

Article

A Textual and Visual Analysis of the Intrinsic Value Dimensions of Romania: Towards a Sustainable Destination Brand

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Abstract: This work examines the projected image of Romania as an emerging tourism destination. Computed content-analysis was applied to the photos, text and video materials promoted online in Romania's last international tourism campaign. The conceptual framework used corresponds to intrinsic values (play, aesthetics, ethics and spirituality), from Holbrook's typology of value. Being more difficult to apprehend and therefore studied less, intrinsic values allow a more sophisticated approach to value creation. The purpose here is to identify the main attributes that are promoted about Romania by destination marketing organizations. The content analysis of text (last international promotion campaign Explore the Carpathian Garden) and visual data (27 photos from the official Facebook webpage and 7 TV videos) allow to depict an experiential view of Romania's image: natural resources (coded as aesthetics with 29% of references), epistemic value of discovery (play 25.8%), authentic and historical traditions (ethics 25.8%) and wellness and therapeutic activities (spirituality, 19.3%). Destination marketing organizations have the potential to develop some distinctive aspects such as authenticity (as an ethical value dimension) and play (as an active, self-oriented value). Findings also highlight that a complimentary approach using textual and visual data might be a suitable option to research destination brand image.

Keywords: intrinsic value dimensions; destination image; destination brand promotion; visual data; Romania



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1. Introduction

Tourists can have unique tourist experiences with a destination's multimedia brand content (images, text, videos, audios), enhancing users' sensory and affective experiences of a destination [1]. Destination marketing organizations (DMOs) use online media and official websites in order to promote their product and hence forge a strong positive brand image, which is a key influence on travellers' behaviour [2]. Moreover, official destination websites become the destination image on the Internet, as the best way of presenting what a destination has to offer [3]. In accordance with this, several studies [4,5] outline that the visual and textual stimuli found on the destination official website stimulates cognitive processes in users, leading to a positive attitude towards the websites' information.

Based on classical literature on tourism destination image [6–8], which considers projected image (that promoted by DMOs) and organic image (that perceived by tourists), recent works (e.g., [9]) have evidenced a new interface between them, where higher congruency is needed to assure sustainable promotion over time [1]. On the one hand, the projected image is usually used to describe how DMOs promote tourism destinations using different kinds of online communication, which has great impact on destination branding

and on the destination image construct [9]. On the other hand, tourists are attracted by promoted destination image, but they also generate an organic image and spread their own perspectives about the images promoted by DMOs [10]. It is a two-way process that occurs in image formation. The promoted destination images of tourism areas are confirmed by the real photos that tourists take, as “consciously or unconsciously, tourists look for scenes and images that replicate their existing perceptions” [11] (p. 591).

In this realm, several studies offer a comparison of brands’ online platforms which highlights the fact that each platform has its own architecture, rules and cultural use [12–15]. But less research has been devoted to analysis of the existing online brand content that DMOs use to promote a projected image, despite the fact that official websites of the tourism destinations allow tourists to obtain relevant information by visiting it, supported by a wide range of stimuli stemming from videos, images and text [16].

Assuming that destination image can be projected through destination photographs [16], logos [17], slogans [18] and texts [17], this work examines the value dimensions of promotional materials from DMOs as drivers of an experiential consumption among tourists.

The conceptual framework used in this paper is Holbrook’s typology of value [19] based on a combination of intrinsic (emotional and altruistic) and extrinsic (functional and social) dimensions. Holbrook’s work is recognized as pioneering the experiential approach of value [20] and it has been further enhanced and updated [21]. It is widely used in tourism and hospitality fields (i.e., on students trips [22,23]), luxury hotel restaurants [24], the timeshare industry [25] and hotel choice [26]), but to the best of the authors’ knowledge, never in analysis of textual and visual content on DMOs. Moreover, our paper focus on intrinsic values, which are more difficult to apprehend and have therefore been studied less [27], although they allow a more sophisticated approach to the creation of experiential value [28,29]. These intrinsic dimensions entail aesthetic and hedonic aspects of tourism, alongside socially or otherwise-oriented dimension at a supra-level (i.e., ethics and spirituality as escapism).

The aim of the paper is to use Holbrook’s intrinsic values typology to contribute to a better understanding of the projected image of Romania as an emerging sustainable tourism destination through the analysis of both visual and textual contents. Indeed, in the last decade, DMOs in Romania have offered strong diversification with new destinations and experiences such as active tourism, wellness, nightlife, traditional rural life and gastronomy. As a result, the country has recently attracted the interest of tourism scholars who analyse destination image based on media content, such as tourism promotion campaigns [30–33], books and movies about the myth of Dracula [34–36] or Internet content [37–39]. This work adds to this trend by adapting classical literature on both marketing (e.g., [19]) and tourism services (e.g., [5,40]) through innovative qualitative approach (content-analysis of text and pictures, the latter encompassing both photo and video analysis) [41,42].

The structure of the paper is as follows. After this introduction, a literature review follows related to Holbrook’s dimensions in consumer value theory, brand destination, image destination and visual data in tourism research. Third section describes the methodology, presenting Romania as a tourism destination and our research questions. In section four, the analysis is performed, and results are presented followed by their discussion. Finally, last section reports conclusions and limitations of the study.

2. Theoretical Background

2.1. Holbrook’s Dimensions in Consumer Value Theory

Value is rooted in the customer’s holistic experience [20,21] and is defined by Holbrook as “an interactive relativistic preference experience” [19] (p. 5) driven by the interaction between consumer and product. Even if other typologies have been proposed, that developed by [43] has been recognized as the most influential one [43] as it “is the most comprehensive approach to the value construct, because it captures more potential sources of value than other conceptualizations ” [44] (p. 97), and it has been widely applied to tourism-related contexts (e.g., [22,23,28,45]).

Value is understood as interactive because it entails an interaction between a subject (a consumer) and an object. The object can be any product or service [21], such as in tourism-related services—a restaurant (e.g., [44]), a hotel (e.g., [46]), or a destination (e.g., [29]). It is also preferential because it emphasizes a preference judgement, mostly emotional and very often related to words such as affect (pleasing vs. displeasing), attitude (like vs. dislike) and/or evaluation (good vs. bad) [45]. The relativistic nature derives from the fact that it is understood as personal (it varies across people), comparative (with differences among objects) and situational (specific to the context) [43].

