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GRADO EN TURISMO

Digital Marketing as a Tool for Tourism Promotion: Destination Branding in Spain

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**DIGITAL MARKETING AS A TOOL FOR TOURISM PROMOTION: DESTINATION
BRANDING IN SPAIN**

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SUMMARY:

Digital Marketing is the new reality when it comes to the promotion of tourist destinations. Nowadays, tourists are more demanding than ever as they expect personalized treatment throughout their entire experience. To face this challenge, Spain's National Tourist Office (Tourspain) opts for a destination branding strategy. It is supported by the Spain brand and partially carried out through digital marketing channels. This paper provides a theoretical base of the main concepts of Digital Marketing and Destination Branding, followed by an evaluation of Tourspain's effective marketing actions such as Social Media Marketing, international advertisement campaigns, and the official tourism portal.

KEYWORDS:

Digital Marketing, Destination, Social Media, Brand, Tourism

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1 CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTONAL CHAPTER

1.1 INTRODUCTION

Who isn't familiar with this scenario? While scrolling through Facebook & Co. or while checking the latest news on the Internet, an ad pops up. What appears to be a simple advertisement is ideally the result of a carefully designed digital marketing strategy. We have become used to the fact that a big part of Marketing is now happening online, and this trend does not come as a surprise: currently, nearly 60 percent of the global population actively uses the Internet, while in Spain, Internet users make up almost 91 percent (Kemp, 2021).

The increasing digitization of today's world has created a more complex and competitive marketplace, that requires companies to position themselves and compete online to connect with the users on an emotional level. Long gone are the times when it was enough to offer a great product, nowadays the consumer's expectations are even more demanding. Since the tendencies of Digital Marketing are changing rapidly, due to the constant development of new technologies and trends, the marketing strategy needs to be adjusted consistently.

Digital Marketing not only allows the promotion of products, but it is also employed in service-orientated sectors such as the tourism industry. This paper explores a side of tourism marketing that is often overlooked as it presents its own characteristics, and is usually carried out by public agencies, known as Destination Branding. In this context, Spain provides a great example since it actively markets the destination under the name of the Spain brand to international tourists.

Regarding the structure of the research, we begin by explaining the theory behind a successful digital marketing strategy. This includes a description of the origin and characteristics of Digital Marketing, which we continue by presenting a selection of the main channels, and an overview of its impact. Secondly, we explore the possibilities of Destination Branding and analyze its application in Spain which is under the responsibility of the National Tourist Office (Tourspain).

The repositioning of the Spain brand and the destination's current role in the tourism industry are the focus of that section, which sets the base for a more practical approach in the last part of the paper. Here, we analyze the implementation and the level of success of Tourspain's digital Destination Branding, with a special reference to the communication strategy that was implemented to face the effects of the pandemic. Finally, we note that the research interest is thematically limited to B2C (i.e., business to customer) marketing and the promotion of Spain on a national level.

1.2 JUSTIFICATION

The growing importance of the Internet in current marketing strategies, combined with the popularity of Spain as a travel destination give reasons to further analyze the country's digital marketing efforts. When we talk about Digital Marketing, whether it is in a lecture or a professional setting, we rarely associate it with the promotion of a tourist destination. But with the rising number of Internet users, social media platforms, and other new technologies, it has become crucial to be present online, even for a consolidated destination like Spain.

The fact that the concept of Digital Marketing is still evolving, is one of the motivations for this paper. Because of the often unexpected changes that generate both, opportunities and challenges, it is necessary to provide the latest information on current trends and developments. We cannot ignore the role Digital Marketing plays, especially

while the tourism industry faces the disastrous effects of the ongoing global health crisis. Due to lockdown restrictions, many people are bound to their mobile devices or computers, so it is no longer a question about “if” a destination should carry out digital marketing practices, but “how”.

The branding and promotion of an entire country differ in many ways from how companies market their individual products. The brand image of a destination is often influenced by aspects that cannot be controlled directly such as outdated stereotypes, its history, the political situation, or the physical attractors. That is the reason why it is of our interest to get to the core of Spain’s branding strategy, with a special focus on Digital Marketing.

1.3 OBJECTIVES

The main purpose of this study is to explore the concept and tools of Digital Marketing with a focus on Destination Branding and to analyze its application to Spain. To achieve this general objective, we propose the following secondary objectives:

- Identify the theoretical base of Digital Marketing regarding its evolution and characteristics.
- Show the opportunities and challenges of Digital Marketing.
- Define the concept of Destination Branding and evaluate the characteristics and positioning of the Spain brand in the tourism industry.
- Describe the behavior and demands of digital users, and more specifically, of Spain’s tourist markets.
- Apply the acquired knowledge to a case study of digital marketing communications by the National Tourist Office to draw conclusions about the effective outcome.

1.4 METHODOLOGY

The methods that were used to conduct this investigation are of different nature. For the first part of the paper, we relied on the revision and consultation of bibliographic material such as books, manuals, e-books, websites, government or journal articles, videos, academic publications, and statistical studies. They are therefore considered secondary sources and have been of great value for the elaboration and understanding of the conceptual base of the investigation.

To support the theoretical explanations, we made use of examples that are the result of our own observations. Since this paper is focused on a digital setting, it was possible to choose from a variety of posts, videos, or articles to compare the theory that we elaborated in the first half of the investigation, with the actual application. With the vast amount of diverse content, it was important to carefully select only the most relevant examples. That is why we gave special attention to the Official Tourism Portal by Tourspain and their communications on social media platforms.

In short, we employed a mix of both secondary and primary sources. Especially the case study is supported by primary data that was collected and later structured to reach quantitative and qualitative conclusions. The majority of the sources are either in Spanish or in English, but we have also consulted German content to expand the reach of the results. Considering that the tourism industry and Digital Marketing are topics of international interest, it is understandable that many authors publish their works in English. Therefore, it has been very beneficial to be able to choose from a variety of resources, without the limitations of a language barrier.

2 CHAPTER 2: DIGITAL MARKETING

It is crucial to understand the general characteristics of Digital Marketing as well as its origin and application before we can further analyze digital campaigns of Spain as a travel destination. In the following chapter, we will set a conceptual base of various online marketing practices and draw the first conclusions regarding their impact.

2.1 CONCEPT

Digital Marketing is a rather new marketing practice; therefore, its characteristics and strategies are constantly adapting to keep up with current technological advancements and advertising trends. It cannot be treated as an isolated concept, instead, we find its conceptual framework in traditional offline techniques which are applied to a digital setting (Centenero de Arce, 2019). The American Marketing Association (2021) defines Digital Marketing as following:

The use of digital or social channels to promote a brand or reach consumers. This includes online marketing efforts conducted on the internet. In the process of conducting digital marketing, a business might leverage websites, search engines, blogs, social media, video, email and similar channels to reach customers. (para. 4)

In this definition, the Internet presence is of great importance, so to successfully make use of these online channels it is important to modify; but not abandon; traditional methods. Digital Marketing can be considered complementary and should provide added value to our long-established methods.

A common offline technique is the Marketing Mix, a marketing tool designed to help companies establish the ideal strategies regarding product, price, promotion, and place. In 1990, in the magazine *Advertising Age*, Robert F. Lauterborn (as cited in Shum Xie, 2019) reinterprets these principles to adapt better to Digital Marketing, as following: consumer, cost, communication, and convenience. Additionally (Shum Xie, 2019), it may include content, community, and connection. We can see that the main focus has shifted from the product to the consumer. As a result, digital market campaigns center their efforts toward understanding the consumers' needs and providing them with an individualized response.

According to Shum Xie (2019), we can define certain characteristics that are unique to this type of advertising: It allows companies to send a more personalized message to a type of consumer who responds in real-time, giving them the chance to advertise their brand through two-way communication. While digital marketing campaigns can reach big masses, it is also possible to segment the market, making use of detailed user-provided databases, such as Big Data. With this information, users can be targeted through emotions and experiences while gaining confidence in the brand.

2.2 FROM TRADITIONAL MARKETING TO DIGITAL MARKETING

As we have mentioned above, Digital Marketing revolutionizes traditional marketing strategies, in an attempt to better understand the consumers' demands and make use of new technologies. The transition from a product-based to a consumer-based orientation; or in other words the shift from Marketing 1.0 to Marketing 2.0 (Shum Xie, 2019); has been influenced by technological advancements, proving the importance of Digital Marketing.

