

Online Communication and Italian Tourism*

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Abstract

Tourism destinations seek to attract tourists in innovative and enticing ways by using web-based communication media. Since tourists have the choice between many destinations of the same target category, destinations are required to provide something special in order to stand out from other destinations. Recently, a lot of attention has been paid to the idea of creating promotional ecosystems able to represent territorial specificities while, at the same time, taking advantage of the global attractiveness of the country brand. However, less is known about how integrated bottom-up approaches. Since congruence between destination image and destination identity was already found to be highly important for successful destination branding, integrated bottom-up communication could provide a reliable basis for developing effective destination branding campaigns.

Keywords: Brand Image; Digital Marketing; Content Analysis; Destination Branding; Global Tourism; Hospitality; The Sense of Place; Wikibrands; Wikidestination; Globalisation

1. Tourism and Online Communication

Tourism plays in many regions of the world an important role for local community development. According to the World Tourism Organization (WTO), the tourism sector has been characterised by two main trends in recent years: The consolidation of traditional or classical tourism destinations; and the geographical expansion of tourism destinations (WTO & SVN, 2010). Tourism accounts for one out of 11 jobs worldwide and represents 10% of the world's economic output (UNWTO, 2016).

Tourism destinations compete on a globalised and diversified market (Brondoni, 2016). Therefore, differentiation becomes more and more important for sustaining competitive advantages (Brondoni, 2008). From a policy perspective, place branding (Ashworth & Voogd, 1990; Anholt, 2007; Kavaratzis, 2004; 2007; Lucarelli & Berg, 2011) and place marketing (Gold & Ward, 1994; Kotler et al., 1993; Ward, 1998) as concepts at the intersection of branding theory and territorial

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marketing are nowadays indispensable, as their role for developing a successful tourism destination has widely been recognised. Differentiation strategies for tourism destinations can be similar to those of conventional products and services. They can be based on tangible and intangible attributes, but also on beliefs, ideas and impressions that people associate with destinations (Kotler et al., 1993).

In this context, different socio-economic mutations and technological breakthrough innovations are currently modifying the competitive environment and the functioning of today's economies (Chesbrough, 2003; Lambin, 2014). Compared to other industries, the impact of the Internet in the tourism industry is unparalleled. Thanks to the proliferation of mobile applications, Internet hosts a large part of the customer's decision making and buying process. Social networks and specialised sites shape the reputation of brands and destinations, while new brands have emerged and grown, taking full advantage of the web (Brondoni, 2010). Mass communication has become globalised and is, above all, less one-way or linear. The continuum of receiver versus source is therefore no longer static, but an active interplay in the communication process (Brondoni, 2014; Bellini & Brondoni, 2016). The advent of user-generated content in social media systems (Belk, 2014), the diffusion of social media and Web 2.0 technologies, and the emergence of skilled and well-educated customers allows users to contribute to the value creation of brands (Pironti et al., 2015). This new workload can be seen in some cases as a double exploitation (Montargot, 2016; Cova & Dalli, 2009).

In such customer-oriented environments, the perception of brands can decide over their market success. With regards to the tourism sector, there is evidence that destination perception is highly relevant for developing competitive destination brands (e.g. Baker, 2007; Chen & Chen, 2010). Especially the congruence between destination image and destination identity is of key importance for successful destination branding (Govers & Go, 2009). Since destination identity development can influence destination image (Govers & Go, 2009), it seems to be important for destination marketers to have reliable approaches that provide valid evidence on destination identity. Wikibrands are a recently developed bottom-up approach in the tourism sector in order to allow place consumers to share place experiences and to promote the local territory themselves in the Internet. This suggests that such web-based bottom-up approaches could provide the basis for targeted destination branding campaigns.

In order to address this issue, the paper focuses on the region of Liguria, which has integrated its traditional marketing strategy in a new approach based on consumer-to-consumer (C2C) online marketing and the concept of wikibrands with the support of local agencies.

The following research questions are therefore being addressed:

How can web-based communication approaches give insight into destination identity?

How can destination marketers use web-based bottom-up approaches in order to develop targeted destination branding campaigns?

The paper starts with introducing the notions of place marketing and branding. Then, these concepts are related to hospitality marketing, wikibrands and consumer-to-consumer (C2C) online marketing. In a further step, the research setting and methodology are presented. Afterwards, the results of the qualitative

analysis of web content are presented, in order to conclude with discussing the findings and its managerial implications.