Helkkula et al. [47] define “value in experience” as “an ongoing, iterative circular process of individual and collective customer sense-making, as opposed to a linear, cognitive process restricted to isolated service encounters” (Ibid, p. 59). Customer value has been recognized as a key determinant of customers’ decision-making and evaluative judgments, and it is determined by the customer [20]. Hence, it is the customer who decides if an object is valuable, not the supplier [21,48]. From a managerial point of view, value is linked to marketing strategies such as market segmentation and product differentiation and positioning [20] and it is therefore a useful tool for assessing destination image.

Customer value is also multidimensional, which implies that it consists of multiple value types [19,43]. The value typology of [19] is based on three underlying dimensions: extrinsic vs intrinsic value; active vs reactive value; and self-oriented vs. other-oriented value (see Appendix A). By combining these dimensions, Holbrook discerns eight value types: efficiency, excellence, status, esteem, play, aesthetics, ethics and spirituality. The easiest distinction in [19]’s framework is the self vs. other orientation of values [28]. The distinction between active and reactive values is given by the fact that the subject (consumer) acts/reacts on/to the object (product or service). Hence it provides differences between, for instance, play and aesthetics “the consumers are actively involved in when enjoying playfulness experiences, and reactively involved when contemplating an aesthetic value in consumption” [28] (p. 5).

The extrinsic vs. intrinsic dichotomy is embedded in the typology of hedonic vs. utilitarian value, where the emotional, affective and hedonic are used closely or are related (as in [28,49]). Intrinsic is a term that emphasizes “the search of an end in itself” and projects the idea that value is experiential: the consumer is at the center of the value provision as “only a consumption experience can offer intrinsic value” [19] (p. 10).

Among intrinsic values, play is the most commonly cited dimension within the scope of hedonism in tourism [24,25] as an active and emotional value. A second basic experiential dimension of value is aesthetics, which is widely considered a hedonic variable in destinations (e.g., [22]) or restaurants (e.g., [44]). Albeit less common, ethics is the third intrinsic dimension. In a consumer context, ethical aspects reflect the feeling of being “better off” after consumption [20] and can be related to aspects of sustainable behaviour in both social, economic and ecological dimensions [21]. The fourth intrinsic dimension of value is spirituality, corresponding to a supra-level (a relationship with nature, the cosmos in general); it can be conceived as “escapism” which relates to relaxing and escaping from reality in hotels [28] or timesharing [25].

Several researchers adapting Holbrook’s typology, such as [50,51] have combined ethics and spirituality in an overarching value type called “altruistic value”. Our study goes beyond these, as it considers the two hedonic values (aesthetics and play) and also two separate altruistic values: ethics and escapism. Furthermore, Holbrook’s typology focuses on the positive side of value (i.e., the benefits) and the trade-off between the benefits and costs is implicitly included in “efficiency” as price, time and effort. However, for the purpose of this paper, and in line with others [27,28], we adopt a truly experiential approach to the destination experience, and concentrate on intrinsic values (play, aesthetics, ethics and spirituality), and therefore disregard the trade-off approach.

2.2. Brand Destination and Image Destination

A destination brand is related to the image of a place created in people's minds associated with uniqueness and the identity of the destination [3,52–54]. It has also been recognized that is a critical element for destinations which wish to cope with fierce competition from others [40]. Brand images are not created in a short amount of time; it requires sustained efforts over a long period [55]. Hence the involvement of all the stakeholders is necessary in the process of branding the destination.

The brand can create a positive image and identity for a destination and lead to engagement of tourists in the destination image formation. Branding is considered one of the most powerful tools for destination marketing [56]; thus destinations need to have a strong brand for differentiation and identification in the tourism market. Morgan et al. consider the brand as a “set of meanings and experiences that express a promise of value about a particular place as an element of differentiation” [57]. Empirical research in destination branding began after [58] first introduced the concept in 1998. Now it is generally acknowledged that brand and image concepts are related concepts. Usually, a destination brand is used to market a destination by communicating the image, values and attributes of the destination to visitors and other stakeholders. Tasci and associate a brand with the “product marketing activities of the authorities” while image is considered “more of a product of the consumer perception” [59]. Hence successful branding will include a strong match between visitor's perception of the destination and the brand identity intended by the destination marketing organization [55]. From the consumer perspective, the destination brand concept has been used similarly to the term destination image [60], place branding [61], etc.

Online visual media communication (photos, videos, movies, brochures) shapes customers' perceptions and purchase intentions [62] and has become an integral component of the marketer's communication tools. Butler emphasized that what is shown in movies, videos and television will become more important than print media in shaping images of and visits to places [63]. Positive image change towards a destination as a result of marketing campaign might conduce to long-term visits because tourism commercials, movies or videos, may enhance the destination image perceived among its audience [62,64].

Understanding change in destination image due to a promotional campaign is a crucial aspect since it offers implications for future campaigns regarding the positive or negative dimensions of destination image [65]. Hays et al. investigated social media usage among DMOs of the top 10 most-visited countries by analysing the content of their Facebook pages and Twitter accounts [66]. Santos studied holiday brochures for DMOs as a major source to reinforce destination image and offer information to potential tourists [67].

2.3. Visual Data in Tourism Research

“Visual Research as a field is not defined by any methodological or theoretical pre-suppositions. It simply explains or makes use of that which is visual, visible and therefore observable, or visually regulated” [68] (p. 6). These authors claim than visual research should expand in scope and theoretical orientations beyond the study of photographs. Simply put, visual research is an emerging sub-field of qualitative approach. The use of visual methods thus emerges as a field of study, defined by [69] as “visual research methods” (VRM), which is in an initial but developing phase of qualitative research [70]. This focus on the visual has been visible across a wide range of disciplines (e.g., [70–74]). Based on Banks's work [71,72] the visual element can assume two important roles in a qualitative research process [75]:

1. On one hand, the adoption of visual methods based on the use of image as a stimulus to extract information and relevant data from the respondents (e.g., photo and video-elicitation, reflexive photography). That is, the adoption of a direct visual method to create data by using elicitation techniques. When the researcher uses this type of visual methods, the focus is the image itself, such as visualizing a video or projecting a photograph as a stimulus, in order to gather opinions, ideas, and perceptions from

the respondent. This is a different approach to obtaining answers, often putting the respondent in a more comfortable and relaxed situation. From an image a conversation is generated.

