

## ORIGINAL RESEARCH ARTICLE

# The physical and the virtual in urban tourist practices—The case of Buenos Aires, Argentina

Mercedes González Bracco<sup>1\*</sup>, Linda Kotschack<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Universidad de Buenos Aires-CONICET, Buenos Aires B1657, Argentina. E-mail: mercedesbracco@yahoo.com.ar

<sup>2</sup> Universidad de Buenos Aires, Buenos Aires B1657, Argentina.

### ABSTRACT

In recent years, Buenos Aires has become one of the main destinations in Latin America. Promoted as the cultural capital of the region, attractive places to stroll around as well as cultural experiences are advertised to attract tourists. On the other hand, the practice of tourism has changed and the current traveler uses virtual tools that help him to know and interact with a tourist destination. Under these premises, this paper observes the role of the virtual and the physical/experiential in the construction of Buenos Aires as a tourist destination. In this sense, the question arises: What city is constructed by the websites, social networks and the tours that pass through it? How is this city physically and virtually practiced? Through the ethnographic and netnographic study that includes the inquiry of virtual media linked to local tourism and the observation of tours that travel through the city, the interaction of the physical and the virtual in tourist Buenos Aires will be analyzed.

**Keywords:** tourist city; Buenos Aires; physical; virtual

## 1. Introduction

### 1.1. The Internet and tourist practices

In the information society, connectivity and the possibility of instantaneous searches through (almost) endless online sources from smartphones, tablets and computers, have effects on our daily practices. Long discussions to define the author of a book or the name of a song are now solved with a quick Google search. Considering that half of the world's population uses the internet and 37% are active users of social networks<sup>[1]</sup>, it is noteworthy that the internet is no longer a separate virtual world but runs through

our lives and is part of our most everyday practices, such as painting fingernails or sharing a meal<sup>[2]</sup>.

The importance of the Internet also has repercussions on tourism practices. In the specific case of Buenos Aires, according to the latest available statistics, 42.8% of foreign tourists indicated that tourism websites were an important means of information to organize the trip in 2014<sup>[3]</sup>; and in 2016 half of the foreign passengers interviewed in the tourist bus indicated that they use apps to access tourist information<sup>[4]</sup>. Tourism practices are thus influenced by the presence or absence of internet connection<sup>[5]</sup>. Added to this is also the growth of travel services

#### ARTICLE INFO

Received: November 20, 2020 | Accepted: December 31, 2020 | Available online: January 14, 2021

#### CITATION

González Bracco M, Kotschack L. The physical and the virtual in urban tourist practices—The case of Buenos Aires, Argentina. Smart Tourism 2021; 2(1): 12 pages.

#### COPYRIGHT

Copyright © 2021 by author(s). This is an Open Access article distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution License (<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>), permitting distribution and reproduction in any medium, provided the original work is cited.

available on offline mobile devices, such as Google maps and other travel guide applications, which blur the boundaries between the online and offline worlds.

In this context, the most important resource of the so-called Web 2.0 are social media that include a mix of information and technology tools and take different forms. Different configurations such as wikis, blogs, microblogs, social networks, material sharing sites, review sites and voting pages can be identified. The central characteristic of social media is that they enhance collaboration and socialization of information online through platforms that enable communication between individuals and create virtual communities<sup>[6]</sup>.

Social media also give rise to a new type of sociability related to tourism. The most important examples are collaborative accommodation and transportation (of the Couchsurfing, AirBnB and BlablaCar type), where the same individuals contact each other through different platforms to manage reservations of properties and private cars for rental or free loan for tourism purposes<sup>[7]</sup>. This phenomenon is part of the collaborative economy, understood as a type of exchange that seeks to take advantage of underutilized resources to create social and economic benefits<sup>[8]</sup>. Online platforms facilitate this type of exchanges, on the one hand by connecting suppliers with consumers, and on the other hand by giving the possibility to create trust between people participating in transactions through an interpersonal system trust mediated by the evaluations posted by other users<sup>[9]</sup>.

It is important to note that the internet not only functions as a source of tourism information but Web 2.0, based on the contribution of users, also constitutes a space for sharing the experience with the virtual community. Social networks offer an innovative element to personal travel reflections, such as souvenirs, photographs, travel diaries and postcards, by providing global platforms on which tourists can create and publish their travel stories<sup>[6]</sup>. In this sense, the power of the so-called influencers, people with a large number of followers on social networks who

partner with different companies to promote their products, stands out.

If Web 2.0 meant the emergence of social networks, Web 3.0 is characterized by semantic networks. In this sense, there is a shift towards artificial intelligence and technological innovation. The new generation is characterized by the possibility of carrying out searches in natural language, being able to directly interrogate the immense database that constitutes the Internet, and by the multifunctionality of mobile devices that make personal computers increasingly ubiquitous. The personalization of results—Based on the collection and analysis of Internet users' personal data carried out by large companies such as Google and Facebook—Redirects attention in an increasingly targeted manner. It is thus possible to observe new behaviors in the face of virtuality, which with the fast connection and easy handling of its portals is increasingly incorporated into routines, configuring information routes based on the interests and previous consumption of each one<sup>[10,11]</sup>.