2. Literature Review

2.1 The Concept of Sense of Place

The concept of 'sense of place' is derived from the Latin term 'genius loci', which was used in the 18th century to describe a new aesthetic appreciation of landscapes referring to the guardians' divinity of a place. 'Genius loci' describes the 'genius of a place' and is a literary expression that refers to a picturesque and pastoral ideal created by human hand. In more recent times, this term has been applied not only to landscapes, but also to urban areas, and places of almost any kind. It was used for exploring perceptions, the quality of places and urban design (Jíven & Larkham, 2003). Sense of place can be defined as description of the atmosphere of a place and the quality of its environment (Jackson, 1994). It refers on the one hand to visual appearances of places, but also to the emotional experience of a place and reaction toward it. Perception plays a key role, so the individual and thus subjective character of the concept is essential. Sense of place describes the intangible assets of a place, which means that determining sense of place relies on experience through sense, memory, intellect and imagination (Jíven & Larkham, 2003). This set of intangible assets, that cannot be delocalised, can be globalised by adopting an integrated online communication strategy.

Authenticity is an integral element for developing 'sense of place', but being authentic does not necessarily imply that there is value added. According to Assi (2000), being authentic is the condition of an object or a momentum in relation to its inherent qualities. In contexts other than the built environments there are similarities in concerns with regard to authenticity, but also differences in its values and conceptions (Jíven & Larkham, 2003).

2.2 Destination Perception

The perceptions of a tourist destination are generally influenced by visitors' images prior to and during the visit (Boo & Busser, 2005). Destination perception can strongly influence destination image (Govers & Go, 2009). There is consensus that destination image includes three components: Cognitive, affective, and conative (e.g. Gartner, 1993; Pike & Ryan 2004; Tasci et al. 2007). The cognitive dimension relates to evaluations of the impression of destination attributes, while the affective dimension covers individual feelings about a destination (e.g. Baloglu & McCleary, 1999; Boo & Busser, 2005; Govers & Go, 2009). The conative dimension refers to an individual's behaviour based on the knowledge of the two other dimensions and usually contains information about a person's likelihood to visit a destination (e.g. Gartner, 1993; Pike & Ryan, 2004; Tasci et al., 2007). A general or, at least, composite image of a place is usually constructed as a result of the relationship between cognitive and affective evaluations (e.g. Gartner, 1993; Tasci et al., 2007).

Destination image is not static, but fluid in nature (e.g. Chon, 1991; Gartner, 1986). It evolves in a dynamic process including formation and modification stages. Regarding travel motivations, the atmosphere and environment of the destination, the opportunity to see interesting things, and the desire to learn more about the local culture are important motivation factors (e.g. Pérez, 2009). It has been recognised that there is a positive and significant interaction between the overall level of travel satisfaction and future intentions to revisit a place (e.g. Fornell, 1992; Baker, 2007; Kozak, 2001, 2003; Castro et al., 2007).

2.3 Place Marketing and Place Branding

Place marketing can contribute to the development of attractive place brands (e.g. Gold & Ward, 1994; Kotler et al., 1993). Kavaratzis (2005) argues that the application of marketing tools to places stems from two trends: The development of marketing for non-business and non-profit organisations and the need for many places to establish an image repositioning. From this background, place branding has emerged as a technique to create and develop the positioning of places at different geographical scales. Place branding is thus applied to countries, regions and cities, with the objective of attracting tourists, investors and residents (Kavaratzis, 2005). In this regard, the interests and perspectives of different target audiences need to be aligned in order to promote places successfully (Hanna & Rowley, 2011).

At a local level, increasing attention has been paid to three points that have been emerging from the results of empirical research into place branding strategies over the last years. First, if place branding is used as strategy for improving a place's image, place image should be an incremental part of place identity (Kalandides, 2011). Second, innovating the image of a place requires more than graphic design, advertising or marketing campaigns. A sustainable and effective cooperation between government and local society is necessary, as well as the creation of new institutions and structures in order to harmonise objectives, themes and communications in the long term (Anholt, 2008). Third, local stakeholders play a central role and are part of larger communities that today, thanks to online media and Web 2.0, are fully involved in the life and development of territorial brands (Ben Youssef et al., 2015).