The introduction of the Internet and its increasing usage by the general population toward the end of the 20th century changed the way companies could reach customers. The aim

was no longer to bombard the masses with generic messages, instead, companies started to personalize their marketing communications. According to Asensio (2018), “advertisers can now look at consumers and modify the message to fit their particular tastes” (p.6). In response to the positive evolution of Digital Marketing, in 2009 Marc Cortés defined ten necessary changes to adapt to online data-driven marketing:

1. **From “me” to “us”.** Consumers are now prosumers (producer + consumer). They are considered social elements who collaborate, participate and interact within one commonly shared network.
2. **From interrupting the consumer with publicity to starting a conversation to gain their respect.**
3. **From self-initiative to customer initiative.**
4. **From product to engagement.** The goal is to convert consumers of the product into followers of the brand.
5. **From publicity to experience.** Companies should no longer chase the customer, instead, they should seek their attention by using emotions to create experiences.
6. **From computers to “always connected”.** Users are connected 24/7 from different devices and different places. This calls for new standards, solutions, and an integral vision of the client.
7. **From brochures to recommendations.** Companies need to be transparent and open for conversation, given that potential consumers value other consumers’ opinions and recommendations.
8. **From the individual to the community.** Consumers come in contact with each other and form commonly shared opinions.
9. **From egocentricity to corporate reputation.** To understand and connect with the client, companies need to listen, take note, analyze, learn and provide an appropriate answer.
10. **From assumption to web analytics.** New tools allow companies to measure the impact of their digital marketing actions in real-time, so they can adapt to the consumer. They are now the center of attention, or in other words: The client is king.

We conclude that digital marketing strategies differ from those of traditional mass marketing. This tendency is not only based on the new possibilities of personalization, but it is rather a response to the general changes in consumers’ behavior. When we look at the evolution of tourism demands, we observe that the new tourist pursues authenticity and individualization (European Parliament, 2015), much to the contrary of the traditional mass tourist. Tourism nowadays is about creating positive experiences, so this is where Digital Marketing falls into place.

Most companies that have long-established the new rules of marketing are now looking for even better solutions. Marketing 3.0 is based on values and its purpose is to contribute to a better world through the brand, whereas Marketing 4.0 is centered on building connections and conversations, aiming to collaborate with the user (Shum Xie, 2019). We consider them important additions to Digital Marketing, but the crucial point for its successful development was the introduction of Marketing 2.0.

2.3 CHANNELS

Offline marketing primarily uses one or multiple channels to distribute the product to the (potential) consumer, but online advertising aims to further collaborate with the users and learn more about their needs (Wrigley & Straker, 2018). We have mentioned earlier that Digital Marketing proposes a bilateral contact with the user to increase engagement

with the brand. As specified by Wrigley and Straker (2018), “a channel refers to how a company communicates and reaches its customers to deliver its value proposition” (p.15).

Because of constant technological innovation, some channels will lose importance in the future, whereas others are still emerging. We have to note that the following represent only a selection of well-established channels. The American Marketing Association (2021) defines eight main channels to target online audiences: Search Engine Optimization (SEO), Search Engine Marketing, Pay-Per-Click, Social Media Marketing (SMM), Email Marketing, Affiliate Marketing, Content Marketing, and Native Marketing. By means of examples with touristic content, we will further describe SEO, SMM, and Native Marketing.

2.3.1 Search Engine Optimization

SEO consists of various actions to achieve the highest possible positioning of a website in the organic search results of the search engine. Organic search results appear below the paid results and include all free traffic. Companies need to study how the search engines classify websites by relevance, so they can improve the quality of traffic (i.e., attract only users who are interested in the brand), and raise the number of visits (MOZ, 2019).

There are various aspects responsible for the order of the results, which we can classify into two groups: On-page factors and off-page factors. The first one refers to optimizing the parts of the website that are subjected to the control of the company. This includes the improvement of the website’s HTML and content. On the contrary, off-page factors can only be indirectly influenced by the company, since they are not related to the website itself. The main focus is therefore to create a positive perception of the brand and attract users through recommendations and inbound links leading to the website (Hernández Dauder, Estrade Nieto, & Jordán Soro, 2020).

In the following two figures, we can observe the distribution of search results after conducting a simple Google search for flights. The results coincide with our previous explanation, since the paid advertisement in figure 2.1, appears first, followed by the organic results in figure 2.2. We see that the first airline to appear as an organic result is Lufthansa, one of the largest traditional airlines in Europe.

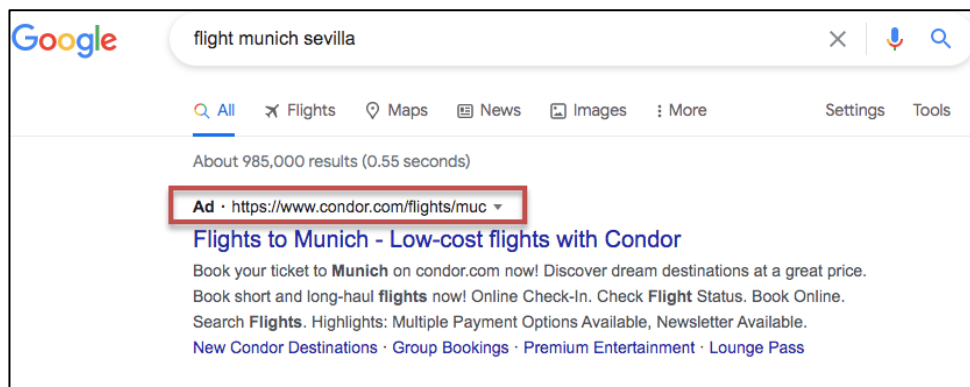


Figure 2.1. Paid search results (search engine: Google)

Source: Screenshot taken by the author after conducting a search for flights

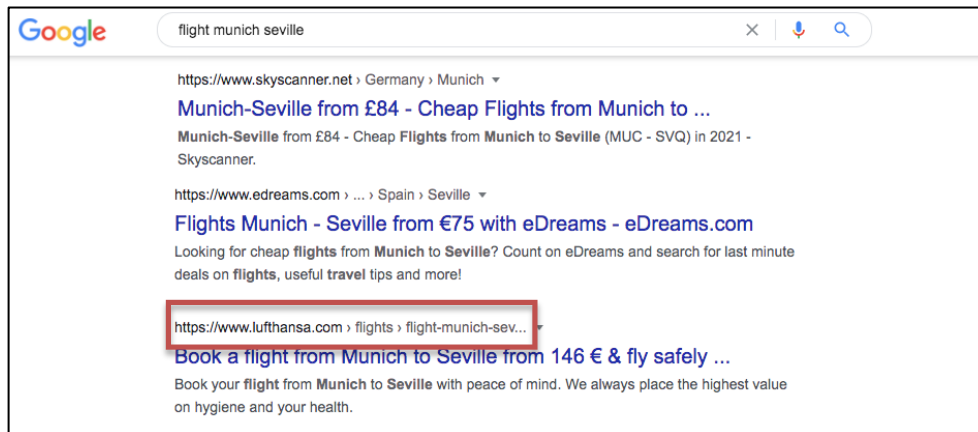


Figure 2.2. Organic search results and objective of SEO (search engine: Google)

Source: Screenshot taken by the author after conducting a search for flights

These preceding practices are also called White Hat SEO. Unfortunately, some companies abuse the possibilities of Search Engine Optimization to quickly improve their ranking through unethical and even penalizable activities. This is considered Black Hat SEO and it consists of (Alcoverro, 2020; Betancourt, 2021):

- **Keyword Stuffing.** Excessive use of keywords to increase the website's ranking.
- **Cloaking.** Misleading titles which do not coincide with the actual content of the website but aim to position it highly.
- **Spinning.** Editing articles with the help of computer software and reposting them as original content.
- **Hidden text.** The text seen by the user does not coincide with the original text, containing occulted elements such as keywords written in the same color as the background of the website.
- **Buying and selling of links.** Inbound links must be obtained organically through ethical SEO techniques.
- **Spam.**

2.3.2 Social Media Marketing

SMM offers some of the best opportunities to reach a broad audience, regardless of their social background, beliefs, age, gender, or location. As of January 2021, there are 4.2 billion social media users worldwide, who make up more than half of the global population. The average time spent on social media per user amounts to 2 hours and 25 minutes daily (Kemp, 2021). It is therefore a useful channel to transmit information about the brand, embedded in users' everyday activities.

In addition, users can create their own content and share their opinions through photos, videos, posts, etc. Consequently, it is not only possible to learn more about them but also to use the level of active participation as a tool to reach fellow users. Most social media platforms adapt to the person's preferences, establishing smaller networks between people with similar interests. Especially in the professional environment, websites such as LinkedIn create important networks between professionals (Berenguer, 2019).