2. On the other hand, visual data is a corpus of empirical material that needs to be analysed in order to extract information. The visual becomes data both from (i) primary sources (researcher-generated) where the researcher decides to create visual data to help their investigations through a video, photo or a drawing; and (ii) secondary sources such as previously published material or which is available in the Internet. To this end, the use of methods of analysis such as content analysis, for example, is of utmost importance. In this case, the visual data is seen as corpus and units of analysis, in some cases complementary to textual data. In certain research contexts, the visual data thus becomes relevant units for analysis.

Accordingly, there are several methods and techniques that use visual data to obtain information [76]. Methods that are based on still images, such as photos, like photo-essay, photo-elicitation, reflective photography or photovoice, just to mention a few, will be described further; and there are also methods based on dynamic images, such as videography. Some authors advocate that there should be no separation between the use of text and the corresponding image in terms of analysis, but that they should be seen as complementary [77].

Regarding tourism research, an increase in visual approaches have been evident in the last decade [78–83] some of them highlighting the benefits of combining textual with visual data [76,84,85]. In tourism, as stated by [83] (p. 3) “a significantly greater focus on the visual has also been seen” and the potential of visual methods for the creation of new knowledge about tourism is immense, according to these authors. In fact, a study of images or visual data may reveal new insights and perspectives that are not accessible through the use of other data. In terms of the use of qualitative data, textual and pictorial data started to be used in tourism destination image (TDI) studies, mainly in the 2000s, based on imagery processing theory [86] as a new paradigm applied to consumer behaviour. In fact, imagery processing-theory as a way of assessing DI was brought in by [7]. A milestone in including the visual element in assessing TDI was the work of [87]. Since then, pictorial materials (in addition to textual data) have been analysed via several techniques such as content analysis [59,82,84,88–90].

Recently, the so-called social media websites, representing various forms of consumer-generated content (CGC) such as blogs, virtual communities, wikis, social networks, collaborative tagging, and media files shared on sites like YouTube and Facebook, have gained substantial popularity in online travellers’ use of the Internet [91] (p. 179). With these, a new form of image has appeared, one that focuses on visual analysis of photos and videos as a means to communicate the experience at the destination. They are of particular relevance as unique representations of tourists’ perceptions, values and experiences of a specific location with great potential for DMOs’ marketing campaigns. This is a field within projected image that needs to be further explored in terms of TDI research.

3. Methodology

3.1. Case Study: Romania as a Tourism Destination

Romania properly entered the global tourism market in 1990, opening its borders after the fall of the communist regime. However, its presence became more prominent in the early 2000s, after a long transition period. The boost of tourist arrivals around Romania’s accession to the EU (in 2007) was stopped by the global economic crisis, followed by a quick recovery after 2011 [92,93]. In 2018, the number of Romania’s tourist arrivals reached 12.9 million, of whom 27.66% were foreign tourist arrivals.

After 2000, the development of Romanian tourism was supported by the country’s efforts to increase its international awareness by launching three international tourism promotion campaigns [31,32]. New market segments and experiential products have been developed in the last decade, with a strong growth of rural tourism (based on cultural

authenticity), city-breaks, business tourism and active tourism. However this development is spatially very concentrated in several known tourist areas [94,95], such as: Bucharest and major cities (gathering about 47% of the tourist arrivals in 2019), followed by mountain resorts (17%), seaside (9%), Danube Delta (1%), health resorts (9%) and other destinations including smaller cities and rural areas (with 18%) [92].

As known, DMOs are public or private organizations that work at different administrative levels to implement the tourism development and marketing policy of a destination [96]. In this case, Romanian DMOs organizations tend to have limited funding sources, budgets and tools to sustain a full range of tourism support services. In this paper we considered the perspective of the main national DMO—the Romanian Ministry of Tourism (that launched and managed the international tourism promotion campaign) and the perspective of an independent organization that promotes Romanian tourism online (i.e., Official National Tourism Organization). The DMOs promotes Romania as a tourism destination on the internal and international market and ensures collaboration with other institutions, public authorities and organizations interested in tourism development [97].

Since the launching of the last tourism promotion campaign (in 2010) there were six main tourism products considered essential for Romania's tourism: rural tourism (focused on cultural authenticity), nature based tourism, health and wellness tourism, active and adventure tourism, complex tours including cultural and natural attractions, and citybreaks [98]. With these, the Romanian authorities aimed to attract multiple market segments.

As an emerging tourism destination, Romania has attracted the interest of scholars. A study on the image projected by video spots from tourism promotion campaigns [32] showed a slow development of the core tourism destinations and products individualized in the communist period, namely: mountain tourism in the Carpathians, health resorts and the Black Sea seaside [99], followed by the capital city Bucharest, the Danube Delta and several iconic religious and historical attractions (e.g., UNESCO heritage churches, [100]). Other studies used content analysis to address the online information [34,38], visitor reviews [37] and Western bloggers' images [101] about the famous Dracula myth, its associated experiences and iconic destinations. Similar studies through Tripadvisor reviews were done for two other iconic destinations in Romania: the UNESCO labelled churches in north-eastern Romania [100] and the Danube Delta Biosphere reserve [102]. Other works underlined the press and social media reaction to tourism branding campaigns. In this sense, Andrei [103] underlined the generally negative echoes of Romania's international tourism campaigns in the national and international media; and Capatina et al. [104] studied the main variables of social media mention that influenced the ranking of Romanian hotels on Facebook (i.e., the role of the brand's likelihood to be discussed in social media and its range of influence).

3.2. Research Framework and Research Questions

The main aim of this paper is to explore the image attributes of Romania as a tourism destination, framed by Holbrook's value intrinsic dimensions about consumer experience. The purpose here is to identify the main attributes being promoted about Romania by DMOs, but with a different approach related to intrinsic value typology, a more experiential perspective that can add value to the destination. The final goal is to reflect on how Romania as a tourism destination might develop its brand strategy for the future based on a more experiential and sustainable perspective. Based on an exploratory and preliminary study of an ongoing work, we identified the image dimensions that could be incorporated into a more sustainable and experiential brand strategy.