2.4 Challenges within the Tourism Sector

Reputation and information exchange among consumers play an increasingly important role for the marketing of destinations (Govers & Go, 2009). The worldwide expansion of media allows the stakeholders and the employees of almost any brand to become responsible for communicating with consumers as brand ambassadors (Bojanic, 2003). The developments in digital technology (Rieple & Pisano, 2015) have advanced this trend. In any case, it is important to assume that this kind of circular communication that is not any more completely under the control of the brand, must be coordinated, driven and inspired by the brand.

In today's business environment, customers become increasingly important for any type of brand, as they are assisting and supporting innovation and brand experience (Salvioni & Astori, 2013). The constructs of authenticity and

transparency are becoming strategic paths for brands that like to remain competitive in the long run. Brands nowadays need to stand out from the crowd (Winer et al., 2012), otherwise people are unlikely to talk about them. Most efforts may be ignored by both online and offline audiences because they are not deemed to be unique enough. Moffitt and Dover (2011) stress that influence can be determined by the power of a brands network and that organisations are likely to connect themselves in order to transform their business culture and operating models for the future.

In recent times, the marketing mix of any brand needs to balance the product-service mix, the presentation mix, and the communication mix. Destination brands offer a mix of products and services, but need to capitalise on products and services that are perceived to be authentic for the destination in order to be successful (Govers & Go, 2009). The presentation mix describes the elements employed by a firm to increase the tangibility of the product-service mix in the perception of the target audience. The communication mix affects all communications between the firm and the target audience that makes the product-service mix more tangible for customers, that establishes or monitors consumer expectations, or that convince consumers to purchase. Succeeding in the communication mix means ‘tangibilizing’ the service by the usage of media to simulate consumer experience. Therefore, managing consumer expectations is a crucial element for the marketing mix of services (Bojanic, 2003).

2.5 Influential Factors for Travel Decisions

Different audiences who experience places or attractions develop a set of plural perceptions and opinions that can hardly emerge without giving voice to the very protagonists of the place experience. Today's digital technology and social media allow the implementation of marketing campaigns in which people can amplify the story of all those involved in the experience of the destination by transforming comments, photos and articles in content that can influence the decisions of other tourists (Ben Youssef et al., 2015). Therefore, a space is needed to bring together consumer stories and where people involved with the brand can interact with the brand on horizontal flows of relationship able to promote and boost the visibility of the brand through the exponential power of social networks. Competition between territories and tourist destinations is increasingly demanding (Dann, 1999; Day et al., 2002) and the need to stand out and to be appreciated by consumer-tourists is not only dependent on advertising budgets invested in big media, even if they are still relevant. Instead, it depends more and more on the ability to integrate traditional and social communication and to enhance the message through word-of-mouth and consumer-to-consumer (C2C) marketing by creating circular flows not directly coordinated but strongly stimulated from the source (destination brands or local actors of tourism destinations).

New information and communication technology (NICT) and social networks have become tools for transforming satisfied travellers in brand ambassadors or spokespersons of the respective destination brand, able to persuade other travellers via C2C online marketing (Ben Youssef et al., 2015). According to Google Search Traveler 2014 (Google, 2014) (Table. 1), Internet suggestions from friends, family and colleagues are the most important source of inspiration for the choice of a trip

and the most influential source in the planning process of the vacation (Ben Youssef et al., 2015).

Table 1: *The Source of Inspiration in the Choice of a Trip - Google Search Traveler 2014*

	Leisure Travelers	Business Travelers
Internet	74%	77%
Family, friends, or colleagues offline	48%	35%
Family, friends, or colleagues online	26%	27%
Informational brochures	23%	26%
TV	20%	28%
Magazines/newspapers	18%	27%
Books	14%	20%
Travel agents	13%	30%
800 or toll-free number	10%	19%
Travel groups	7%	18%
Radio	7%	14%
Other	5%	6%

Source: Based on the Google Travel Study, Ipsos Media CT, (June 2014, pp.10)

Table 1 shows that tourists are looking for trustworthy stimuli and information about a destination brand. Tourists are likely to exchange brand experience, product or service evaluation, and recommendations (Chen & Chen, 2010). For this reason it seems to be important to identify and operationalise empirical approaches for creating authentic and convincing messages about a destination's identity in order to promote a destination brand.