From anthropology it is possible to make a valuable approach to urban tourism considering the contextual aspects mentioned above. Through the netnographic approach combined with the ethnographic one, it is possible to elucidate the particularity of the city of Buenos Aires presented as a tourist destination on websites, social networks and smartphone applications and to analyze how it interrelates with the physical city. The particularity of the ethnographic method is given by the dense description of the phenomena studied. This activity consists of studying human behavior in its context in order to construct knowledge about its particular meanings<sup>[12]</sup>. The relevance of this work lies then in the qualitative analysis of the interrelation between the physical and the virtual in the construction of a specific tourist destination, the city of Buenos Aires, based on a dense description of the way in which tourist practices are carried out and the analysis of the meanings assigned to them by the subjects.

## 1.2. Ethnographing tourism on the Internet

Just as the Internet provides many possibilities of use, there are also various strategies for scientific approach. The qualitative methodology par excellence to approach these questions is netnography, which adapts ethnographic research techniques to approach relational processes, cultural practices and specific dynamics observed on the Internet. Netnography thus allows the study of cyber-cultures, virtual communities and the experiences that are manifested through them by analyzing the information that is publicly available on the network<sup>[13]</sup>.

Tourism is linked to virtual practices in different ways. As Lindsay<sup>[14]</sup> points out, the Internet provides the possibility of having tourism experiences through a virtual interface, without visiting the physical site. In this sense, it is important to differentiate between virtual tourism practices and the use of virtual tools for tourism practices at the destination. On this basis, for this case study material was identified through keyword searches in Google<sup>[15]</sup>. Three keywords in English and Spanish were used, with a total of six searches, and the first page of results was examined. The terms used were “Buenos Aires tourism”/“Buenos Aires Tourism”, “Buenos Aires places of interest”/“Buenos Aires places to visit” and “What to do in Buenos Aires”. Among the results of these searches are articles and listings from different magazines, newspapers and blogs as well as travel agencies. The two results that appear most frequently were selected: TripAdvisor and the website of the Ente de Turismo de la Ciudad Autónoma de Buenos Aires. These results are also useful in terms of covering different virtual environments. Both sites are present in social networks and have mobile applications where the content is adapted to the interface and features of smartphones. Moreover, although they are among the most viewed, the choice of these websites is interesting because of their differences. TripAdvisor depends on an international and private company that provides an image of Buenos Aires fed by the gaze of tourists, i.e., it builds its legitimacy from the bottom up (bottom-up). The Ente de Turismo, on the other hand, is an official organization

that seeks to install an agenda of attractions and tours for visitors, building its legitimacy from the top down (top-down).

This analysis is complemented by an ethnography of the tourist practices that take place in the physical city. In this sense, tours were chosen as units of observation because they are eminently touristic practices and involve displacements through the city<sup>[16]</sup>. Given the wide variety of tours available, the selection criteria in this case had to do with the range of popularity (among those promoted by TripAdvisor) and those organized by the City Government itself (among those promoted by the Ente de Turismo website). Likewise, in order to observe changes and permanence in the construction of the tourist city, we tried to include not only the traditional circuits but also new ones, either by theme, route or means of transport used.

## 2. Buenos Aires—The construction of a virtual tourist experience

Originated in 2000 by an American company, TripAdvisor (hereinafter TA) is today the largest travel site in the world. Its differential is given by its horizontality, since it is a free access platform where anyone can enter to obtain and offer information about destinations and attractions. Places are ranked according to users’ opinions, which gives the site a solid reputation. Moreover, the site offers a wide variety of travel options and planning functions available in many languages. It is possible to create shared travel itineraries with other users, incorporate attractions into the travel calendar and comment on them.

The Buenos Aires section includes more than one million reviews, 50,000 photos and a forum with more than 1,800 posts provided by the site’s users. The first thing that stands out is a large photograph of the Puente de la Mujer, in Puerto Madero, taken by a user. Bearing in mind that tourist destinations are in constant competition with other similar ones, it is worth noting that in the upper left corner of the photograph there is a small sticker of the “Travellers’

Choice” award, indicating that it is the best positioned destination in the country and the third in South America. The following is a brief description of the city to guide users’ expectations:

The birthplace of tango is, like the dance itself, captivating, seductive and bustling with vibrant energy. The evocative old neighborhoods are filled with romantic restaurants and exciting nightlife, and Buenos Aires’ European heritage is evident in its architecture, boulevards and parks. Café Tortoni, the city’s oldest bar, will transport you back to 1858, and the sensational Teatro Colón still has the same effect on the viewer as it did in 1908. The shopping capital of Latin America offers the promise of luxurious retail therapy along its wide boulevards.

