insults. Some of the expressions used for *surprise* (17%) were 'I would never have imagined' or 'it exceeded my expectations.' It was interesting to observe that in many cases *anger* and *sadness*, *sadness* and *disgust* or *disgust* and *anger* were the three most common emotion combinations found in one OTR. Finally, *fear* was the scarcest emotion (4.5%) represented with the expressions: 'watch out!,' 'be careful' and 'risky'; and in 7% of the OTRs, no emotion could be detected.

None Surprise Sadness Happiness Fear 4.5% Disgust Anger

Figure 1: User emotions recorded in the OTRs.

Source: Own elaboration.

It is interesting to observe that while feelings like sadness (27.5%) and anger (21.5%) are highly prominent in first-person stories, opinion OTRs excel in disgust (31.5%) (see Figure 2). This is because the first-person stories typology gives more context of the situation and emotions can be better appreciated whereas the feelings expressed through opinion are opaquer and it is difficult to see where the negativity comes from. Moreover, in 7% of opinions no emotion at all could be found, whereas all the OTRs of first-person stories type contain at least one.

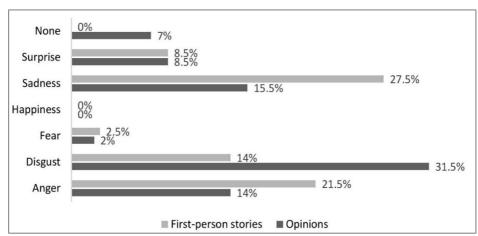


Figure 2: User emotions according to the typology of OTRs.

Source: Own elaboration.

The study also reveals users' emotions for each attraction. Therefore, findings show that one of the most famous streets of Barcelona, La Rambla, is worryingly perceived as a disgusting and fearful attraction due to its dirty appearance, the high concentration of tourists and because it is a well-known spot for pickpockets. However, Casa Batlló and Parc Güell are the two attractions that disappoint tourists the most due to their entrance prices. This information can be very useful for the Barcelona authorities and DMOs managing these attractions, as they may be trustworthy sources of information to overcome these problems.

5. Discussion and conclusions

As OTRs written by tourists co-create destination image, these discourses may help DMOs to evaluate their strengths and weaknesses and plan a marketing campaign accordingly to address or enhance these views. However, the study shows that there are few negative OTRs

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with one-star among all the published OTRs of the Barcelona attractions analysed. Highly negative opinions only represent between 1.2% and 4.8% of the total published OTRs, depending on the platform. This means that the negative impact that these one-star OTRs may have on the co-creation of the image of Barcelona is extremely scarce.

This study was comprised of one-star OTRs that were collected during the last quarter of 2017 when Barcelona experienced several events related to the Catalan independence process. However, these events did not imply that tourists were mainly concerned about this issue as only 12% of the negative OTRs referred to it. Tourists were far more annoyed and preoccupied by high prices, bad service in situ and the appearance of the city's attractions, which are permanent topics intrinsic to any tourist destination. The majority of reviews that referred to political issues were complaints about the bad management of the attractions (failure to inform of the cancellation of the match between F.C. Barcelona and Las Palmas at Camp Nou) or complaints about not opening on strike days (Sagrada Família and Casa Batlló). Thus, the vast majority of reviews complained about the attractions themselves, not mentioning contextual matters.

However, the function of the platforms analysed is to share users' tourist experiences, not political statements. Thus, it is surprising to discover that these kinds of platforms can also contain tourists' discontent about issues that are scarcely related with the attraction itself and give more information about personal opinions such as politics and religion. These reviews, even though they show an anti-Catalan bias, may also influence in the co-creation of the brand image. However, evidences for a significantly answer are weak due to the reduced number of found negative posts related with the Catalan independence process.

In terms of results by type of OTR, one would assume that first-person stories would be the preferred option in online platforms for its intrinsic nature, as the main function of OTRs is for tourists to share reviews and personal stories about their experiences at the destination. However, results show the opposite of this assumption, as the majority of users opted to post opinions rather than first-person stories' reviews. In relation to emotions, disgust was most identified with users who post their opinions. On the other hand, first-person reviews were more emotional. Messages expressing sadness and anger were the most remarkable for this category. Consequently, in accordance with previous academic literature (Servidio & Ruffolo, 2016; Lambert, 2010; Lorenzetti & Lugli, 2012), this study shows that first-person stories' reviews have a further impact on destination image and on the decision-making of prospective tourists because they express more emotions.

One of the most relevant contributions of the present study is that it delves into users' co-creation of destination brand image through the analysis of negative OTRs. DMOs should take them as a reliable source to detect visitor perceptions because they help to complete the image of attractions and destinations and the opinions they reflect are highly influential for prospective tourists.

Another contribution of this research is its analysis of the type of comments and emotions of negative OTRs, which has enriched the simple content analysis. This study has confirmed that first-person OTRs express better and more diverse emotions than the opinions expressed in OTRs, since in the latter, no emotion at all could be identified. However, in terms of typology it can be seen that opinions prevailed over first-person contents. It would therefore seem that in the negative OTRs, tourists prefer to share their opinions rather than their real experiences at the destination. This is related with the showed anti-Catalan bias that is more centred on political beliefs than on their experiences in tourist attractions.

Finally, the third contribution of this research is that it has proved that despite being found in low percentages, users express and share their political opinions in OTR platforms. Consequently, their personal opinions also contribute to the creation of the destination image and these may influence its perception by potential tourists.

6. Limitations of the study and future research

The study is based on the content analysis of the negative OTRs of tourists to Barcelona, basically on the communication of their complaints, stories and emotional feelings. Obviously, these tourists went ahead with their planned holidays and decided to go to Barcelona. However, destination image is closely related to holiday decision–making. Consequently, this study does not include the opinions of potential tourists who, influenced by the media, declined to spend their holidays in Barcelona due to political instability. It would be interesting to develop future research that includes these actors. In addition, the political issue is far from being solved soon, and consequently, it would be suitable to repeat this research in the near future to see the evolution of this matter and its impact on the Barcelona and Catalonia brand images.

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