In descending order of importance, Facebook, YouTube, WhatsApp, Facebook Messenger, and Instagram count the highest user base, while the first three account for more than two billion users each (Kemp, 2021). The current health crisis caused by COVID-19 has surely impacted the positive evolution of Social Media, with new platforms gaining popularity rapidly.

In this matter, we want to mention TikTok (cf. <https://www.tiktok.com/>), a Chinese social media platform where users can share self-produced video clips as well as comment and react to them. The service received special media attention, when American ex-president D. Trump announced in September of 2020, that he would ban TikTok nationwide, due to data protection concerns (Leskin, 2020).

We have to remember that users take part in Social Media voluntarily, so companies need to create content that informs about the values of the brand but also entertains. The European low-cost airline Ryanair provides a great example with its TikTok account (cf. <https://www.tiktok.com/@ryanair>) which features various video clips recreating current trends of the TikTok community, as captured in figure 2.3. The content makes the airline appear approachable; therefore, the user perceives the company as equal. As of April 07, 2021, the account has accumulated over 11.6 million likes and videos with the hashtag “#ryanair” have received approximately 158.4 million views.

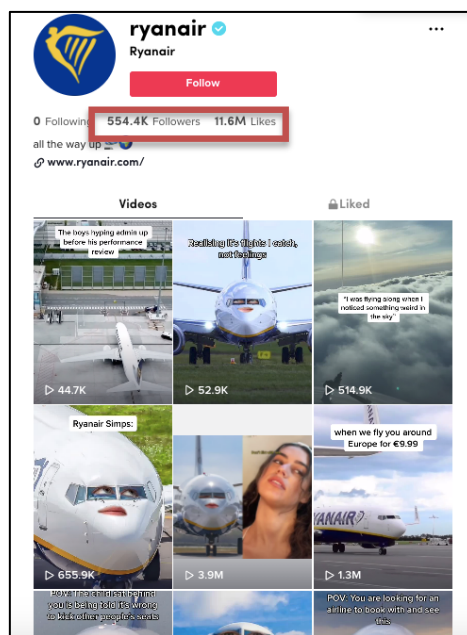


Figure 2.3. Ryanairs TikTok account

Source: Screenshot taken by the author from <https://www.tiktok.com/@ryanair>

2.3.3 Native Marketing

As stated by Tomás, Cardona, and Roberts (n.d.), “*native advertising is a non-intrusive ad format that is based on integrating an advertisement into the natural editorial style or content of a website or news platform*” (p. 5). As opposed to traditional advertising, Native Marketing consists of camouflaging the ads as part of the website, so that the user does not perceive them in a disruptive way. Instead, it is fundamental to approach the consumer naturally, through relevant content, to gain their trust and attention (Tomás, Boada, de Pouplana & Cardona, n.d.). The goal is to gradually inform the user about the brand, without causing negative emotions, which could result in a poor image.

Even though there is a great variety of native marketing advertisements, we observe certain characteristics that native ads have in common. The format and style of the ad are based on the website’s content, as long as the ads are still identified as such. Engagement is key to attracting potential clients, so the ads create a necessity and then present the product or service as a solution. Lastly, advertisements need to make use of the different possibilities each device or platform presents and adjust its content accordingly (Tomás, Boada, et al., n.d.).

We can further divide native publicity into three groups: (a) branded content, which includes all of the content concerning the brand created by third parties, such as social media influencers; (b) native display ads, which merge completely with the app or website and are no longer perceived negatively; and (c) content ads, which appear to the user in the form of suggested content, such as videos, articles, blogs, etc. (Tomás, Boada, et al., n.d.). Employing figures 2.4., 2.5., and 2.6. we demonstrate them respectively.

As we can see in figure 2.4., this Instagram post was not published by the travel company in question (Visit Idaho), but it was uploaded by a travel influencer called Makepeace Family Travel (2021). In the caption of the post, the creator describes the personal experience they had in Idaho but provides no details about the company. It is therefore not perceived as an intrusive message but gives the user the chance to decide whether they want to learn more about the company through the link above the image.



Figure 2.4. Paid partnership post by a travel influencer (platform: Instagram)

Source: Screenshot taken by the author from <https://www.instagram.com/ytravelblog/>

We verify in figure 2.5., that this Facebook post is marked as an ad beneath the account's name with the word "Gesponsert" [sponsored]. It blends in seamlessly with the format of the newsfeed, as it is possible to like, comment, and share the ad. This native advertisement makes use of what we have mentioned earlier: it reminds the user of a need (i.e., sun and beach) and then resolves it with a promotion and the option to reserve a stay at the resort.



Figure 2.5. Native display ad of a resort (platform: Facebook)

Source: Screenshot taken by the author from her personal newsfeed

To conclude this series of examples, in figure 2.6. we note the content ads following an electronic newspaper article about a current tourism matter. In this case, they make up half of the recommended articles and can only be distinguished by the indication of the source and the word “Patrocinado” [sponsored]. After conducting various searches for sponsored content, it was not possible to find tourism-related ads, so we conclude that content ads are not necessarily based on the topic of the original article.



Figure 2.6. Content ads following an electronic newspaper article about tourism

Source: Screenshot taken by the author from the advertisement section underneath the article: https://sevilla.abc.es/opinion/sevi-manuel-cardenete-turismo-necesita-vacunas-202104080939_noticia.html

2.4 REPERCUSSIONS

Based on the previous information, the following tables represent an overview of the repercussions for the two key players in Digital Marketing: the company in table 2.1. and the user in table 2.2. We structure the results in two parts so we can reflect the advantages and disadvantages of Digital Marketing, individually for both players. As we stated earlier, the concept of this marketing practice is constantly evolving, therefore the following conclusions are merely selective.

Opportunities	Challenges
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Global reach. - Big databases and real-time response to measure the immediate impact of their marketing efforts. - Campaigns can be launched 24/7. - Adaptable to all types of companies, including small businesses. - Reduced costs compared to traditional marketing. - Improvement of the product through feedback. - Active engagement with the consumer. - Fomentation of customer loyalty as they turn into followers. - Possibility to segment users and personalize content. - Through relevant content is it possible to promote the values of the brand and create a good image. - It is not confined to a physical space, which is especially valuable in times of Covid-19. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Impossible to control whether individuals harm the company's reputation through negative feedback. - Consumers are more demanding and have higher expectations. - Companies must transmit values and direct their efforts towards environmental and social issues. - Continuous training and education as trends change rapidly. - Many users do not have the buying power to purchase the advertised product. - Strong competition and difficulty standing out since the content has to be engaging but also relevant and informative. - Digital advertisement often leads to consumers purchasing the product in-store, which makes it difficult to measure its impact.

Table 2.1. Repercussions of Digital Marketing for the company

Source: Elaborated by the author based on NI Business Info, n.d., and Desai, 2019. Last point based on Asensio, 2018.

Opportunities	Challenges
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Become a follower of the brand and share opinions with the company and other consumers. - Greater influence regarding the product and the content they want to see. - Possibility to represent the brand as an influencer. - Personalized information and therefore relevant to the user. - Numerous companies competing for followers offer a great variety of options for the consumer. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - People who do not have access or the knowledge to use the Internet are excluded from valuable information that is only available online such as promotions, launches, etc. - Difficulty distinguishing content from advertisement (e.g., Native Marketing). - Content is purposely engaging to draw the users' attention to the advertisement. - Consumers need to disregard necessities that are being created 24/7 and make reasonable choices between a vast amount of offers. - Users' data and time are used for marketing purposes, which causes distrust toward the company and the platform.

Table 2.2. Repercussions of Digital Marketing for the (potential) consumer

Source: Elaborated by the author based on NI Business Info, n.d., and Desai, 2019.

3 CHAPTER 3: DESTINATION BRANDING

The tourism industry makes use of various online marketing techniques, but for reasons of length limitations, we are going to focus on one particular based on the promotion of a travel destination. We can understand a tourism destination as a city, region, country, or any other specific place,

in which a visitor can spend an overnight. It is the cluster (co-location) of products and services, and of activities and experiences along the tourism value chain.... It is also intangible with its image and identity which may influence its market competitiveness. (World Tourism Organization, 2019, p.14)

The tourist's value perception of a destination depends on five key elements (Camilleri, 2019). First of all, easy access to the destination has to be guaranteed. This is possible in the form of transport or through other types of appropriate infrastructure that allow tourists to access the destination on foot. Secondly, the destination has to offer a wide range of accommodation regarding prices and characteristics. Also directly related to the tourists' motivation are the attractions the destination offers. They range from tangible attractions, such as natural resources or monuments, to attractions that create experiences, such as events, the nightlife, or the gastronomy. Penultimately, tourists value the possibility to engage in activities during their vacation, which can be of any kind. Finally, it is essential to provide amenities such as infrastructure and police presence to ensure a secure and comfortable stay for the tourist.