3. Research Design

3.1 Research Setting

In Italy, place marketing has received increasing attention in recent years. This has been due to the loss of competitiveness experienced by Italy in the international tourism sector and to the need for creating new ways for marketing the Italian tourism industry (Capriello & Fraquelli, 2008).

The case study of Liguria can be considered as original approach for establishing a strategy for tourism marketing in which the local actors of the destination (i.e. the region of Liguria and its partners) developed an integrated bottom-up communication approach for motivating place consumers to become ambassadors of the destination brand. The place marketing strategy of Liguria has been defined in the tourism plan "A Wikibrand for a Wikidestination". The project Liguria Tourism Bottom Up has been created on behalf of the Liguria Tourism Board, supported by the local consulting agency Giaccardi & Associati. The project had the objective to define a three-year tourism plan for the region with active involvement of all stakeholders. The work realised in Liguria is the first Italian

example of designing tourism development through a bottom-up approach and was conducted with a methodology in which objectives, actions, resources and indicators for monitoring results were identified through interviews and dialogue with all the stakeholders directly or indirectly concerned with tourism in the region (i.e. tourism operators, associations, government agencies, citizens and tourists). The tourism marketing plan of Liguria, implemented in 2012 and in force until the end of 2015, integrated traditional marketing within the wikibrand approach in order to reinforce the Ligurian tourist brand. In other words, the marketing plan is designed to promote the tourism destination of Liguria through direct investment and the collective intelligence of prosumers, word-of-mouth influence, C2C online marketing, viral marketing on social media with active involvement of tourists and citizens for developing the identity of the territory in which the points of view of those who live, visit and know the region are valued (Ben Youssef et al., 2015).

Moffitt & Dover (2011) define wikibrands as a set of organisations, products, services, ideas and causes that tap into the powers of customer participation, social influence and collaboration in order to drive business value. Brands can integrate their direct communication approaches by engaging customers in collaborative interaction schemes for adding value to the services provided. Similarly, the new term “Wikidestination” refers to a regional area, city or country that, in order to position itself in the global markets as a tourist destination, uses the collective intelligence, strongly driven by the local actors of the tourism destination, to build a plural narrative capable of restoring and combining different points of view in order to identify and communicate the competitive assets of the territory.

3.2 Methodology

For analysing the contribution of the communication strategy of the region of Liguria, blog content of “Liguria tells” has been analysed with a qualitative discourse analysis. This blog gives voice to citizens and tourists who want to tell and share memories, emotions and experiences with the region, and the way they saw, perceived and captured it with their own eyes. This led to a collection of over 200 stories during the last few years, containing a plethora of associations, perceptions and interpretations that can incite and influence the choices of new tourists. The blog involved more than 80 bloggers who have contributed with articles full of photographs on a variety of topics. Furthermore, the blog generated interactions in the online community: Over 287 comments to posts, several thousand likes and shares on social networks such as Facebook, and reposts and retweets on Pinterest and Twitter. The blog is filled with content written by place consumers and the editorial board of the Agency Liguria, which was planned in accordance with an editorial plan and entries written by tourists, bloggers and citizens. The most frequent topics are those dedicated to traditional culture (festivals, typical products), stories about Ligurian towns and idyllic places (tales of memory), and thematic itineraries (outdoor, villages, etc.). The blog has had 127,000 page views and 45,000 unique visitors in 24 months (Ben Youssef et al., 2015).

The basic idea behind the analysis of web content is that language is supposed to be structured according to different patterns that people’s utterances follow when they take part in different fields of social life. Discourse analysis represents the