The research question(s) addressed are the following, corresponding to the four intrinsic dimensions of Holbrook's typology:

- What are the main items/attributes and their meaning within the (a) play or entertainment (b) aesthetics, (c) ethics and (d) spirituality dimensions about Romania as a tourism destination, according to Holbrook's schema?

3.3. Data Analysis and Analysis Strategy

This study is grounded on content-analysis of text and pictures, advocating that there are benefits in combining both types of data [75,84,85]. As the main goal of this study is to explore the main attributes of Romania as a destination through the “lens” of Holbrook’s intrinsic value schema, a more interpretative technique was needed, such as content-analysis. Content analysis was used as a research technique for making replicable and valid inferences from data to their context [105,106]. From this perspective, “photographs, videotapes, or any other item that can be made into text are amenable to content analysis” [107] (p. 240). In this study, textual data analysis was undertaken first, complemented by a visual analysis based on photos and videos.

3.3.1. Textual Analysis

The textual data considered as the corpus for analysis was part of the official Romania Tourism (Minister of Tourism) brochure, based on the last international promotion campaign (Explore the Carpathian Garden, ECG) launched between 2010–2015. Data was related to Romania in general and was first content-analysed using WebQDA (web qualitative data analysis) software, which carries out qualitative data analysis individually or collaboratively, synchronously or asynchronously [108]. A descriptive coding that “summarizes in a word or short phrase—most often as a noun—the basic topic of a passage . . . ” [109] (p. 70) was adopted. In fact, a direct approach was undertaken where “the researcher uses existing theory or prior research to develop the initial coding scheme prior to beginning to analyse the data” [110] (p. 1286). In this case, a codebook based on Holbrook’s [19] intrinsic value types (play, aesthetics, ethics and spirituality) was used to categorize each one of the references extracted from the textual data.

3.3.2. Visual Analysis

The analysis was based on visual data composed by still (photos) and moving (videos) images about Romania as a destination (see Supplementary Materials). The photos used as data were posted on the Romania DMOs official Facebook webpage (available at <https://www.facebook.com/VisitRomania>) from the official album named “cover photos”, with a total of 30 photos (3 photos were repeated) so the final visual corpus for content analysis was 27 photos. Regarding the moving images such as videos, 7 TV spots from the last international promotion campaign (Explore the Carpathian Garden, ECG) launched between 2010–2015 were considered for analysis with the following themes: Natural Romania, Wellness Romania, Rural Tourism Romania, Cultural Romania, City Breaks Romania, Authenticity Romania and Adventure Romania.

(a) Photos Analysis

The analysis strategy was grounded on a more “compositional” approach to photography, based on the elements that make up the image, to be used through a more quantitative approach for content analysis. As [83] a more ‘representational reading’ of the photos was undertaken, since tourism is essentially a “way of seeing” and its pleasure is in the eye. In this case, there was no room for interpretation according to a context; it was mainly a description of the photo. It is important to note that the choice of a specific method for pictorial analysis depends directly on the objectives of the study and the type of data to be extracted from the visual element (e.g., photograph, cartoon, drawing, or video [75]). Content and composition are two components of the image taken into account in content analysis [78]. According to these authors, the content of the photograph passes through the survey of the elements that compose it as a function of a totality; the composition refers to the connection that exists between the various elements that make up the photograph. Content analysis is the method that allows the quantification of observed elements in a “sample” of images obtained according to a well-defined, clear and reasoned methodological procedure [69]. It is important to note that content analysis is a method that focuses on the image itself and its composition, not on the “cultural analysis” and contextual information.

In this case, the 27 photos were first themed according to [40]’s framework, which includes every aspect of DI based on nine image categories or dimensions (in these case four categories were considered): natural resources; natural environment; culture, history and art; and atmosphere of places.

(b) Video Analysis

The analysis of videos contents consisted of the following stages based on [111]: extraction of resources, analysis of the resources and indexation. The first stage consisted of the separation of image and text, i.e., since the videos are subtitled, the subtitles were the corpus considered for the analysis. In the second stage, individual segments with text extracted from the video’s subtitles constituted the units of analysis. Finally, the third stage—indexation—corresponds to the coding procedure based on a pre-defined tree coding system based on [19]’s typology, i.e., all the segments extracted from the videos were coded to the corresponding category (play, aesthetic, ethics or spiritual intrinsic value).

4. Results

The content analysis of text and visual data was conducted separately. Nevertheless, the findings are eminently similar. Methodologically, a complementary approach was applied in this study, based on the use of textual and visual data. In accordance with the literature [42], this study is grounded on a combined use of textual and visual data. First reported are the results of text analysis, followed by visual analysis (photos & videos), after which the discussion brings the observations together.

4.1. Textual Analysis

As a first approach to the textual data, the outcomes related to image attributes of Romania as a tourism destination are presented here in a word cloud as a visual representation of data in a free format. Three main considerations were brought out from the word cloud in Figure 1 generated by WordItOut (<http://worditout.com>). Word clouds are visualization tools that differentiate font size based on the frequency of particular words. At a first glance, attributes more related with “traditions”, “authentic”, “places”, “historical” are seen, meaning that Romania is deeply associated with the authenticity of places strongly grounded in their traditions and history, which might enhance an ‘ethical’ experience more intrinsically appreciated by the way it affects others or how others respond to it. Secondly, it was curious to note that a second group of attributes, such as “people”, “great”, “exciting”, “interest” or “path” give rise to ideas more associated with entertainment, and fun in consumption experiences actively pursued for the self-oriented value experience. This is in line with the intrinsic value type of “play” of Holbrook’s schema. Thirdly, when describing Romania as a destination in its promotion brochure, it is possible to find descriptor words in this word cloud such as: “remarkable”, “amazing”, “magnificent”, “comfort”, “openness”, “wildness”, “inspiring” or “pleasurable”, meaning that there are intangible, psychological or abstract elements that are close to both aesthetics and escapism as spirituality in the tourism experience. In conclusion, this word elicitation technique allows reflection upon the multidimensionality of tourism experiences, mainly its intrinsic dimension (more affective, emotional, hedonic or aesthetic) that should be taken into consideration when defining a tourist brand strategy for Romania.



Figure 1. Textual corpus from Romania’s official tourist brochure (general description). Source: Generated by WordItOut.