Optimizing these five key elements is not the only way to raise the value of a destination. Some rely on brands to promote the destination's competitive identity, or in other words, what makes it different and attractive to tourists (Anholt, World Tourism Organization, & European Travel Commission, 2009). From a more general viewpoint, brands lead consumers to associate certain features with the product and are therefore "*a marketer's major tool for creating product differentiation*" (Kotler & Gertner, 2004, p. 40). Especially for consolidated travel destinations like Spain, the creation of a brand can be an important factor in promoting the country to tourists.

Before we can further analyze Spain's brand *España* [Spain], we need to explain the function of destination brands. We can understand it as the DNA, the essence, or the sum of the core values of the destination. The popularity of a destination no longer depends exclusively on the product and its price, but it is important to transmit emotional aspects as well. For instance, they can refer to experiences or feelings, which altogether create a unique personality. Tangible characteristics, such as natural resources, monuments, and other physical attractors, are still influential in the tourist's decision, but the focus must lie on marketing the brand's identity (Anholt et al., 2009).

A lasting competitive identity can only be established if the brand promotes relevant attributes and values which are permanently associated with the destination. But consistency is not the only element of a successful brand. These unique attributes need to add enough value to the destination to differentiate it from competitors with similar physical characteristics. Additionally, a well-rounded brand is worthless if it is not recognized by potential tourists. The objective of Destination Branding is therefore to spread awareness about the unique assets of an area or place, to gain tourists' loyalty, and to improve their perceived image (Anholt et al., 2009).

A common problem with individual perceptions is that they do not, or only partially, coincide with the reality promoted by the destination. As a result, the brand must be present in various marketing channels to send a consistent image to all consumer segments. We can consider the destination brand as a combination of the portrayed image by public organizations, such as the National Tourist Office (Tourspain) in the case of Spain, and the tourists' subjective perception (Anholt et al., 2009).

Ideally, tourists move along the brand continuum defined by Anholt, the World Tourism Organization, and the European Travel Commission (2009), which we can observe in figure 3.1. Destination marketing targets potential tourists even before they are aware of the destination's assets to turn them into customers. During their stay, it is important to ensure that the destination meets their expectations so that they leave as satisfied tourists. Including after the vacation, it is key to foment customer loyalty and to promote them into advocates or; the equivalent in Digital Marketing; followers of the brand.

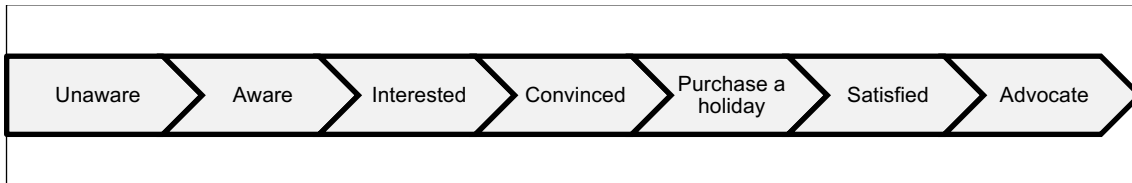


Figure 3.1. The brand continuum

Source: Anholt, World Tourism Organization, & European Travel Commission (2009, p. xxix)

It is not only possible to make use of digital marketing channels to carry out a destination branding strategy, but it is critical for the destination to be present offline as well as online. Both, Digital and Destination Marketing are strongly focused on the relationship with the client, which is based on authentic and reliable information. Consequently, it is convenient for destinations to make use of the Internet to provide a marketplace that tourists can trust and access for information (Anholt et al., 2009). Whether it is on social media platforms or directly in the form of a website, as long as the content is associated with the brand, it gives users a valid idea about the destination.

The idea of a destination is subjective and can hardly be controlled, but the absence of a brand on the Internet can have negative repercussions. The current HABITUR report, which is a statistical operation of Tourspain, reveals that 61 percent of international tourists positioned the Internet as the main source of information when planning their vacation, regardless of their motives to travel to Spain (Spanish Tourism Institute, 2016). In conclusion, destinations that lack online presence can easily fail to be noticed by potential tourists.

On the contrary, we have to note that according to a data report by Stackla (2019), only 13 percent of travelers find branded content impactful, whereas 79 percent consider user-generated content influential in their purchasing decisions. That is why branded destinations must allow users to share their opinions, experiences, suggestions, etc., with others. This way, tourists who have become advocates of the brand have a platform to promote the destination, without the intervention of public organizations. By permitting this kind of content, brands project transparency and authenticity. They gain the prospective costumers' trust because they do not fear being exposed to critique.

To clarify our previous approach to the subject, Blain, Levy, and Ritchie (2005) define Destinations Branding as following:

The set of marketing activities that (1) support the creation of a name, symbol, logo, (...) that readily identifies and differentiates a destination; that (2) consistently convey the expectation of a memorable travel experience that is uniquely associated with the destination; that (3) serve to consolidate and reinforce the emotional connection between the visitor and the destination; and that (4) reduce consumer search costs and perceived risk. Collectively, these activities serve to create a destination image that positively influences consumer destination choice. (p. 337)

4 CHAPTER 4: DESTINATION BRANDING IN THE CASE OF SPAIN: NATIONAL TOURIST OFFICE (TOURSPAIN)

In the case of Spain, the public agency responsible for promoting the country and its corresponding brand to international tourists is called Tourspain. It is attached to the Ministry of Industry, Commerce and Tourism and acts through the Secretary of State for Tourism. Their mission is to create value for the tourism industry through the use of marketing techniques and the generation of tourist knowledge (Tourspain, n.d.-a).

Every activity by Tourspain takes into account the economic, social, and environmental sustainability of Spain's destinations (Tourspain, n.d.-a), to foment continuous profitability for the Spanish tourism sector. In March 2020, just before COVID-19 brought the global tourism activity to a near stop, Tourspain counted with 33 Tourist Offices and 77 source markets. Marketing sessions in distant markets such as China or international tourism fairs are some examples of their activity (Spain, 2020a).

Comprehensive management of the Spain brand in its tourism dimension as well as public-private and interterritorial collaboration are some of the key elements, on which the agency bases its actions (Tourspain, n.d.). Even though in Spain each autonomous community is responsible for promoting tourism in their region, Tourspain counts with their necessary participation when planning the annual marketing actions carried out by the network of tourist offices abroad (Tourspain, 2020)

In mature markets, such as the United Kingdom, Tourspain targets the cosmopolitan tourist who is interested in culture, gastronomy, shopping with sustainable local consumption, and who spends a relevant amount of money at the destination. Regarding distant source markets such as Asia, the agency focuses, amongst other things, on the promotion of highly profitable products. In short, Spain's national tourist office is the body designed to build a sustainable tourism model that responds to the challenges posed by the Spanish tourism reality and that consolidates the touristic lead of the country as a destination (Spain, 2019).

4.1 THE BRAND *ESPAÑA* [SPAIN]

Throughout history, the image of Spain as a travel destination has experienced various changes and developments. Spain as a country has evolved politically, by transitioning from the Franco regime to democracy, setting itself apart from its poverty-stricken past. Nowadays, the country offers a comfortable living standard, is an active EU member, and presents a great cultural heritage. It has successfully repositioned itself in the tourism industry, abandoning outdated stereotypes. These improvements led to an important rebranding of Spain's destination brand (Olins, 2004).

The 1970s were marked by mass tourism and the exploitation of the Spanish coastline as a result of the existing Destination Branding. Because the "3s", sun, sand, and sea, were the main focus of Spain's marketing efforts, they failed to attract higher spending tourists, who preferred cultural holidays over the traditional beach vacation (Anholt et al., 2009). This first phase of managing the Spain brand was characterized by the intent of integrating old romantic stereotypes into the creation of new values for the country. As this happened under a dictatorial regime, we can assume that the purpose was to position Spain internationally rather than promoting it as a destination (Llorens Bahena, 2013).

As a result, the country targeted mainly British and German travelers (Anholt et al., 2009), a strategy that still has its effect on currently massified destinations, such as Mallorca for the Germans, and Benidorm for British tourists. In the early 1980s, Spain

was perceived as a cheap beach destination that did not offer variety or cultural value for the cosmopolitan tourist (Anholt et al., 2009).