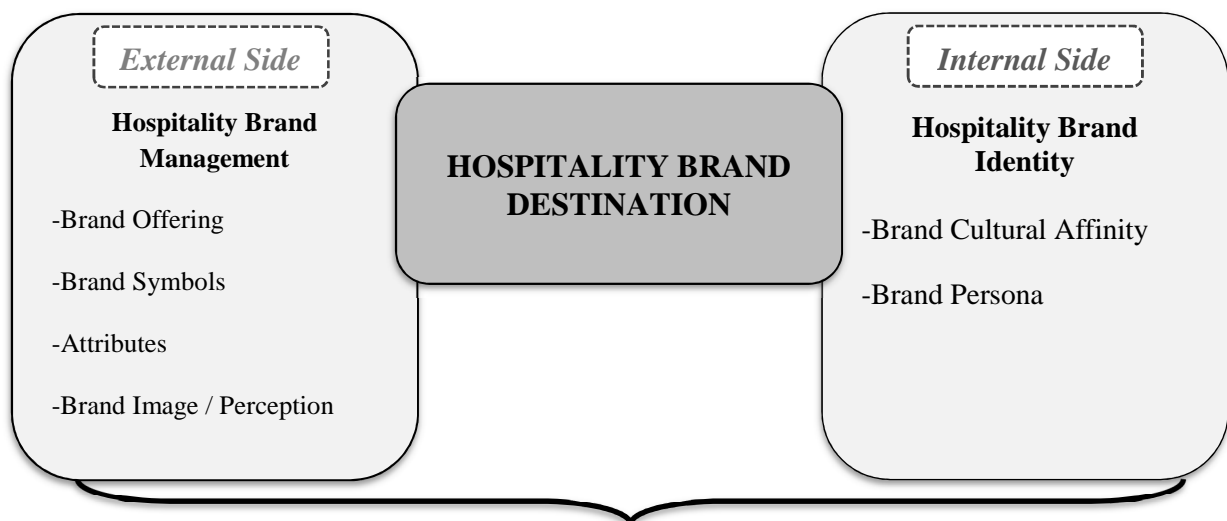
analysis of these patterns (Hardy, 2011). In general, discourse analysis can be defined as a way of talking about and understanding the world or an aspect of the world. Discourse analysis belongs to hermeneutic research tradition and represents a set of interdisciplinary approaches that can be used to explore and interpret language and its meanings. A key concept of discourse analysis is thus to identify key signifiers in the organisation of discourse and to unravel chains of equivalence which refer to the investment of key signifiers with meaning. Some approaches seek to analyse discourses that are created and exchanged in everyday discursive practices and therefore require systematic empirical analyses of people's talk and written language in, for instance, the mass media (Jorgensen & Phillips, 2002).

An approach for analysing the discursive practices of people's written entries was used for this study. A total of 43 blog entries were identified on Liguria's blog within the category 'Liguria's bloggers'. This category was used for the purpose of this article, as the objective is to analyse how bloggers from Liguria could give evidence on Liguria's sense of place. Blog entries in the three different languages Italian, English and German have been analysed and translated by the authors. The software MAXQDA v.12.1.0 was used for identifying the key signifiers and chains of equivalence associated with the region of Liguria in a first step. Subsequently, it turned out that the findings from the qualitative content analysis can be clustered according to the components of the branding model 'CBM Hospitality Brand Management' (Fig. 2) by Copperbridge Media.

3.3 The 'Hospitality Brand Management' Model

In order to theoretically contextualise the findings of the discourse analysis, the model 'CBM Hospitality Brand Management' (Fig. 2) by Copperbridge Media was employed.

Figure 2: *CBM's Hospitality Brand Management Model*



Source: based on Copper Bridge Media Consultancy

This model assumes that every destination, resort or hotel has certain compelling facts, myths and legends integrated into its history. Therefore, an effective marketing strategy should unlock the essence of its characters, adventure and mental imagery. The model proclaims that the main objective of a place brand is to communicate a captivating story and to give hints on the empirical experience that awaits the visitors when they visit the destination. This represents the story of the respective brand and which needs to be broadcasted across all the marketing media. From the model's internal perspective, brand cultural affinity refers to cultural associations and experiences with the place brand from the local population's point of view. Brand persona gives evidence on brand identity and relates to the core values that constitute a brand internally. On the external side, brand image and perception is what visitors perceive when experiencing a place brand. Attributes is what visitors or tourists cognitively link with a brand. Brand symbols relate to the signals that brands send out and that visitors capture in their minds. Finally, the brand offering refers to the value proposition of a brand in terms of products and services (tangible or intangible).

4. Findings

The discourse and content analysis of 'Liguria's bloggers' showed that bloggers associated colourful contrasts, landscape including the seaside and the mountains, towns, historic and cultural places with the region of Liguria. Imagery and views across the landscape were one of the most important destination assets described by the bloggers. Besides, the bloggers expressed strong emotions in their blog entries. Especially visual emotions (e.g. contrasts and imagery), olfactory experiences (e.g. saline smell of the seaside) and gustatory senses (e.g. dishes and cuisine) were described.