Table 1 depicts a more detailed multidimensional nature of a tourism experience when visiting Romania as a destination. It is possible to find concrete, tangible or functional attributes of Romania (e.g., Danube Delta, UNESCO World Heritage Sites, Spas or Carpathian Mountains). All the references (units of analysis) extracted from the textual corpus were coded, according to a deductive procedure based on Holbrook’s intrinsic value types: play, aesthetics, ethics or spirituality. For more clarity in textual analysis, each element is assigned by the four authors (assuming we are acting as experts) to one of the intrinsic dimensions. However, according to the “compresence” characteristics of [19]’s typology, which stands for holistic and multifaceted consumption experiences where multiple value dimensions emerge at the same time, some elements could be considered in more than one dimension (see “amazing” or “magnificent” as potential drivers of play and/or escapism).

After the four authors acted as judges on the selected input (they coded it independently until agreement was reached), a total of 31 textual references were extracted from the corpus, among them 9 references coded as “aesthetic” (29%), followed by 8 references as “play” and 8 as “ethics” (25.8% each) and finally 7 references for “spirituality” (19.3%). This categorization demonstrates that there is a distribution among the four intrinsic values, corresponding to a more abstract, intangible and psychological dimension of the tourism experience (e.g., “experience inspiring places” (play category), “ever-fresh beauty of the Danube Delta” (aesthetic category), “unique places and traditions” (ethics category), “Moldavia and Bukovina’s monasteries comfort your eyes and calm your soul” (spirituality category). This explorative content analysis which looks for semantic congruence between the coded references and Holbrook’s explanation of each dimension (see Chapters 5, 6, 7 and 9 in Holbrook, 1999), throw results in accordance with Holbrook’s conceptualization of value dimensions within the intrinsic nature in his classification, corroborating the idea that value is “an interactive relativistic preference experience” [19].

4.2. Visual Analysis

Table 2 shows the result of the photo coding procedure. A preliminary categorization of photos according to Beerli and Martin [40] was made by the four authors as a form of organizing the visual framework of these photos. Each image category from a total of 27 photos from Beerli and Martin’s classification emerged, namely “natural resources” (22.2%), “natural environment” (51.8%), “culture, history and art” (22.2%), and “atmosphere of place” (3.7%). Additionally, sub-themes were extracted from each corresponding category (“lakes & mountains” and “variety of flora and fauna”; “beauty of the scenery” and “winter landscape”; “historical buildings and art” and “customs and way of life”; “relaxing and enjoyable”).

Table 1. Tree coding of textual corpus from the Romania's official tourist brochure (general description) intrinsic values.

Textual References/Category Holbrook's Intrinsic Values (Total 31)	Play	Aesthetic	Ethics	Spirituality
Authenticity			✓	
Welcoming nature		✓		
Exciting culture	✓			
Experiencing Inspiring places	✓			
Love Romania	✓			
Exciting love destination of unbeaten paths			✓	
Natural features are unique			✓	
Our country enjoys the embrace of the Carpathians		✓		
True wilderness		✓		
Ever-fresh beauty of the Danube Delta		✓		
Extensive plains scattered with little natural and cultural treasures		✓		
Natural treasure with unchanged traditions			✓	
Warm and generous personality				✓
Cultural sites of UNESCO World Heritage Sites		✓		
Unique history			✓	
Heritage of Latin origin mixed with other great cultures of the continent				✓
The stories of these places will surely fascinate you	✓			
Deep spirituality of Romanians will impress you too				✓
Unique places and traditions			✓	
Romanian way of life	✓			
On the paths of the Carpathian Mountains	✓			
Enjoy the natural parks, which will rouse you to adventure and activity	✓			
Danube Delta is a delightful		✓		
Moldavia and Bukovina's monasteries comfort your eyes and calm your soul				✓
Maramures overwhelms you with its magnificent locations, traditions and people		✓		
Banat and Oltenia's caves and rapids flush you with adrenaline	✓			
Fortified churches and strongholds in Transylvania take you back to the Middle Ages				✓
Exceeding your imagination, even if you've read huge volumes of their history				✓
Pay attention to traditions and popular fairs, spa resorts			✓	
Cultural heritage from the great cities and historical areas		✓		
Amazed by the original and authentic destination			✓	
Number and percentage of references per category (type of intrinsic values)	8 (25.8%)	9 (29%)	8 (25.8%)	6 (19.3%)

Source: Author's elaboration from webQDA outputs.

Table 2. Tree coding of visual corpus (photos) from Romania’s official Facebook page according to Holbrook’s intrinsic values.

Main Themes	Sub-Themes	Examples of Photo’s Descriptions (N = 27)	ID Photo	Theme (%)	Play	Aesthetics	Ethics	Spirituality	
Natural Resources	Lakes and Mountains	Beautiful landscape with mountains, flowers, green vegetation, magnificent sky	1;2	22.2%		✓			
		A clear waterfall from the mountain within colorful flowers and a green vegetation	13			✓			
	Variety of flora & Fauna	Birds beautiful flying in the middle of a green landscape	4			✓			
		Beautiful flowers in nature flower in winter season surrounded by snow	8 23			✓ ✓			
Natural Environment	Scenery beauty	Ocean waves with a bird flying through the waves	10	51.8%		✓			
		Trees with colorful red leaves reflected in a lake as a mirror image	6			✓			
		Trees with colorful red leaves surrounded by a mountain landscape	9			✓			
	Winter Landscape	Foggy natural landscape, cloudless sky, misty forest and local houses	11;14						✓
		Soothing foggy within a natural landscape	12;25						✓
		Beautiful winter landscape with snow on the trees and a magnificent blue sky	5; 16; 22; 26				✓		
	Village located on a rocky hilltop Carpathian Mountains, snowy mountains; green vegetation	19			✓				
	Stunning winter snowy landscape in the evening, a religious monument	20;27			✓				

Table 2. Cont.

Main Themes	Sub-Themes	Examples of Photo's Descriptions (N = 27)	ID Photo	Theme (%)	Play	Aesthetics	Ethics	Spirituality				
Culture, History & Art	Historical Buildings/Art	Romania's triumphal arch looks out over Bucharest and a beautiful garden	7	22.2%		✓	✓					
		Old colorful paintings in a monastery within nature	17; 24									
	Customs & Way of life	Painted eggs, traditional behaviour of the Christians, related to the Easter period	3									✓
		1st March: A symbol of a new spring	18									✓
Traditional clothing of Romanians: a specific traditional wearing		21				✓						
Atmosphere of the Place	Relaxing & Enjoyable	Square with Christmas decoration. (Christmas tree, people walking and relaxing near a local church	15	3.7%	x							
Number & percentage of photos descriptions per Holbrook's classification					1 (3.7%)	17 (62.9%)	2 (7.4%)	7 (25.9%)				

Source: Author's elaboration from webQDA outputs.