We have mentioned earlier that very few people find branded content impactful, nevertheless, in 1983, Joan Miró designed a successful logo of Spanish tourism known as “El sol de Miró [Miró’s Sun]”. One year later, it was introduced in the Tourspain campaigns and forward 37 years, it still represents the Spanish tourism brand. That makes it one of the most long-lasting destination logos in the tourism industry (Porrás Núñez, 2013).

In figure 3.2., we observe an abstract combination of the colors yellow and red, forming a sun that resembles the Spanish flag. Its distinctive design focuses on Spain’s identity, which is reinforced by the word “ESPAÑA [Spain]”. Even though the letter “Ñ” is almost exclusively used in the Spanish language, Miró did not exclude it from the logo (Llorens Bahena, 2013). We assume that he used it as a tool to portray the brand’s authenticity.



Figure 4.1. Spain’s tourism logo “El Sol de Miró” [Miró’s Sun] designed by Joan Miró in 1983

Source: Taken by the author from https://www.hosteltur.com/159130_sol-miro-celebra-30-anos-al-servicio-turespana.html

But what makes Miró’s Sun so impactful to foreign travelers? According to Anholt et al. (2009), when creating a successful logo, there are a series of characteristics and limitations that should be taken into account. Consequently, we are going to analyze Miró’s image in accordance with the guidelines stated by these authors. First, it is impossible to prove the entire brand essence in one logo, so Miró’s Sun does not represent every facet of Spain. It would be overwhelming and therefore have negative effects regarding the immediate impact and recognition.

The logo consists of two visual components, the sun itself and the word “ESPAÑA”, which keeps it simple and easy to distinguish. Whether the logo is attractive to the consumer or not is subjective, but we find the uneven font appealing as it creates interest in the various possibilities Spain has to offer. We conclude that even though the font hints to Spain’s diversity, it is still subjected to a commonly shared brand, considering that the colors of the flag repeat throughout the letters. On the contrary, we note that the logo is strongly influenced by the artist’s style, so our conclusions might be simply based on a positive coincidence.

Digital Marketing is already an important component of Spain’s Destination Branding, so additionally, the logo has to be suitable for all media channels, regardless of the device or platform. Depending on the channel, the logo appears in different sizes, so it needs to be legible and stand out from the background. The logo is rarely used without the support of certain media, such as photos or text (Anholt et al., 2009). Some destinations choose to include slogans, events, or symbols like the sun in Spain’s case (Olins, 2004).

Apart from the visual aspects, the logo presents a great durability of nearly 40 years. We have stated earlier that consistency is key when it comes to Destination Branding and that includes the brand's logo as well. Ideally, it is immediately associated with the destination. Miró's Sun is employed by Tourspain throughout their marketing communications, so the image and values they aim to project have to match the message of the logo. The goal is not to homogenize the country as a whole, but to conserve the Spanish identity when promoting specific areas with their own distinctive characteristics, such as cities or regions (Anholt et al., 2009).

Initially, Miró's Sun was introduced as a "*symbol of their [Spain's] modernization after the Franco era*" (Almeyda-Ibáñez & George, 2017, p.15), and was applied in national and regional promotion in collaboration with the private sector. This second phase of Spain's Destination Branding took place simultaneously with the democratization of the country. Therefore, the intention was to combine both, historic and current assets (Llorens Bahena, 2013), to create an authentic brand. The repositioning strategy was strengthened by international events, such as the Barcelona Olympics and the Universal Exposition in Seville; which both took place in 1992; and the inauguration of the Guggenheim Museum in Bilbao (Almeyda-Ibáñez & George, 2017).

The new contemporary Spain is characterized by its artistic strengths. The focus lies on the interior of the country, promoting cities with a high cultural value, like Seville or Valencia. The repositioning of Spain has not abandoned the traditional beach market, on the contrary, it has added another worthy component to the industry. With the new image, it is possible to target higher-spending markets and profit from their cultural interests. We consider the country's decision quite risky since it could have led to the loss of image and consequently, the loss of a great portion of tourists (Anholt et al., 2009). Nevertheless, we need to emphasize the importance of a fresh start for Spain, due to its past that had negatively affected the perception of the country abroad.

Fortunately, Spain's vibrant culture and its friendly people allow Tourspain to rely on emotions and feelings (Llorens Bahena, 2013), in their marketing communications. We have already mentioned that the emotional factor plays an important role in Digital Marketing, and Destination Marketing does not differ from that. After all, one of the best ways to promote a brand is by transmitting positive emotions to the potential consumer and therefore creating the need to experience them at the destination. We should not confuse this with false advertisement, as Spain is a country that lives up to the standards it portrays to the consumers ahead of the vacation (Llorens Bahena, 2013), but instead, it is yet another tool to generate authenticity.

Apart from the historical background, various other objectives called for a repositioning of the brand (Llorens Bahena, 2013; ICEX, Real Instituto Elcano, Foro de Marcas Renombradas & DIRCO, 2003):

- **Focus on the resources that make Spain a distinguishable tourist destination** that stands out from its competitors: "1) *the Spanish lifestyle*, 2) *the European context, which entails quality and cultural proximity*, 3) *personalisation of the experience*, 4) *the rich variety on offer*" (Llorens Bahena, 2013, p. 18).
- **Confront the initial branding strategy** regarding the "3s", and draw attention to less massified forms of tourism, which do not rely on the beach.
- **Promote and offer a quality experience**, outside of the cheap packages of big British and German tour operators as well as prevent environmental degradation and assure the visitors' safety.
- **Make use of the brand itself**, as a tool to commercialize Spanish tourist products, while taking advantage of its widespread recognition.
- **Target tourists that are more demanding but also more profitable**, and much more interesting for an international projection of the Spain brand.

- **Become a leading competitor** through the combination of a variety of touristic products and services, and the favorable climate Spain has to offer.

4.2 POSITIONING OF THE BRAND

Based on a current study regarding Spain's positioning in the tourism industry, released by the Real Instituto Elcano and Tourspain in December of 2020 and other relevant tourism studies, we are going to determine to which degree Spain's branding strategy is successful. Additionally, we are going to learn how the current travel restrictions affect the destination in the present, and what can be done in the future to minimize the negative repercussions.

The image of Spain is very strong regarding "soft" aspects, such as the way of life, the gastronomy, the weather, the sociability of the people or the nightlife. It also shows positive results in "hard" or tangible elements. After tourists have experienced a combination of these assets, they tend to acquire a positive image of Spain. Especially consolidated markets like Great Britain, Germany, and France have the highest opinion about the destination (Real Instituto Elcano, 2021).

Currently, Spain's coasts and beaches are still the main attractors, forming, therefore, the destination's competitive advantage. A secondary advantage that adds further value to the brand is a slightly lower price, compared to other competitors. However, present behavioral patterns show the disposition of tourists to choose complementary or substitutional tourism forms, replacing the traditional sun and beach vacation (Real Instituto Elcano & Tourspain, 2021a).

The extraordinary climate and gastronomy are some of the most appreciated assets but depending on the issuing market they vary. For tourists originating from Asian or American markets, the main attraction factors are the culture, historical heritage, and the natural environment, whereas European tourists value mostly Spain's beaches and climate (Real Instituto Elcano & Tourspain, 2021b).

In distant markets, leading alongside Italy, Spain is the preferred European destination for future vacations. In mature markets, even on a global scale, Spain is the third most preferred destination for next trips. The ranking coincides with its position for countries that actually end up being visited, which proves certain stability in the tourist flow. The better ranking coming from distant markets might be due to their improved perception of destinations in general (Real Instituto Elcano & Tourspain, 2021a).

Consolidated markets criticize the massification of many Spanish destinations, which is the main reason for the lower position. As a result, the focus needs to be on these markets to improve Spain's image. Mass tourism occurs only in places that attract the interest of many tourists, so marketing actions should be carefully weighed to avoid massification and to redirect the interest toward other markets (Real Instituto Elcano & Tourspain, 2021a).

In this matter, we have to emphasize again the possibilities of less crowded internal destinations, which could appeal to a large number of travelers for a variety of travel motivations. This group of tourists finds itself clearly segmented since they carry out multiple types of activities at the destination. Spain has the capacity to attract increased volumes from this market segment, as long as they prioritize exposing these tourists to attractive and diverse offers beyond the beach such as cities, towns, nature, or the gastronomy (Real Instituto Elcano & Tourspain, 2021a).