As a commercial platform, the website presents a constant back and forth between user reviews and ratings and its use by TA to offer transportation, accommodation and tour services. Some versions of the page—Which changes subtly according to the country of origin, which can be chosen by the visitor—Also offer different guides for the user to take certain suggested tours: “3 days in Buenos Aires”, “Buenos Aires for children”, “Buenos Aires for free”, “Buenos Aires alternative” and “Excursions from Buenos Aires” are the options that show the diversity of the public that is expected to be questioned.

As for what users search for and share, it was found that the most popular are restaurants (493,000 opinions) followed by attractions and things to do (370,000), while hotels (205,000) and temporary rentals (1,500) are far behind in interests, which allows inferring that the page is a tool more related to “being in the destination” than to trip planning. Taking the case of “things to do in Buenos Aires”, the organization proposed by the site for these items is by popularity, location and type of attraction. In order of popularity, for January 2018 the top ten items were: 1) Teatro Colón, 2) Puerto Madero, 3) Recoleta, 4) Private Tours, 5) Palermo Woods, 6) Tres de Febrero Park, 7) National Museum of Fine Arts, 8) Recoleta Cemetery, 9) Museum of Latin American Art of Buenos Aires—MALBA, and 10)

Classes and Workshops. This ranking is defined by means of an index based on the quality, quantity and age of the reviews (TripAdvisor, “TripAdvisor Popularity Index”, n.d.).

This list provides some information about the preferences of users and also about how the site presents this variety. On the one hand, it can be observed that the creation of items by tourists makes the list include different categories of attractions (mixing buildings with neighborhoods and activities) while the same place can appear twice (Parque Tres de Febrero-Bosques de Palermo). On the other hand, this apparently anarchic hierarchization appears as the most “authentic” because it is based on the democracy of the popular score, establishing itself as a “word of mouth” platform: “It’s one thing to say on your website that it’s the best tour in Buenos Aires, but that’s what we try to sell. But when a person has already tried the service saying ‘it’s the most’, ‘you have to do it’, ‘that’s what I recommend it’s another thing”.

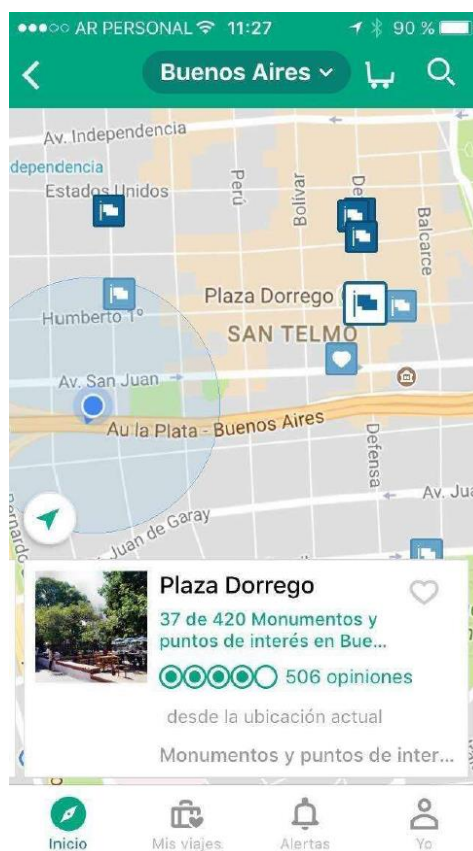
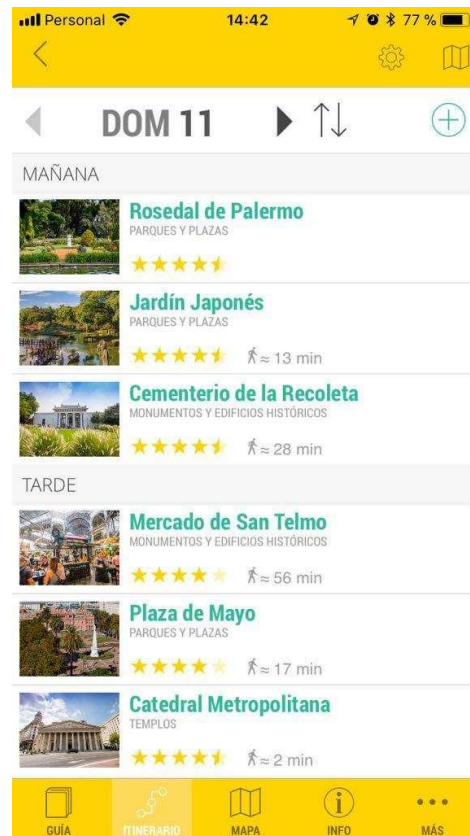


Figure 1. Screenshot of the TA mobile app, 19/09/17.