Table 3 shows the result of the coding procedure for the 7 videos spots. Similarly, as in the photo analysis, a preliminary categorization of the videos according to Beerli and Martin [40] was made by the four authors, as a form of organizing the visual framework. The final image categories were “natural resources”, “natural environment”, “culture, history and art”, “tourist leisure & recreation”, and “atmosphere of place”. Next, the following image contents were extracted from the video descriptions and coded according to Holbrook’s conceptualization of value dimensions:

- (i) 18 of the total descriptors (38.2%) were coded for ‘aesthetics’ with visual contents related with “natural resources” (e.g., “The Danube Delta: the largest Delta in Europe”, “Letea Forest: the most northern semitropical forest in Europe, “Tens of kilometres of wild beaches”), “culture, history and art” (e.g., “Sibiu: European Cultural Capital in 2007”, “The Black church in Brasov: the symbol of Gothic architecture”, “Saxon settlements with fortified churches dating from the 13th century”, and “atmosphere of the place” (e.g., “vast parks and botanical gardens”). In fact, when the video is showing an invitation to a reactive or passive participation of the tourist (i.e., reacting to beauty) it has been labelled as “aesthetics”. These value dimensions “refers to the appreciation of some consumption experience valued intrinsically at a self-oriented end in itself [19] (p. 10);
- (ii) 12 of the total descriptors (25.5%) were coded as ‘play’, as an active and self-oriented value dimension, with visual contents mostly related with “atmosphere of the place” (e.g., “Concerts of the best bands in the world”, “Intense night life”), “tourist leisure & recreation” (e.g., “Multiple intense experiences: biking, skydiving, winter sports”) and “culture, history & art” (e.g., “Discover the land in the heart of the Carpathians: Transylvania circuit”);
- (iii) 10 of the total descriptors (21.2%) were coded for ‘ethics’ with visual contents mostly related with “natural environment” in an epistemic way of discovery (e.g., “Rediscover the authentic taste of the countryside life”, “Carefully kept skills sent forward to the next generations”), “culture, history & art” (e.g., “Discover the authentic Romania”, “Unique places: The Sapanta Merry Cemetery”). In fact, anything related to “authenticity” is close to “ethics” as it goes with the idea of “morality, justice” [19] (p. 21) again “virtue, justice and morality involve various sorts of matches or correspondences between the natural, the right and the good”. Moreover, what “stands for more than one generation” corresponds to “virtue” and definitely to a more sustainable destination than the ones which have not a long-term projection, and where the “other-oriented aspects” are less prominent (when the DMOs stress just fun and pleasure, but not authentic intrinsic behaviour);

7 of the total descriptors (14.8 %) were coded as ‘spirituality’ with visual contents mostly related with “natural environment” (e.g., “Romania: Wellness and Health”, “Recovery therapies and climotherapy”, “Special mud pack therapies”, “Therapeutic aspects”) were considered as spirituality, in the sense that, compared to the previous ones (aesthetics and play), these are other-related, in a macro level, as they allow to escape from routine and to unveil. See how “other”, as [19] claims the others in question could range from the more micro level (family, friends, colleagues) to an intermediate level (community, country, world) to the most macro level (the Cosmos, Mother Nature, the Deity).

Table 3 shows a dominant focus of tourism spots on aesthetics (38.2 % are focused on Romania’s natural and cultural resources and landscapes) and play (25.5 %, represented by visitor experiences), followed by ethics/authenticity (21.2 %) and spirituality (14.8%). However, all four dimensions reflect the Romanian authorities’ aim to cater for the main trends orienting the present tourism market demand, such as: nature tourism, experiential tourism (active, adventure), the search of authenticity and spirituality. Compared to the text analysis from Table 1, there is less emphasis on authenticity and spirituality.

Table 3. Tree coding of spots video from last international tourism promotion campaign of Romania (Explore the Carpathian Garden).

Main Themes	TV Spot	Videos Descriptions (N = 47)	Play	Aesthetics	Ethics	Spirituality	
Natural Resources	Natural Romania	Discover Romania nature		✓			
		The Sphinx and the Babele unique megalithic formations		✓			
		The Danube Delta: the largest Delta in Europe			✓		
		Letea Forest: the most northern semitropical forest in Europe			✓		
		The last wild horses in Europe			✓		
		Tens of Kilometres of wild beaches			✓		
			A country that is waiting to be explored	✓			
		Wellness Romania	Romania: Wellness and Health				✓
			Salt mines with curative tradition of hundred years			✓	
			Recovery therapies and climotherapy				✓
	Special mud pack therapies					✓	
		Magnetic therapy and laser therapy				✓	
		1/3rd of the mineral water and thermal springs of Europe				✓	
		Special waters drinks				✓	
		Traditional curative therapies & hundred of years SPA treatments			✓		
		70 natural spas		✓			
Natural Environment	Rural Tourism Romania	Discover Rural Tourism	✓				
		Rediscover the authentic taste of the countryside life				✓	
		Goodies cooked like hundreds of years ago				✓	
		Traditional field works forgot by modern world				✓	
		Carefully kept skills sent forward to the next generations				✓	
		Simple, healthy, rich tasting life	✓				
Culture, History & Art	Authenticity Romania	Discover the authentic Romania				✓	
		Traditions that were carefully kept				✓	
		Unique places: The Sapanta Merry Cemetry				✓	
		Mocanita, the oldest engine train in Europe			✓		
			A country were nature and traditions are truly respected				✓
		Tours Romania	Choose your favourite circuit in Romania	✓			
			Discover the land in the heart of the Carpathians: Transylvania circuit	✓			
			Sibiu: European Cultural Capital in 2007			✓	
			Cluj Napoca: the largest university center in Romania			✓	
			The Black church in Brasov: the symbol of Gothic architecture			✓	
	Saxon settlements with fortified churches dating from the 13th century				✓		
		The Hunyad Castle unique French architecture for this part of Europe			✓		
		Find more wonderful experiences in the Top Romania circuits	✓				

Table 3. Cont.