Especially under the exceptional circumstances caused by COVID-19, Spain needs to focus on these types of destinations to guarantee health security to all visitors and the local population (Real Instituto Elcano & Tourspain, 2021a). The future projection of the sector is positive, as it is expected to recover fully and reach again the same promising numbers Spain accounted for in 2019 before the pandemic. Still, the country should take

into account tourists' demands for more routes through natural environments other than beaches and a broader offer of cultural routes (Real Instituto Elcano & Tourspain, 2021b).

We conclude that Spain still depends strongly on the sun and beach market, against its branding strategy toward more individualized tourism. Tourspain has built a solid foundation for more diverse forms of tourism, as we can observe in current tourist patterns. But despite their efforts, Spain is yet considered a massified destination by its consolidated markets. Seeing as demands for safer, less crowded destinations are rising, Spain should take advantage of that situation and clearly position the destination and the brand.

4.3 THE ROLE OF DIGITAL MARKETING

So far, we have learned the characteristics and objectives of Spain's destination branding strategy. We have also analyzed its brand and the corresponding logo as well as its current positioning in the tourism industry. To continue the evaluation of Tourspain's marketing efforts, we are going to present the theoretical framework that is necessary for a successful implementation.

Online Marketing is a fundamental part of Tourspain's marketing activity. That is why the agency defines certain pillars concerning their digital marketing strategy, which is mainly, but not exclusively, focused on B2C marketing (i.e., business to consumer). The main objective is the repositioning of the Spanish brand, from being perceived as a beach destination to attracting cosmopolitan tourists. In the following list, we observe the five pillars that sustain the agency's online actions (Tourspain, n.d.-b):

- **"Full-funnel strategy"**: The greatest efforts are made in the "upper funnel" (gaining the users' attention and interest), but the goal is a "full funnel strategy", also affecting the planning, purchase, loyalty, and prescription phases.
- **Selection of tools according to the phase of the "customer journey"**: Examples are advertising in the "awareness" phase, social media in the "prescription" phase, or e-mail marketing in the loyalty and prescription phase.
- **Content Marketing**: Tourspain carefully selects its own as well as third-party content since it has to be applicable to all channels.
- **Big data**: Both, in planning and in measuring results. It enables the hyper-segmentation of the market so cosmopolitan tourists are impacted appropriately.
- **Selection of differentiated tools for B2B** (i.e., business to business) **and B2C**.

Tourspain's current marketing strategy is subjected to the Strategic Marketing Plan 2021-2024. The application of the plan can be divided into three phases. The first one, a market diagnosis, was completed at the beginning of the year 2021 and is now followed by strategic planning and finally, its implementation. Considering the ongoing health crisis, the plan is going to focus on a fast tourism recovery and the transformation of the sector (Hinojosa, 2021).

We are not going to go into further detail about the initial phase, as we have extensively discussed the results of the market diagnosis in the chapter above. Based on these findings, the first stage of the plan's implementation phase is going to comprehend primarily short-term actions to reactivate the tourist activity from mature European markets as quickly as possible (Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Tourism, 2020).

Proximity to the destination will be an important factor for tourists, since future travel restrictions could create uncertainty for distant markets. As a result, the penetration of these markets is going to be carried out in a second phase. Still, we have to remember that Asian and American tourists help deconcentrate the demand geographically and battle seasonality (Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Tourism, 2020).

Apart from cosmopolitan tourists, there are other segments that the plan wants to act on. Millennials (i.e., those born between 1981 and 1996; Beresford Research, 2020) and Generation Z (i.e., those born between 1997 and 2012; Beresford Research, 2020), with more experiential preferences and higher levels of spending in many cases, new middle classes in emerging markets, and segments with a strong technological profile, are some of the more recent elements of the plan. Additionally, Tourspain acknowledges the growing demand for sustainable values and is therefore working to attract a profitable tourist, with a focus on sustainability (Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Tourism, 2020).

The promotion itself is going to be carried out through the main online channels, postponing the recovery of offline tools such as tourism fairs. Instead, the plan proposes virtual fairs to maintain contact between companies and clients during this period. Regarding digital channels, the development of Content Marketing and Social Media Marketing has gained importance. Additionally, a new Spanish tourism portal (ct. <https://www.spain.info/>) has been launched which we present later. Finally, an image campaign will be developed to strengthen and improve the image of the destination (Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Tourism, 2020).

5 CHAPTER 5: CASE STUDY: SPAIN'S DIGITAL DESTINATION MARKETING

By demonstrating various examples of digital marketing content by Tourspain, we are going to investigate the implementation of Spain's online branding strategy. The channels and tools that we find most apparent in Tourspain's marketing communications are various social media platforms, the tourism portal "spain.info", and Content Marketing. Additionally, we are going to analyze the strategy that was employed exclusively online throughout the stages of lockdown and post-lockdown due to COVID-19. The following data and examples were extracted in April of 2021 and might be subjected to change in the future.

5.1 GENERAL CONTENT

5.1.1 Social Media

We begin with Tourspain's Social Media Marketing strategy which targets foreign users interested in experimental tourism, and who would like to travel internationally. The goal is to gain more followers from this segment, encourage them to interact with the personalized content, and as a result, build brand loyalty (Tourspain, 2020). As we can see, Tourspain's SMM guides tourists along the brand continuum that we presented in chapter 3.

After conducting a search in known social media channels, we have found that Tourspain accounts for a significant number of followers throughout diverse types of social media. Although, we note that there is a great difference in popularity depending on the platform. We also observe a variety of content such as user-generated posts on Instagram, promotional and informative videos on YouTube, or themed content on Facebook. This proves the importance of adapting the content to the possibilities of the channel. Currently, Tourspain is present in the following media:

Social Media Platform	Number of Followers	Content
Facebook (@spain.info)	~ 1.9M	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - various posts that present specific destinations or products in Spain through photos, videos, and travel recommendations. They provide links leading to the corresponding article on the website "spain.info" for further information. - multimedia posts featuring current cultural events and traditions. - most posts also mention the corresponding regional tourism office and are available in English and Spanish.
Instagram (@spain)	697k	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - 8 guides that present specific destinations in Spain (e.g., "Galicia, A Natural Paradise"). Each guide features up to 11 individual posts by Tourspain or other regional agencies. - ~ 4000 posts consisting of user-generated photos and suggestions in Spanish and English.

Social Media Platform	Number of Followers	Content
<i>Continuation of the table:</i> Instagram (@spain)	697k	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - 11 highlighted stories covering topics like recipes, culture, or nature. - Daily interactive stories such as quizzes about the Spanish language, culture, or geography.
Twitter (@spain)	~ 326k	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - see “Facebook”, with the difference that the posts are more frequent on Twitter.
Sina Weibo (@spaintourism)	~ 201k	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - posts in the form of pictures, videos, or text directed toward Chinese users. - all communications are presented in Chinese even though most videos do not include speech and therefore rely on captions.
YouTube (@spain)	~ 18k	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - 655 videos that offer personalized travel advice and the latest news on tourism-related topics in various languages. - recently the “Travel safe” series concerning current COVID-19 guidelines for safe tourism was added. - a multimedia section with infographics, videos, voice-overs, virtual visits, guided tours, 3D panoramic views, and other interactive tools. - themed playlists such as art & culture, rural, nature, gastro, way of life, sport, traditions, coast, and cities.
TikTok (@visitspain)	242	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - 7 video clips in English and Spanish about landscapes, recipes, and the Spanish language.

Table 5.1. Tourspain’s social media presence

Source: Elaborated by the author after consulting the social media profiles in question

The importance of user-generated and interactive content becomes very apparent in Tourspain’s social media communications. It ranges from cultural topics such as gastronomy, historical heritage, or Spanish traditions, to content that presents the natural attractors of Spain. Most posts directly address the user, encouraging them to share their experiences with others or to participate in quizzes or other engaging content. Also, quite frequent are questions at the end of a post asking for the user’s opinion in the comment section (figure 5.2.).

We also note that very few posts are related to the sun and beach tourism which proves the focus on experimental tourists that we mentioned earlier. We consider especially the Instagram content quite attractive to younger generations. There, highlighted stories such as “Routes” or “Culture” are positioned at the beginning of the profile, whereas the story “Coast” requires scrolling to be seen. In figures 5.1. and 5.2. we can see examples of posts; (Tourspain [Spain.info], 2021a) and (Tourspain [Spain.info], 2021b), respectively; in which Spain intends to leave the old stereotypes behind and focus on more sustainable markets.