The brand offerings, as described in the blog entries, affect tangible elements such as the seaside and the Mediterranean atmosphere, mountains, eco-systems, biodiversity and geomorphological patterns of the landscape. Especially panoramic views across landscapes and picturesque sceneries are frequently cited. Besides, attributes such as colourful facades were mentioned. It was even claimed that the environment is 'supernatural', but not a 'hallucinatory effect', and that the view across the sea is 'more beautiful than you can imagine'. The scenery of Liguria evokes strong cognitive imaginations ("between dreams and illusions I leave the stone village"). Furthermore, towns and places are frequently described and sometimes associated to Italian culture and architecture, which was supposed to give them authenticity (e.g. "appreciated as it is a very authentic Italian town"). Certain towns and cities such as Genoa were associated with medieval and gothic architecture. Especially the city of Genoa plays an important role for identification with the territory (e.g. "You are in Genoa and you seem to be at the centre of the world" or "Genoa is a city wedged between sky and sea that forces you to go to see what awaits you after the horizon"). Nevertheless, small romantic places that inspire tranquillity and peace, and in which people thought themselves to be in a fairy tale, were also cited. Besides, the magic and mystic character of places was described in several blog entries (e.g. "and still I have not told anything about a beautiful country that is situated at three kilometres from my house"). Nevertheless,

also intangible assets such as sunny weather, mentality and people are important. Brand cultural affinity and associations such as the UNESCO World Heritage Label for Porto Venere also created dialogue. The historic place Cinque Terre was referred to in several blog entries. Other attributes were elegance and romanticism, with an emphasis on seductive experiences. With regard to olfactory sensations, the smell of the places in many different kinds plays a key role and frequently inspired people. Especially the seaside produced olfactory experiences with its subtle smell of salt, while it was claimed that “the sea never ceases to amaze”. Liguria was considered to be a place that combines modernity with a great deal of respect for the tradition of the local cuisine. Culinarian experiences were also a major topic. Bloggers were convinced that “Liguria is nice to discover even at the table because there are many delicacies”. Indeed, food was frequently claimed to be “delicious” and “flavourful” (e.g. “The food was of course delicious” or “the dinner in Noli was like a fairy tale.”). Furthermore, culinarian highlights made people discover new things (e.g. “We have tried so many extremely tasty Italian nation dishes that we never tried before”).

In many blog entries, friendliness was mentioned as an element constituting a cheerful atmosphere. People claim to be happy to live in Liguria (“we remembered how lucky we are to live here”). With regard to brand person, people want to share their own brand experience (e.g. “there is nothing left but sharing it with all of you” or “heritage of everybody, for sharing and not for loosing”) with other people. Especially in the field of culinarian experience, hospitality was mentioned (e.g. “sharing, together around a table, products of the land and the family stories” or “and then I remember the warmth of autumn dinner where I ate really tasty, with that inevitable simplicity that makes life beautiful”). Furthermore, people seem to be willed to assist foreigners (e.g. “it came back to my mind the sympathetic bus driver”, “thanks to our Ligurian girls, who spent with us the whole day” or “thanks to the staff who work there I felt like at home! All very kind and careful”). Besides, Liguria is claimed to be a region where people come together (e.g. “where we met people and not only tourists”, “we had very family atmosphere with other guys and Ligurian girls, like we knew each other for ages” or “we still remember every second, every funny moment, every lesson that we got there, eyes and smiles of the people whom we got to know there”). Another central topic was the open-heartedness of local people (“go and visit Italy, get acquainted with people and they will show you their hearts”, “warm, cozy and familiar”, “you’ll meet the owner who really loves the ladies and will gift you with not only a kiss on each cheek but even one on the lips” or “I bring home a little of his life, and leave a little heart”).

In comparison with other destinations the travellers have been to, Liguria turned out to be different (e.g. “I have already travelled to more than 36 countries in the world, but I still haven’t seen a place like this”, “you have to turn the world to realise that your so beautiful Liguria is lost at every turn”, “we go around the world with eyes full of the beauty of the land that we live”, “But that land is unique in the world“ or “the village which we expect a unique experience”). Uniqueness is also underlined by statements such as “[Liguria] has places where we know where to go alone, without the help of guides, without the need for signs along the route, even if years have passed”. Liguria was also claimed to be convincing (e.g. “[Liguria] is for me especially this: intense colour, unique taste and nice people”). People claimed to love the region (e.g. “I simply can’t get enough of my favourite country.