The app for mobile devices includes the same information as the website but its functionalities are adapted to the habits of Smartphone users. In this sense it gives first and foremost and by downloading information of the selected destination the possibility of accessing it offline. Geolocation helps tourists to locate themselves in space and allows them to visualize nearby attractions—Both those selected and those available (**Figure 1**)—And links with other associated applications, such as the Uber service and the maps installed on the device.

For its part, the Ente de Turismo (hereinafter ET) website depends on the Government of the Autonomous City of Buenos Aires (GCBA) and is available in Spanish, English and Portuguese. Taking into account that the ET was created “with the purpose of designing and executing policies and programs for the promotion, development and encouragement of tourism as a strategic economic activity of the city”<sup>[17]</sup>, a dual purpose of the page can be identified, which on the one hand addresses the individual tourist to give him travel tips and inform him of the things the city has to offer as a tourist destination and on the other hand also includes information related to tourism policies and programs promoted by the same.

The home page is composed of a series of images of the city connected with informative articles. The colorful mosaic design intersperses photographs and information about upcoming events and relevant news for tourists, as well as the different tours organized by the Ente. The page also provides access to fixed sections of the portal such as lists of things to do and attractions, thematic articles, as well as data on accessible tourism and tourist services.



**Figure 2.** Screenshot of the ET mobile app, 10/03/18.

Like what was found in TA, the itineraries presented in ET propose tours of the city designed for different audiences, lengths of stay and budgets. A multifaceted city is shown: An alternative Buenos Aires, a multicultural one, one “from above”, one accessible for people with disabilities and a gay friendly one. The information section advises visitors on how to get around the city and includes useful data as well as indications on how to get there, how to move around and where to sleep. The BA Planner, on the other hand, is a travel organizer that works with big data, providing updated information from the providers’ websites. It seeks to match the interests of tourists with the activities available in the city on their travel dates and thus configure a personalized itinerary.

At the bottom of the page there is a list of the GCBA applications: BA Wi-Fi, BA Tourism, BA How to get there, BA Mobile and BA Ecobici. The analysis of the BA Turismo app demonstrates the multidimensionality of the relationship between the

virtual and the physical, between connection and disconnection. Like the TA app, the information it includes is available offline and its content corresponds to that provided by the website. In the application the tourist can see the attractions on a map of the city and through geolocation find directions from the current location, allowing them to move without difficulty in an unfamiliar space. Articles about different attractions can be filtered by proximity, popularity or alphabetical order, and the user has the possibility to save favorites, add them to an itinerary or mark them as visited. The itinerary creation functionality automatically sorts the places according to their location and indicates the walking distance between the chosen attractions. The user can also choose to change their order in relation to their current location or that of their accommodation (**Figure 2**). The application also has functions aimed at sharing travel experiences: It includes the possibility of connecting to Facebook and publishing postcards created in the application on that social network or sending them by E-mail. Users can also report changes in relation to the articles and make reviews, which are the basis for filtering by article popularity.

### **3. “Discover Buenos Aires”—Tours and the physical city**

After presenting the analysis of the most popular web pages dedicated to tourism in Buenos Aires, it is appropriate to observe in what way the practices crossed by them are linked to other tourist practices developed in the city. First of all, it is convenient to dwell on the decision to take tours as an empirical referent when looking at how the tourist city is practiced. It is understood with Urry<sup>[18]</sup> that tourist practices are differentiated from the daily life of the person who performs them and typically include an induced pleasurable experience. This implies that they can be of a very diverse nature, from visiting a museum or a park to attending some extraordinary activity such as a tango show or a soccer match. The fundamental characteristic found in tours, and which establishes them as a favorable locus for the study of

the tourist city, is that all attendees identify this practice as a tourist one. It is also noteworthy that even though one out of every five people attending the tours organized by the ET are portenos, they are also considered as tourists when it comes to constructing themselves as the target of the tours, since their objective is to “discover the city”.

The mapping of the city established by these tours is concentrated on the coastal strip of the city, which is recognized as the part of the city that is of tourist interest (**Figure 3**). It can be seen that the best positioned tours in TA are concentrated in this more traditional area of the city and that, even if they have different specificities, ranging from being free or paid, walking or cycling, they always oscillate between showing “the entire culture of Argentina” or focusing on a specific aspect such as the asado or tango. In this way, the companies seek to differentiate themselves by introducing new ways of “experiencing” the city beyond staying in the traditional tourist space: “We are trying to leave the perspective that we do only tours, is that the word tours are well washed out, then we go more type by experiences of the city, cultural. That’s why we also bring fernet cola, we drink mate, we go to a grill to talk to the grill master and he tells us how it is, how he puts together an Argentine asado, and it’s more than just information, it’s culture”.