Finally, Tourspain’s recently launched a TikTok account that includes videos that are categorized into three groups: “Spain from the air”, “Recipes from Spain”, and “Learn with Spain”. According to Tourspain, the goal is to use a “100% TikTok style” to connect

with its large community (Tourspain, 2021a). Three weeks after its inauguration, the account has hardly gained followers which does not come as a surprise. Even though the clips are informative and highlight the positive assets of Spain, they seem a bit flat and barely entertaining, as they do not make use of the platform's current trends (cf. <https://www.tiktok.com/@visitspain>).



Figure 5.1. Promotional post highlighting Spain's natural resources (platform: Facebook)

Source: Screenshot take taken by the author from <https://www.facebook.com/spain.info>

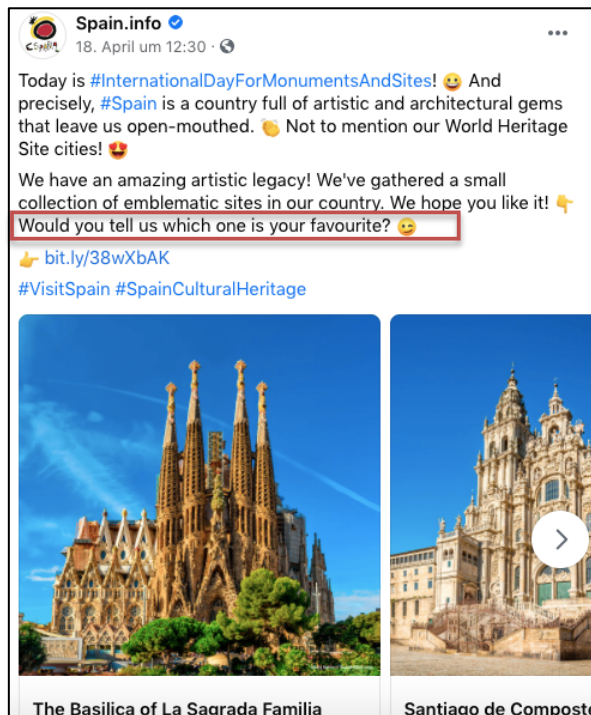


Figure 5.2. Promotional post highlighting Spain's cultural resources (platform: Facebook)

Source: Screenshot take taken by the author from <https://www.facebook.com/spain.info>

5.1.2 Official Tourism Website

Next, we introduce the tourism portal Spain.info (cf. <https://www.spain.info>). It is the main information resource for international travelers in terms of Spanish destinations and tourism products. It is also a showcase for Spanish companies since it allows the promotion of different tourist experiences (Tourspain, 2020). Not long ago, the portal underwent a renovation to adapt to current digital marketing trends and the ongoing health crisis. The goal was to create a website that would guide tourists along their journey of decision-making before their vacation and help them organize their trip (Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Tourism, 2020).

Some of the improvements concerned the navigation experience, usability, and accessibility of the website, whereas others focused on offering more visual and practical content (Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Tourism, 2020). We already know that it is key to portray a consistent image in all marketing channels. That is why Spain's tourism portal had to match the new modern image of the Spain brand and create a more fitting visual identity. As brand loyalty is becoming more important in the digital age, the website also accompanies the tourists throughout the other stages of their customer journey (Spain, 2020b).

To achieve that, Tourspain chose to focus on resources that are designed to adapt especially to mobile devices. Additionally, spain.info is integrated into the social media platforms we mentioned above, so users can further interact with the content. It includes catalogs, travel guides, editorial content, maps, newsletters, calendars, and reports which employ SEO (cf. chapter 2) to improve the website's recognition in search engines (Spain, 2020b). The website is available in 12 languages, even though we have observed that especially non-European versions do not provide a full translation of the content and instead show it in English. After considering various examples, we conclude that the translations to English and German are nearly perfect.

Before going into detail about the general content of the portal, we want to draw attention to the campaign "Travel Safe" which revolves around an integrated microsite within the spain.info portal. It is designed to advise tourists who plan on traveling to Spain during and after the pandemic. They can get informed about the safety measures in Spanish destinations and are reminded of the security that is ensured by the Spain brand. Along with other marketing campaigns, the goal is to regain their trust in the brand after a long period of inactivity caused by COVID-19 (Tourspain, n.d.-c).

"Travel Safe" specifically addresses certain topics of interest such as Useful Information, Restaurants, Sun and Beach, Nature, Urban, Snow, Golf, Cultural Visits, Public Transport, Hotels, or Shopping (cf. <https://travelsafe.spain.info/en/>). The portal is sectioned into three categories: general tips for traveling safely, prevention measures depending on the type of destination, and specific information for travelers coming to Spain. This last section gives detailed advice for the time periods before, during, and after their vacation (Tourspain, n.d.-c).

The campaign, which is exclusively digital, targets European markets through own, paid, and earned media and the participation of influencers (Tourspain, n.d.-c). Depending on the category we find infographics (figure 5.3.), videos, and articles. The information is supported by graphic illustrations of people who depict responsible tourists who follow the health and security measures while wearing a face mask (Tourspain, 2021b). These infographics make up an important part of Tourspain's Content Marketing. They cover diverse topics including the Spanish language, specific forms of tourism, or the cultural heritage.

We also find more than 400 publications (cf. <https://issuu.com/spain.info>) in the form of digital flyers, brochures, and magazines that cover topics of touristic interest and travel advice. Apart from that, the portal makes use of promotional and informative videos that

aim to anticipate the users' experience through inspiring and emotional audiovisual material. The videos are adapted to the main platforms so they can be employed in most digital channels (Tourspain, 2020).



Figure 5.3. Infographic “10 tips for enjoying urban destinations safely” by Tourspain

Source: Downloaded by the author from <https://travelsafe.spain.info/en/iinfographic-10-tips-for-enjoying-urban-destinations-safely/>

We note that spain.info is highly engaging as it offers interactive and personalized content depending on the tourists' preferences. We want to highlight two tools that require the tourists' participation and therefore respond with individualized advice during the planning period of their vacation. One of them is a route planner which bases its recommendations on the origin, the destination, and the time of the trip (figure 5.4).

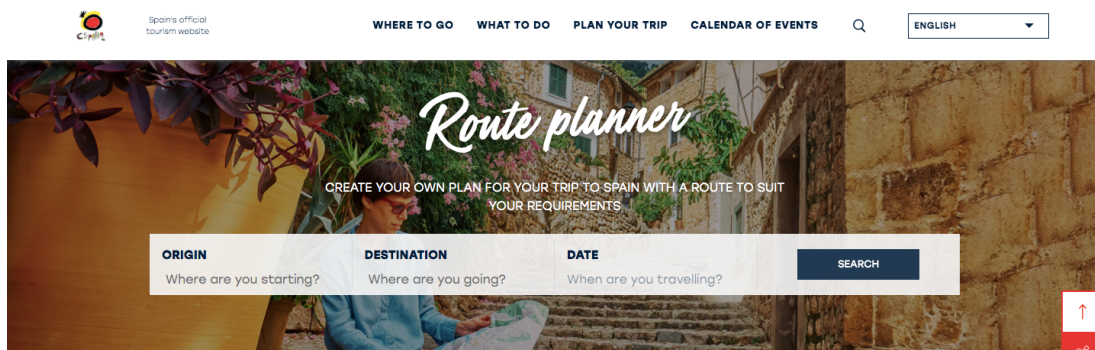


Figure 5.4. Interactive Route planner by Tourspain

Source: Screenshot taken by the author from <https://www.spain.info/en/route-planner/>

Additionally, we find a three-part questionnaire that creates the ideal trip according to the users' interests. They can choose between culture, gastronomy, sea, nature, cities, and routes, and afterward they can specify their choice. As a result, the website proposes various travel plans which match the given answers (cf. <https://www.spain.info/en/plan-trip-to-spain/>). Each article about certain travel plans offers a variety of relevant content. As a comparison we used the portal's section called "The Camino de Santiago" which is a route through the North of Spain leading to the city of Santiago de Compostela (cf. <https://www.spain.info/en/camino-santiago/>).

At the beginning of the page, we are presented with a description of the experience, followed by referenced articles about particular routes and ways to participate such as by bike or on horseback. It continues with a gallery so that the user can imagine the experience through images, and a section dedicated to frequently asked questions. Finally, we notice some linked articles about related topics and, most importantly, the option to book the activity or route.

The portal also proves the importance of the final step of the brand continuum (cf. chapter 3) which is the transition of tourists into advocates of the destination. We notice the "Spain Quiz" that includes questions about Spain's cultural, natural, and gastronomical assets. Additionally, there are eleven quizzes about specific subjects such as soccer or mythology. It is a great way to build loyalty and spark interest in activities and destinations that are still unknown to tourists. Once again, the user has the possibility to interact by sharing their scores on social media and by that, actively promote Spain.