When it's love, it's love?!", "is one of those postcards that I will keep forever in a corner of my heart", "which is exactly the piece of the world that I love" or "I love this kind of Liguria"). All these types of sensations make people claim that life is good in Liguria (e.g. "What can I say? Life is good!" or "It's all beautiful.", "These days which we spent in Liguria were the happiest days!"). One blogger was even asking himself "in which fortune are we living?". All these statements give evidence on the brand symbols Liguria emits.

5. Conclusions

Liguria's integrated bottom-up marketing strategy aims at sharing experiences that await tourists when they come and visit the region. The analysis carried out in this paper underlines that consumers can develop destination brand identity via web-based bottom-up communication. In the case of Liguria, place consumers express strong brand perception in online media. It turned out that the natural, historic and cultural brand assets of Liguria are at the core of its sense of place. Natural landscapes, as well as medieval towns and culinarian dishes provide the basis for experiential sensations that seem to have a positive impact on people's identification with the local specificities. The findings of this article show that the strong territorial identity of Liguria created by the means of C2C online marketing can boost Liguria's brand definition.

Besides, it was shown that hospitality plays an incremental element of the brand identity and the brand value of Liguria. All in all, hospitality was in many blog entries a central topic. Sometimes, people had difficulties in explicitly describing how hospitality can be characterised (e.g. "it would be difficult to describe in a few words what welcomes you" or "it's all too good and I with the words I am struggling to describe it"). However, there was consensus that especially the local people provide a cheerful and hospitable atmosphere (e.g. "in the first few minutes you feel already comfortable and feel that coming was a good idea"). One blog entry even had the title 'Hospitality in Liguria'.

It can be concluded that these factors seem to be important for the destination development of Liguria. Over the last years, the wikidestination strategy for Liguria in fact produced significant results. An increase in international tourist arrivals and journeys could have been observed. Between 2009 and 2013, there was a plus of 35.6% arrivals and a plus of 24.7% journeys spent in Liguria (Ben Youssef et al., 2015). However, if these tendencies are really linked to the development of destination identity through Liguria's wikibrand strategy needs further validation.

5.1 Managerial Implications

With 3.8 million tourist arrivals and 13.5 million overnight stays, Liguria accounts for about 3.9% of tourism in Italy. Tourism is a strategic sector for Liguria, as it contributes to approximately 10.2% of its GDP and generated revenues of 5,158 million € in 2011 (Ben Youssef et al., 2015). As stated by Kavaratzis (2005), place branding can be an important approach for creating or developing the positioning of places at different geographical scales, with the aim of not only attracting tourists, but also investments.

This article showed that the concept of wikibrand can create customer-perceived value if integrated with other communication strategies. This means that territorial brands promoted by tourists and local shareholders inspire a certain degree of authenticity which can subsequently form the basis of destination branding campaigns. The analysis realised in this paper showed that C2C online marketing, viral marketing and word-of-mouth are suitable tools for defining territorial brands and communicating them on a global scale. Destination management organisations (DMO) could thus draw from the concepts emerging from the web-based communication media in order to develop targeted destination narratives that ensure a high level of congruity between destination identity and destination image, as stressed by Govers & Go (2009). Liguria is thanks to its historic character with its towns and villages likely to have different destination assets that can be effectively used for destination branding campaigns. Therefore, giving voice to the persons who experience places and who share their impressions turned out to be a promising approach for creating place branding campaigns.

5.2 Limitations and Further Research Topics

This study raises a set of questions that have not been addressed. First, it can be assumed that only blog entries written by bloggers with positive attitudes towards Liguria have been analysed, without giving evidence on negative brand experiences. Wikibrands are supposed to promote hospitality, as they are likely to invite other foreign people to share their impressions of their own place. Furthermore, this study has examined the case of Liguria and the role that hospitality plays for its wikidestination strategy, so the analysis of other wikidestinations seems to be necessary in order to test whether the findings of this study are generalizable.

It is therefore necessary to examine the role of hospitality in light of other territorial marketing strategies that adopt a bottom-up approach for promoting a specific destination. Indeed, a more quantitatively oriented methodology could be useful for assessing the impact of the C2C online marketing approach of wikidestinations on tourism decisions. In this context, it would also be interesting to measure how well the shared positive brand image on the blog corresponds to the perceptions of tourists that have never visited the blog and that merely knew the region before going there.

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