In four cases, however, a leakage of this space was observed: These were two tours by GraffitiMundo. One is a non-profit organization that organizes thematic tours on street art in the city with great repercussion in TA and two by ET: “Barrios Futboleros” and the “Circuito Papal”. From a resource such as urban art works, soccer and Pope Francis, these tours seek to build an attractiveness related to residential or industrial areas that are not usually the object of tourist practices. Especially in the ET tours, the neighborhoods are emphasized as constitutive parts of the narratives: Jorge Bergoglio’s life is known through his neighborhoods<sup>[19]</sup> and, according to the brochure of the tour Barrios Futboleros, the neighborhoods were previous to soccer and “the city is crossed to show the difference of identities”. That

is, while in the case of Graffiti Mundo the relationship with the location of the murals is less explicit, in the case of ET the use of soccer and the Pope as attractions are taken as “an excuse” to show other areas of Buenos Aires, given that “our focus in reality

is to be the tip of the spear to show that there is interest from tourists to tour other parts, to be innovative in how we tour the city, how we present it, what are the contents we want to show”.



**Figure 3.** Tours observed in the city of Buenos Aires. Traditional ones are shown in red and alternative ones in violet (ET) and green (GraffitiMundo).

Another ET strategy observed in the tours that remain within the space usually considered as touristic is the creation of new alternatives to see and experience the city. While private tours usually transit the city by bus, bicycle or on foot, the ET proposes a change in the location of the viewer or in the mode of movement through the city by offering Rooftops tours (i.e., terraces, allowing to see the city from above), running, electric skateboard rides, paddle boat and eco-car. These efforts are related to the search to promote new approaches to the city and include them in the tourist’s itinerary.

Understanding that tourists are looking for exotic experiences, today the traditional city tour is not enough, and instead there are places and activities typical of the daily life of the locals, and therefore not touristic in the agenda of many companies. On the other hand, residents are encouraged to “experience the city as a tourist”, proposing activities that allow

a change of perspective on the spaces they usually visit. Thus, in a crossed game of exoticisms, for a porteno who does not pay attention to these areas in his daily life, going to Caminito or the Casa Rosada can be a tourist experience, while for foreigners the tourist proposals include eating asado, going to a bar, a milonga or a soccer match, learning how to cook empanadas and drinking mate.

#### **4. “Then they can google it”—From the physical to the virtual**

It was observed in tourism practices that the internet forms an inherent part of being in the world: It is taken for granted that all tourists are web users. Within this usage, smartphones are becoming increasingly important in people’s virtual practices. It is possible to break down the main virtual practices

of tourists into two categories: Informational and interactive.

In the first sense, tourists use the Internet to get information, make reservations, etc. It is a type of practice that is explicitly related to “being” in the destination and allows the tourist to manage independently, leading to the fact that they are not necessarily going to hire a travel agency for their activities. The information sought can be about things to do but also includes practical information on how to get around the city. According to this same guide, the apps she sees tourists using the most are BA Cómo Llego and Google Maps. This type of information is also an important functionality of the BA Turismo app that “geolocates you the point in the city and guides you” giving “all the necessary information to be able to be self-sufficient in the city of Buenos Aires”.

Having maps on the phone and reviews of places to guide tourists’ expectations does not mean, however, that the city becomes transparent to them. For many, technological tools operate at a first level of knowledge about the place or attraction, endorsed or refuted by an authoritative human voice—Someone known who has already made the visit, the hotel concierge, the tour guide, a sporadic tour companion—That can even refer to another internet search, but already more refined. In other cases, when the investment in time, energy or money is not so important, reliance on the applications seems to be enough. The weight of the information provided by technology thus conditions the practices, uses, behaviors and perceptions of tourists, enabling or restricting their autonomy from suggestions, warnings and plain prohibitions, bringing to light their active role in the “production” of the tourist experience<sup>[20]</sup>.

On the other hand, the possibilities of information search are also used as a resource by the guides in the tours. Thus, a Graffitimundo guide points out a mural by Jim Visión that alludes to the work “Napoléon crossing the Alps” by Jacques-Louis David and upon learning that the attendees do not know it indicates that “later they can google it”

to see its similarities. Likewise, in a thematic tour on ET tango the guide tells a love story between two artists explaining that there is a documentary that is on YouTube and that he does not want to advance how it ends. On the other hand, in several tours offered by the ET the guides have tablets where they have audiovisual information complementary to the tour (**Figure 4**). In contrast, it is also noteworthy that this possibility of searching for information can be seen as a threat to the profession: one guide explains that many people speak disparagingly of her job thinking that it only involves looking things up on the internet.