5.2 COMMUNICATION STRATEGY DURING COVID-19

Since 1984, Tourspain has launched eleven international advertising campaigns under the Spain brand (Tourspain, n.d.-d):

- *"Spain. Everything under the sun"* (1984-1990).
- *"Passion for life"* (1991-1994).
- *"Spain By"* (1995-1997).
- *"Bravo Spain"* (1998-2001).
- *"Spain marks"* (2002-2003).
- *"Smile! You are in Spain"* (2004-2009).
- *"Spain. 25 years beyond the sun"* (2008).
- *"I need Spain"* (2010-2016).
- *"Spain Addicts"* (2011).
- *"España es parte de ti"* (2017-2020).
- *"Back to Spain"* (2020).

Because this paper focuses on Digital Marketing, we are going to analyze the social media communication strategy that was implemented by Tourspain in April of 2020 in response to the global health crisis. It was divided into three phases that were specifically adapted to each stage of the country's lockdown impositions: the initial lockdown, the easing of the lockdown, and the so-called "new normality". Especially during the last phase of the strategy, the communications under the hashtag "#SpainAwaitsYou" functioned as the prelude to the international advertising campaign *"Back to Spain"* (Spain, 2020c).

The project aimed to depict the country as a safe destination for international tourists even within the current circumstances. For that, three individual videos were created and uploaded to various social media platforms at the beginning of each phase. They served to remind the user that Spain is always going to be an attractive and relevant travel destination, regardless of the pandemic's impact. The results have been very positive which is partially due to the strategy's flexibility to adjust to the evolution of the situation (Spain, 2020c).

Video 1: “Spain Will Wait”

(cf. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GHHrJh7swUY>)

The initial phase of the implementation required a different approach which actually discouraged tourists to come to Spain and recommended them to stay home. We have to note that a contrary focus would have likely led to a loss of image. Given the situation, tourists might perceive a destination’s lack of responsibility in a negative way. Two concrete actions were the adoption of the new hashtag #SpainWillWait, which replaced the former hashtag #VisitSpain, and a 47-second promotional video that is available in 6 languages (Spain, 2020c).

In the first 29 seconds of the video, we see various scenes with emotional background music of people enjoying their time at home with family or alone. A voice-over introduces the video with the sentence “*Being at home is*” (Spain, 2020d, sec.3), and then continues by naming the activities that are shown such as “*a relaxing shower*” (Spain, 2020d, sec.5) or “*leaning out the window and always looking beyond*” (Spain, 2020d, sec. 15-18). We conclude that the content aims to touch the viewer through emotions as it describes moments everyone experienced during the first months of lockdown.

As a result, the video associates certain feelings with the concept of “home” and then, replaces it with the word “Spain”. The voice-over ends the sentence stating that “*whatever happens, your home is always waiting for you*” (Spain, 2020d, sec. 30-34), and immediately makes the connection to Spain as in “*Spain will wait for you*” (Spain, 2020d, sec. 37). The message is supported by clips of popular monuments and landscapes reminding the viewers of Spain’s attractors. Finally, the video finishes with an appeal to stay home, the new hashtag, and the Spain logo.

Video 2: “Never stop dreaming - Spain Will Wait”

(cf. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Fg_PQoQGLBc)

With the easement of lockdown restrictions, the second video was launched. It served as a motivational message for tourists to look forward to Spain as an ideal destination with extraordinary characteristics (Spain, 2020c). In terms of language diversity, on the main social media channels we find both, an English and a Spanish version. The video is 58 seconds long and just like the first video, it provides subtitles, a voice-over, and impressive images of the destination’s attractors. We note that the background music is more joyful and that it follows a motivating rhythm.

Throughout the entire video, the voice-over directly addresses the viewers with the words “you” and “traveler”. The sentence “*You can’t stop thinking about it*” (Spain, 2020e, sec. 1), introduces a list of places and experiences that the viewer is currently missing due to the pandemic. “*That hidden cove just for you*” (Spain, 2020e, sec. 5-7), and “*dreaming about enjoying the fresh air again*” (Spain, 2020e, 20-22) are some examples that encourage the viewer to imagine the possibilities of visiting Spain in the future.

Even though the majority of the clips show Spain’s natural and architectural assets, we note that the scenes including people have one common feature: The people do not face the camera, and instead we see them walking toward something else or observing a scenery (i.e., dreaming). The theme of walking repeats toward the end of the video when the voice-over proposes that “*paths are made by walking*” (Spain, 2020e, sec. 36). This time, the video finishes with the appeal to never stop dreaming, the same hashtag as in the previous phase, and the Spain logo.

Video 3: “Top 10 reasons to travel to Spain. Spain Awaits You”

(cf. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qcg_xbFQ4ck)

The third and last video was uploaded at the beginning of the new normality, once it was possible to travel to Spain again and actively promote the destination. The focus was no longer on promoting future holidays, but to boost current reservations (Spain, 2020c). The video is available in English and Spanish and does not make use of a voice-over or subtitles. Therefore, the viewer has the chance to center their attention on the images while being influenced by the cheerful background music that makes them want to experience what is shown in the video.

In the first 30 seconds, the video presents the following 10 attractors: Weather, Food, Culture, History, Nature and Landscapes, Hospitality, Shopping, Sport, Quality and, Infrastructure. We observe that there is no specific target group as it covers activities and assets that interest diverse markets such as shopping for distant markets, or the weather for consolidated European markets. The last 15 seconds provide additional information written on-screen, underlining our previous statement regarding the target group: “*A country that celebrates variety, for all ages, tastes, and budgets*” (Spain, 2020f, sec. 30-32).

Contrary to the previous videos, this one does not finish with a slogan. Instead, the on-screen text emphasizes that “*there are 83 million reasons to return to Spain*” (Spain, 2020f, sec. 36-39) which refers to the number of tourists the destination received in 2019. We conclude that Tourspain wants to highlight the individuality of each tourist, supposing that every person has their own reasons to travel to Spain. The message is simple: Regardless of the motive, Spain has the capacity to provide high-quality experiences and satisfy tourists in a personalized manner. The video ends with the new hashtag “#SpainAwaitsYou and the Spain logo.

Apart from these promotional videos and hashtags, Tourspain employed impactful content throughout their social media platforms, in form of multi-channel communications (Spain, 2020c). We appreciate the language and image diversity of the content on social media and the first video, but at the same time, we criticize that the succeeding videos do not offer the same number of translations. Possibly, subtitles in different languages could have expanded the reach without incurring excessive costs.

6 CHAPTER 6: CONCLUSIONS

The evidence that we have presented in this research paper proves that the Internet has established a firm role in all areas of Marketing. What used to be a promising add-on to traditional product-based marketing, is a must nowadays. A combination of the increasing popularity of social media, the development of new technologies, and the shift in the consumers' behavior and demands explain the success of Digital Marketing.

At the beginning of this paper, we made assumptions about the importance of Digital Marketing even in the promotion of destinations. As a fact, we have observed that this type of consumer-orientated Marketing is a perfect fit for the tourism industry. Whether we talk about companies or destinations, they all have to face the challenge of promoting experiences that cannot be described with data or facts. Making the intangible tangible can only happen through emotions and connections between the tourist and the destination and fortunately, Digital Marketing offers exactly that.

The choice to find out more about Spain as a travel destination has proven its worth. Throughout the elaboration of the paper, we could confirm that Tourspain successfully applies various concepts and trends that define the new reality of marketing to their digital communications. Additionally, we conclude that without the possibilities of the Internet, Spain could not have repositioned the Spain brand as rapidly as it did. Digital Marketing is instantaneous which allows faster and more constant transmission of information, and therefore has given Spain the necessary support to carry out the branding of their country.

Based on the complexity and variability of this environment, we think that it is important to hire young professionals who are familiar with social media and spend a great portion of their free time on the Internet. As a result, destinations like Spain who target, among others, age segments like Gen-Z or Millennials could increase the authenticity of their posts on social media and connect on a deeper level with the tourists of that significant age group.

On a more critical note, we as users should be aware of the fact that "authenticity" is mostly part of a carefully designed image strategy. No element of a marketing communication is unintentional which we observed during the analysis of Tourspain's social media strategy. In addition, the fast evolution and introduction of new technologies oftentimes do not give the user the chance to confront the different ways of advertisement appropriately. Most users are already accustomed to tools like Native Marketing and Social Media Marketing, but with recent innovations such as Artificial Intelligence, the question arises: Where is the limit of Digital Marketing?

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