Main Themes	TV Spot	Videos Descriptions (N = 47)	Play	Aesthetics	Ethics	Spirituality
Leisure & Recreation	Adventure Romania	Discover Romania, discover adventure	✓			
		Multiple intense experiences: biking, skydiving, winter sports	✓			
Atmosphere of the Place	City Breaks Romania	City break: discover the Romanian Cities				✓
		Hundreds of years of old churches and Palace of Lords		✓		
		Cultural Capitals	✓			
		Concerts of the best bands in the world	✓			
		Intense night life	✓			
		Fortresses listed in the UNESCO world heritage			✓	
		Palace of Parliament: 2nd largest administrative building in the world			✓	
		European historical landmarks: the Arch of Triumph			✓	
Vast parks and botanical gardens			✓			
		Romania's cities: rich experiences and tastes	✓			
Number & percentage of videos descriptions per Holbrook's classification			12 25.5%	18 38.2%	10 21.2%	7 14.8%

Source: Author's elaboration from webQDA outputs.

These dimensions illustrate the Romanian authorities' perspective on what the country has to offer to foreign visitor and this perspective has not changed much in the last 30 years, as a previous study on Romania's tourism campaigns after 1990 [32] has shown. The video content analysis of all the spots used in the ECG campaign [32] confirms that natural resources (i.e., the aesthetics dimension) dominate the visual content, followed by tourist experiences (i.e., the play dimension), culture and authenticity (both corresponding to the ethics dimension) or spirituality (churches). A similar pattern was illustrated in the video spots of two previous promotion campaigns from 2003 and 2009, only with different emphasis on specific natural resources or cultural attractions. The main development was in the play dimension. The main resources and tourism products emphasized in these campaigns and the Facebook page analysed are underlined in most of the studies of Romania's tourism potential and strategies for tourism development (i.e., [99,112]). Compared to the Tourism Masterplan 2007–2026 [98], only the seaside tourism and business tourism are less emphasized in the ECG campaign video spots.

5. Discussion

The preliminary visual content framework shows that the aesthetic dimension (as an intrinsic value as an end in itself) dominates, based on the predominance of "natural resources" and "natural environment" categories. The experience of beauty as reactive in nature and self-oriented perspective is predominant. These aspects are the most evident and are congruent with previous works on the prevalence of aesthetic value in the tourism experience [23,28]. This is corroborated when image contents are extracted from the photo descriptions and coded according to Holbrook's conceptualization of value dimensions: (i) 17 of the total photos (62.9%) were coded for 'aesthetics' with visual contents related with "natural resources" (mountains, flowers, birds, trees, landscape), "natural environment" (colourful read tree leaves, snowy mountains landscape), "culture, history & art" (old colourful paintings, traditional clothing, traditional painted eggs); (ii) 7 of the total photos (25.9%) were coded for 'spirituality' understood as a the way to escape from routine and connect with nature and the cosmos [19] with visual contents related to "natural environment" (a mystic and insightful foggy landscape surrounded by the Carpathian mountains); (iii) 2 of the total photos (7.4%) were coded for 'ethics' associated with "historical buildings & art", although acknowledging the difficulty of addressing ethics as an abstract element [27]; and (iv) only one photo coded as 'play' within "atmosphere of place", associated with a more engaging and hedonic experience.

The last tourism promotion campaign (i.e., Explore the Carpathian Garden) underlines the well preserved natural resources of Romania (the Carpathian Mountains in particular), followed by cultural authenticity (i.e., the ethics dimension) and spirituality [98]. Similar visual analysis of visitors' photos posted on TripAdvisor studies were done for specific Romanian destinations, hence the different results in the share of categories. For the Danube Delta Nature Reserve [113], the aesthetic dimension also dominates (with about 70 % pictures about natural resources and "natural environment"), followed by very few pictures in the categories of "culture, history and art" and tourist facilities. In other studies of TripAdvisor visitor reviews for specific Romanian destinations, the resulting dimensions of visitor experiences correspond to various shares of Holbrook's and Beerli & Martin's categories: aesthetics (nature), and play (visit organisation) dominant reviews of the Danube Delta; aesthetics (i.e., the painted, beautiful, blue, inside, tower themes) and spirituality (the atmosphere of the place) for the UNESCO monasteries in Northeast Romania [100]; aesthetics (e.g., the castle, stairs, outside and inside themes) and play (i.e., the Dracula and Dracula's castle theme) for the Bran Castle [37].

However, despite the generally positive and attractive image of Romania we found communicated through the pictures, text and video spots, previous studies [103] has shown that the media reactions were mainly negative to the ECG promotion campaign. These reactions were linked to political and administrative aspects of the campaign, such as: accusations of plagiarism for the logo, critics of the budget and a corruption scandal.

Moreover, our results confirm also previous works on value dimensionality applied to tourism experiences, as it regards emotional value dimensions (play and aesthetics) but very scarcely on altruistic ones (ethics and spirituality). Indeed, regarding perceived value of destinations, most works focus on extrinsic aspects such as functional and social ones, and on emotional ones such as aesthetics and fun. In this sense, our results cohere with [22]’s work, which researched students’ trip to varied destinations, agreeing in considering the value of the destination they visited in terms of fun or entertainment and the destinations’ aesthetics (both intrinsic values as ours). Similarly [114] for the case of Croatia advocates for a mixture of extrinsic (quality of touristic services and reputation, and costs) and intrinsic, the latter being coincident with our results in terms of destination appearance (e.g., forest, beaches labelled as “natural Romania”) and emotional experience (e.g., “adventure Romania”).

Our results are closer to [115], who found, for community homestay destinations, a broad range of value dimensions, covering most of functional, social and emotional elements (except altruistic): in their work, perceived value corresponds to tourist accommodation and cost (extrinsic), but also natural environment, enjoyment and new experiences, the relationship between tourist and host, experiences of culture, activities, and new insights. All these are intrinsic aspects, similar to the epistemic (e.g., “a country waiting to be explored”) and emotional benefits proposed by Romanian DMO’s materials (e.g., “rich tasting life” or “intense nightlife”). However, when aspects of authenticity are proposed as relevant dimensions for the destination experience [116], these are often linked to social values (see “intrapersonal and interpersonal authenticity” in [116], which conceptually coheres with Holbrook’s framework, but they are not classified in terms of “ethics”, as our work does. Regarding the last intrinsic dimension of our work, spirituality, value of “wellness” and “therapy” are dimensions also proposed in recent works such as [117] in terms of “escaping bad feelings”; it is a psychological health dimension, close to the one framed here as “spirituality”.