**Figure 4.** ET guide showing images on a tablet during the Rooftops of Monserrat tour.

## **5 “Without social networks, you don’t exist today”—From the virtual to the physical**

As already pointed out, the use of the Internet by tourists is not limited to the search for information. A second type of use that can be identified, the interactive one, is that of sharing the experience. With the proliferation of smartphones and the increase in the image quality of cellular cameras, fewer and fewer people are carrying actual cameras when sightseeing. Using the phone’s camera simplifies the sharing of photos and videos, since the only necessary step to do so is to connect to the network. The content acquires another meaning when it is shared, as it goes from being a memory to being part of the construction that the individual makes of himself on the networks. As one of the guides explains, nowadays social media is almost everything, in fact sometimes it seems that tourists come here to show their



friends that they are in an exotic place. And that's why they want to take pictures all the time". Social networks now occupy the place that postcards sent to family or the slide show session at a get-together with friends after a trip used to have: They fulfill the traveler's need to show the destination.

At the same time, the Internet is used to share the experience in open channels by writing reviews and posts in blogs and different websites, with the publication of photos and videos. This type of postings is the most relevant for tourism stakeholders as it generates possibilities of attracting more tourists to their activity, so they encourage its use. The guides of Buenos Aires Free Walks always ask tourists to make reviews. Likewise, the joke that "if you don't give 5 points (the maximum score) don't give anything" is recurrent. Another guide stated it in more dramatic terms: "(Being on social networks) today is fundamental. You see it with the airlines, all the companies involved in tourism (...). They are all very clear that without social networks, today you don't exist. You don't exist".

In this sense, it is noteworthy that the way a place looks on the networks is important for tourists. According to a survey conducted in the United Kingdom, four out of ten millennials take into account how instagrammable a place is when choosing a destination for their vacations<sup>[21]</sup>. This becomes intelligible considering that people live on social networks and that these have become social environments.

In the case of Instagram the presentation of the self is carefully constructed and with a highly aestheticized style<sup>[22]</sup>. It should be recalled that the social network Instagram was developed specifically as a mobile application in 2010. To date, it is not possible to upload photos from another device. Travel photos thus acquire an important meaning as they allow showing an image of something extraordinary at the very instant it is being experienced.

Content created by tourists on social media in turn has a significant influence on positioning and branding related to a tourism destination and is

considered more credible<sup>[23]</sup>. One of the most widespread ways in which tourism stakeholders seek to associate their brands with the preference of tourists is using hashtags. Thus, many of the companies surveyed make efforts to establish their own hashtags and encourage their use. ET resorts to this practice by asking tourists to share their photos by tagging them with #travelbuenosaires; as of January 2018 the hashtag has more than 11,000 posts. In addition, in 2017 it invited, in collaboration with the National Ministry of Tourism, 22 influencers as a visibility strategy on the networks. As an official indicates, "Instagram is a new communication platform, and this year we focused on attracting the attention of potential tourists (...) the opportunity to get to know Buenos Aires is highly valued abroad and the proposal is focused on being porteño. The gastronomy, the nightlife, the urban outings by bicycle and the cultural offer of our city, which is unique in Latin America, are appreciated"<sup>[24]</sup>.

Private companies, on the other hand, also seek to make themselves visible in the networks. Biking Buenos Aires has a sign in its office indicating the hashtags they want tourists to use and an Instagram account that exclaims "Hashtag bikingbuenosaires to show us your adventures!". According to Will, guide and founder of the company, these serve to generate a bond with tourists that goes beyond the moment shared on the tour: "(Tourists) also want to participate in looking for good things to do in the city, so the hashtag is very useful where we can do that."

In contrast, as observed in previous work<sup>[16,20]</sup>, there are urban brands that seek to interact with tourists and their networks. The Tourist Assistance Centers (TAC) of the ET, located at strategic points in the city, are the meeting places from where different tours of the city depart; they provide tourists with free Wi-Fi, desks with plugs and USB connection ports and touch screens with information and the BA Turismo app is promoted. In addition to this, the Postales BA initiative, with the installation of metal windows in different parts of the city, seeks to introduce a new look on heritage buildings while indicating the hashtag Postales BA to share photos of them.

At the same time, when walking through the streets of the city, the Certificate of Excellence that TA awards to establishments well rated by users is recurrent in the windows of businesses. This makes those who pass by on the street, even without having consulted the website, aware that it is a company of proven quality (**Figure 5**).

These “quality wafers” are also an excellent example of how TA exerts power over the tourism market. Referring to this website, one guide indicates

how difficult it is for it to position itself as a company with few reviews can hardly compete with one that has hundreds of positive comments. Moreover, as another guide states: “I have even offered 2 for 1 tours in order to become known. Sometimes it is more a question of moving around to get clients so that later those clients will write to you”. The guide equates “becoming known” with positioning in the TA listing, telling below the story of a friend who started from scratch but became very well positioned in the listing, achieving commercial success.



**Figure 5.** TA decals on the windows of different establishments in the city of Buenos Aires.

## 6. Conclusions

### 6.1. The pedagogy of the tourist-with-smartphone

This paper has proposed to analyze the tourist construction of the city of Buenos Aires by observing the interrelation between the virtual and the physical, highlighting its relevance for the tourist and for the economic activities linked to the tourist practice. As a result, it was found that there is a permanent back and forth between the physical and the virtual city, as the latter is continuously available to the Internet user through smartphones, with the possibility of accessing information and sharing experiences instantaneously. At the same time, the physical city contains references that encourage interaction with the virtual geolocation of phones that allow recognition

of nearby attractions, TripAdvisor stickers on restaurant doors, QR codes at the entrances of emblematic buildings, indication of which hashtag to use in a specific place.

In this way, what can be called a “pedagogy of the tourist-with-smartphone” is built, through which tourists are shown how they can discover, get to know and share the city in an easy and immediate way, feeding back the interest in Buenos Aires as a destination on a scale that would be impossible if it were built only from the supply side. The tourist-with-smartphone belonging to the Web 3.0 generation is independent, creative, spontaneous and dynamic; he is connected, informed and open to the different options offered by the city.

On the other hand, it was found that the catego-

rized virtual practices challenge the traditional tourist offer models. On the one hand, the informative one was mentioned, which is built from the tourist's personal and virtual networks and complemented by the various applications available. This turns the tourist-with-smartphone into a confident tourist, who can self-manage his stay and does not need (as much) conventional guides. On the other hand, the interactive, generated from the production and dissemination by the tourist of content related to the destination. Here, quantity (how many positive or negative opinions there are about a certain attraction, how many photos or videos there are with a certain hashtag, how many reposts it has) and quality (what score a certain restaurant has, what opinions there are about a certain hotel) become relevant, turning the tourist-with-smartphone into an empowered tourist facing an increasingly sophisticated tourist offer that must make efforts for the visitor to mention and recommend it.

As a result, companies seek to focus on the link, trying to build tourist loyalty in order to achieve visibility and positive reviews. Like TripAdvisor, other bottom-up websites such as Yelp, Oleo Guide and Google Guides stimulate the interactive practice of users eager to share experiences and opinions, which these companies overlap with commercial use. For its part, ET focuses much more on informational use, related to its purpose as a government institution. Although tourists are encouraged to share content on the networks, the main thing for this institution is to position Buenos Aires as a destination, so its focus is on providing tourists with all the possibilities offered by the city, beyond its visibility or hierarchy. This can be seen from the analysis of the new circuits with which they seek to widen the current tourist map.

The latter also shows that, although the options for the tourist-with-smartphone are very varied, there is still a specific city built for them by tourism agents. The new circuits and forms of travel favor the generation of new images and ways of practicing the city. The pedagogy of the tourist-with-smartphone con-

tributes to consolidate and take root in time, also favoring a fragmented temporality of tourism that can be observed in two ways. On the one hand, because the link that a company establishes with the tourist goes beyond the moment of the experience, since the tourist has the possibility of continuing to share his or her experience on the networks. The posts last over time and can influence another traveler days, months or years after their publication. On the other hand, the instantaneousness of the publications are considered in other contexts as an added value, demonstrated by the popularity of ephemeral social media, such as Snapchat and Instagram stories, giving the possibility to show that "today I was here" without the aesthetic pressure of other networks<sup>[23]</sup>.

Tourist Buenos Aires is thus a dynamic and diverse city that presents itself to the world as home to "all passions". The tourist-with-smartphone has the possibility to discover that city, walk around it and look for new places with the certainty (real or not) that he is going in the right direction and that the restaurant where he is going to dine is worth it. In a movement that detaches, though not totally, from the old obligatory referents of travel, the construction of tourist destinations is coupled to the easier, more immediate and democratic uses of stars and hashtags. However, this collective construction does not blur the traditional tourist image that continues to be reinforced in the practices of tourists. This is because the "pedagogy of the tourist-with-smartphone" does not escape the paradox of the "bubble filter"<sup>[11]</sup>, according to which the artificial intelligence of Web 3.0 allows for virtually infinite information searches, but the results tend to be increasingly narrowed down based on the lines prefixed by the advertisements of the providers and the preferences of visitors.

## Conflict of interest

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

## References

1. We Are Social. "Digital in 2017: Global overview" [Internet]. 2017 [cited 2018 Jan 16]. Available from: <http://bit.ly/2pcK6Y9>