6. Conclusions

The objective of this study was to explore the image attributes of Romania as a tourism destination, framed by Holbrook’s value intrinsic dimensions about consumer experience. The main purpose was to identify what are the main attributes that are being promoting about Romania by the DMOs but looking them into a different approach more related with an intrinsic value typology, a more intrinsic experiential perspective that can add to the development of a brand strategy in the future. DMOs should have a more experiential view of the Romania image attributes allowing them to adequately develop an image to achieve an effective positioning in a more competitive world [118]. Thus, this study is underpinned by the premise that the development of a brand strategy for Romania as a tourism destination, requires an investigation of a more intrinsic nature of tourism experience, putting the consumer in the centre of the value provision since a consumption experience can offer intrinsic value.

As a main theoretical contribution, this study advances the definition and modelling of the value concept as it regards its intrinsic nature [19] in response to the scant number of studies which have approached it empirically. As a way to broaden the vast utility of the Value concept [20] and in ways to adjust this classical typology to new realms [21], the value dimensions known as intrinsic (i.e., aesthetics, play, ethics and spirituality) have been proven in this research to be useful for identifying and depicting the main attributes that are being promoting on Romania by the DMOs. Moreover, the combination of both textual and visual (photos and videos) contents as materials in this work allow to enrich the existing literature on multidimensionality of the tourism experience [23,29]. In this sense, our mixed analysis has shown the property of “compresence” of Holbrook’s view, as some elements from texts and videos encompass more than one value dimension, adding to both the richness complexity of the tourism experience.

Managerial contribution of our results corresponds to an inductive guidance for Romanian DMOs. One of the objective of the destination branding is to develop a consistent brand strategy in order to build a positive image for the destination and a strong positioning from differentiating it from the competitors [119]. In this way, is considered a way of creating a unique identity for a destination that allows the tourists to compare one destination to another [120]. In this sense, our findings add up to the process of destination branding [121] as a cooperation between different stakeholders so that the brand is accepted and communicated through official and unofficial advertising and marketing strategies. As already stated by [114] (p. 127) “the organization managing a destination needs to conduct research to determine the dimensions that define the perceived value of a specific destination”. Our work on projected image of Romania has proven how these “different dimensions of (Romanian) destination perceived value” cohere with the intrinsic side of a tourist experience. There is evidence of all four experiential intrinsic dimensions of play, aesthetics, ethics and spirituality. But it is fair to acknowledge that there is space for improvement in some of them. Indeed, our results on promotional material of aesthetics of Romania are linked to only natural resources. As proven by [122] (p. 282) when defining beauty in destination the “assessment of the beauty goes beyond the visual aspects and engages all senses”. Indeed, as Holbrook himself recalls aesthetics corresponds not just to visual elements, but to any aspect of beauty experienced as an end in itself. The potential aesthetic significance of Romania as tourist destination is therefore considered in our work only partially. Exploring how other senses (leading to further emotions) are tackled in promotional materials, or in tourists review about Romania may lead to extra ways of differentiation for this country as a tourism destination.

Additionally, other limitations do arise from our study, giving therefore place to future lines of research. First, methodologically, the sampling process followed to get our corpus has been limited to one stakeholder in TDI formation (marketers or DMOs). Organic images of tourists, both domestic and international, should be addressed in future works, by combining, with similar analysis, photos, text and videos uploaded by (tourists) consumers on the Internet. Second, the combination of textual and visual content analysis done here could lead to triangulation with quantitative tools (surveys on Tourism Destination Image) in search of a mixed methods approach. This paper intends to demonstrate that are advantages in using a more integrated approach in data analysis, by combining textual with visual elements. In this case, the visual results allowed us to corroborate the textual results and give some new insights about experiential image attributes about Romania.

Third, our approach has been exploratory in nature, and the choice of materials has been discretionary. A more systematic approach could consider a diachronic view of promotional materials of Romania across the years, which could be further compare with tourists’ contents posted in more than one site. In order to help in better monitoring of the brand image of Romania.

Fourth, results have shown unbalanced relevance of some value dimensions (play and aesthetics, over ethics and spirituality in the visual analysis of photos). In order to progress in the “compresence” of value dimension experienced at a tourism destination, it is recommended in the future to triangulate (i) in sources of data (for instance, tourists’ comments, opinions and perceptions), (ii) methods of data collection (e.g., focus group, in order to have a more holistic, integrated and critical approach to the data), (iii) data analysis techniques (e.g., complement with other qualitative software analysis that can undertake a more semantic analysis), and (iv) data validation (e.g., through the use of expert consultation that could help in overcoming difficulties in addressing in both visual and textual contents of some dimensions such as ethics and spirituality. Fifth, although adding to value research because less studied, our paper has focused only on the intrinsic dimensions of value and not the entire intrinsic vs extrinsic behavior duality. Therefore, future research should also consider the utilitarian (efficiency, excellence) and social (status and esteem) dimensions of both projected and induced image, to better grasp all drivers of Romania as a complete and sustainable destination.

Finally, by integrating other stakeholders' perceptions (prospect tourists, residents), and a wider focus on also extrinsic value dimensions, future research should be directed towards a reliable brand strategy for Romania as a tourism destination. The line of action should strategically enhance the image, positioning and competitive advantage of Romania, demanding image studies as a precondition of further decisions.

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Appendix A

Table A1. Holbrook (1999)'s Typology of Value.

		EXTRINSIC	INTRINSIC
SELF-ORIENTED	ACTIVE	EFFICIENCY (Convenience)	PLAY (Amusement)
	REACTIVE	EXCELLENCE (Quality)	AESTHETICS (Beauty)
OTHER-ORIENTED	ACTIVE	STATUS (Success)	ETHICS (Virtue, Justice)
	REACTIVE	ESTEEM (Reputation, Materialism)	SPIRITUALITY (Faith)

Source: Holbrook (1999, p. 12).

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