2. Miller D, Costa E, Haynes N, et al. “Academic studies of social media”. In: *How the world changed social media*. London: UCL Press; 2016. p. 9–24.
3. Observatorio Turístico Ciudad de Buenos Aires. Informe Anual de Bus Turístico Ciudad Autónoma de Buenos Aires. Año 2014 (Spanish) [Annual Report of Tourist Bus Autonomous City of Buenos Aires. Year 2014] [Internet]. 2015 [cited 2018 Jan 27]. Available from: <http://bit.ly/2qgb26i>
4. Ente de Turismo de la Ciudad de Buenos Aires. Informe anual de bus turístico. Ciudad Autónoma de Buenos Aires. Año 2016 (Spanish) [Annual tourist bus report. Autonomous City of Buenos Aires. Year 2016] [Internet]. Available from: <http://bit.ly/2K5HVML>
5. Bezerra ED, Melo Silva Luft MC, Rocha Dacorso AL. Tourism in the information society. A conceptual approach to post-tourism. *Studies and Perspectives in Tourism* 2021; 21(1): 262–1280.
6. Munar AM, Ooi CS. What Social Media tell us about Heritage Experience [Internet]. 2012 [cited 2018 Feb 27]. Available from: <http://bit.ly/2Dq8msE>
7. Fierro Á, Salmon C. El impacto del turismo en el casco viejo de Bilbao mediante los modelos economía colaborativa: Una aproximación a través de una distribución binomial negativa (Spanish) [The impact of tourism in the old town of Bilbao through collaborative economy models: An approximation through a negative binomial distribution]. *Lurralde: inves. Espac* 2017; 41: 175–201.
8. Oskam JA. Airbnb or ‘Networked Hospitality Businesses’: Between innovation and commercialization. A research agenda. 2nd Global Tourism & Hospitality Conference, 15th Asia Pacific Forum for Graduate Students Research in Tourism; 2016 May 16–18; Hong Kong. Hong Kong: The Hong Kong Polytechnic University.
9. Keymolen E. Interpersonal system trust in AirBnb. In: Keymolen E (editor). *Trust on the Line. A philosophical exploration of trust in the networked era*. Oisterwijk: Wolf Legal Publisher; 2016. p. 193–220.
10. Datateca. Characteristics of Web 3.0. [Internet]. [cited 2018 Feb 10]. Available from: <http://bit.ly/1Hdk6MU>
11. Pariser E. El filtro burbuja. Cómo la red decide lo que leemos y lo que pensamos (Spanish) [The filter bubble. How the network decides what we read and what we think]. Barcelona: Taurus; 2017.
12. Geertz, C. La Interpretación de las culturas (Spanish) [The interpretation of cultures]. Barcelona: Editorial Gedisa; 1992.
13. Casas Romero A, Gázquez Abad JC, Forgas Coll S, et al. La netnografía como herramienta de investigación en contextos online: Una aplicación al análisis de la imagen de los servicios públicos de transporte (Spanish) [Netnography as a research tool in on-line contexts: An application to the analysis of the image of public transport services]. *Innovar Journal* 2014; 24(52): 89–101.
14. Lindsay A. VirtualTourist: Embracing our audience through public history web experience. *The Public Historian* 2013; 35(1): 67–86.
15. Mkono M. The reflexive tourist. *Annals of Tourism Research* 2016; 57: 206–219.
16. Kotschack L. La ciudad de Buenos Aires como lugar turístico. Representaciones, sentidos y prácticas en los city tours (Spanish) [The city of Buenos Aires as a tourist place. Representations, meanings and practices in city tours] [Bachelor’s thesis]. Buenos Aires: University of Buenos Aires, Buenos Aires; 2018.
17. Law 4685 [Internet]. Available from: <http://bit.ly/2fC5YpF>
18. Urry J. Globalising the tourist gaze [Internet]. 2001. Available from: <http://bit.ly/2rAkfdl> con-sultado
19. González Bracco M. Guías, imágenes y souvenirs: Reflexiones sobre los artefactos mediadores de la práctica turística (Spanish) [Guides, images and souvenirs: Reflections on the mediating artifacts of tourism practice]. *PASOS—Revista de Turismo y Patrimonio Cultural* 2017; 14(3): 741–750.
20. González Bracco M, Kotschack L. El espacio turístico, entre el enclave y el desborde. Estudio en dos barrios de Buenos Aires (Spanish) [Tourist space, between enclave and overflow. A study in two neighborhoods of Buenos Aires]. *Cuadernos de Geografía—Revista Colombiana de Geografía* 2017; 26(2): 373–397.
21. Infobae. Destinos instagrameables: Los Millenials escogen vacaciones que “se vean bien” en las redes (Spanish) [Instagrammable destinations: Millenials choose vacations that “look good” on networks] [Internet]. 2017. Available from: <http://bit.ly/2fP6KPs>
22. Boczkowski P, Mitchelstein E, Matassi M. Vivir en las redes (Spanish) [Living in networks] [Internet]. 2017 [cited 2018 Feb 14]. Available from: <http://bit.ly/2xLkXjA>
23. Krikler I. The power of hashtags: Using travel experiences by tourists for destination branding on Instagram [Internet]. 2017 [cited 2018 Sept 20]. Available from: <http://bit.ly/2xediSe>
24. La Nación. Buenos Aires instagrameada: La mirada de cinco influencers que llegaron invitados por la Ciudad (Spanish) [Buenos Aires instagammed: The look of five influencers who arrived invited by the city] [Internet]. 2017 [cited 2018 Mar 14]. Available from: <http://bit.ly/2FIdNVL>