Building Urban Destination Brands in Europe

Re-conceptualizing the relationship between brand image and brand personality in website communication practices

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ABSTRACT

Destinations must project a strong and differentiated brand image to position themselves in a competitive market. To this end, official websites have become a key instrument in the portrayal of the desired image and as the place where tourists expect to find everything about the destination. In this study, the official websites of the 12 most popular urban destinations in Europe are analyzed with a two-fold purpose: to describe their projected image, and to explore the relationship between brand image and brand personality in their discourse. The investigation combines three techniques in an exhaustive content analysis to assess the websites' quality and the functional and symbolic dimensions of the projected image. The results highlight cultural activities, tourist packages, and food and drink associations as the three core components of the European cities' offer. Similarly, while all destinations project highly exciting personalities, the traits related to the other personality dimensions are those that differentiate the destinations in the competitive context. Finally, the study shows that some product-related associations are more likely to transmit specific personality traits.

Keywords: Destination branding, Brand image, Brand personality, Website communication, Projected image, Urban destinations, Place branding, Europe.

RESUM

Les destinacions han de projectar una imatge de marca robusta i diferenciada per prendre posició en un mercat competitiu. En aquest procés, els webs oficials s'han convertit en un instrument clau per transmetre la imatge desitjada, i en el lloc on els turistes esperen trobar tota la informació sobre la destinació. Aquest estudi analitza el lloc web oficial de les 12 destinacions urbanes més populars d'Europa amb un doble objectiu: descriure la imatge que projecten les marques, i explorar la relació entre imatge i personalitat de marca en el discurs. La investigació combina tres tècniques en un exhaustiu anàlisi de contingut que avalua la qualitat dels webs, i les dimensions funcional i simbòlica de la imatge de marca. Els resultats destaquen les activitats culturals, els paquets turístics i la gastronomia com els principals components de la oferta de les ciutats Europees. També demostren que totes les destinacions projecten una personalitat forta en emoció, però són les altres dimensions de la personalitat aquelles que contribueixen a la diferenciació de les destinacions en el context competitiu. Finalment, l'estudi identifica la propensió de determinades associacions relacionades amb el producte a transmetre trets de personalitat de marca específics.

Paraules clau: *Branding* de destinacions, Imatge de marca, Personalitat de marca, Comunicació web, Imatge projectada, Destinacions urbanes, *Branding* de territoris, Europa.

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1. TOPIC AND RESEARCH PROBLEM

This study investigates the content of European urban destinations' official websites as a reflection of these destination brands' image. This introduction aims to summarize the overall topic of the research while explaining the relevance of this study and the research problem.

In the postmodern era, where acts of consumption represent more than needs fulfillment, tourist activity is gaining in relevance. The globalization process and the new economy of symbols, among other factors, promote a new role of consumption practices, also in tourist consumption activities, as identity expressions. Destinations are not only valued for their cultural heritage or architectural legacy any more, but also for their symbolic attributions, such as the character of these places. Symbolism is linked to the destination, and tourists want to adopt these symbols in their self narrative and identity. But how can destinations enhance this symbolism?

To enhance the symbolic value of a destination and stay ahead in an increasingly competitive context, managers have resort to marketing and branding strategies. In this regard, a key component to positioning a destination brand is its image. The brand image construct is crucial for destinations, especially their symbolic dimension. Unlike other kinds of products, destinations cannot be tested prior to their acquisition; therefore, the brand image held in consumers' minds becomes the foremost appeal to potential tourists. Furthermore, beyond a leisure experience, postmodern tourists look for places coherent with their own identities: places full of symbolism to be consumed (de San Eugenio Vela, 2011). Therefore, is no longer a matter of promotion or making the brands visible to the world, but of projecting a specifically planned image to compete in the international market, and to control the way the image is projected.

Even though all marketing resources and activities contribute to building this city/destination image (Kavaratzis, 2004), communication has a crucial role in creating and transmitting symbolism attached to the place. With the appearance of the Internet, online communication has developed new expressive possibilities (Buhalis & Law, 2008). In particular, a destination's

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official website has become the portrayal of its desired image, and the place where potential tourists expect to find everything about this destination (Luna-Nevarez & Hyman, 2012; Pike, 2012). For his reason, Destination Management Organizations [DMOs] invest a great amount of effort in strengthening their online discourse.

However, destination branding efforts need to overcome additional challenges typical to the tourism sector, such as lower budgets, the relation with the local population, or political decisions that may change relatively frequently (Pike, 2005). Therefore, all advances in the understanding of destination image construction are crucial to support these organizations' public task.

The academic interest in the study of online destination communication has increased significantly in recent years (Standing, Tang-Taye, & Boyer, 2014). A considerable amount of research has been conducted on the impact of the Internet in the tourism field (Standing et al., 2014), with regard to the official websites' overall quality and performance (Law, Qi, & Buhalis, 2010), the destination image formation (Pike, 2002), and, recently, some studies have also approach the study of destinations symbolic dimension projected on these websites (Pitt, Opoku, Hultman, Abratt, & Spyropoulou, 2007). Furthermore, the specific context of European destinations has also been explored based on tourists' experiences and emphasizing some other marketing-related descriptors (Wöber & Fesenmaier, 2010). Cities' relevance in the economic development of the country and individual and social identity creation (Anholt, 2004; Kavaratzis & Ashworth, 2010), also as tourist destinations, has garnered researchers' interest in the study of the large metropolis.

However, further research is still needed. For example, the specific projected image of European urban destinations and their personality in particular has not yet been explained, and nor has the relationship and dependence between the functional and the symbolic dimensions of the destination image.

All in all, advances in this regard may contribute to urban destinations' competitiveness in the European market, but also promote synergies between similar or complementary destinations. Furthermore, working with intangibles in communication has always been a challenge, since symbolic attributions are difficult to delimit. Thus, research that contributes to the understanding of how to manage these intangibles, in this case the character or personality of a city, would be of great value.

1.2. SCOPE, AIMS, AND HYPOTHESIS

In general, the research presented in this doctoral thesis could be included in the place branding domain[1], since it analyzes the image construction of different European cities. However, the study's scope is more precise. Place branding is a broad domain that has emerged from the contributions of many areas of knowledge, such as architecture, politics, and marketing, and assesses different facets of the territories (Lucarelli & Berg, 2011). In contrast, the scope of this research is limited to three areas of knowledge, as seen in Figure 1.1. First, the main focus is communication. In particular, the postmodern trend to gather touristic information from the Internet (Law et al., 2010; Park & Gretzel, 2007) and the relevance and influence of this media in the decision-making process (Patkose, Stokes, & Cook, 2004; Tang & Jang, 2011) have narrowed the topic of this study to online communication.

Figure 1.1. **Areas of knowledge framing this study**
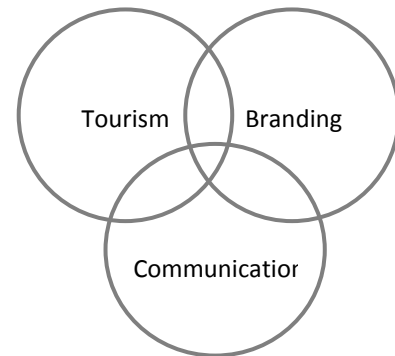
Source: Author

The second area of knowledge framing this study is tourism. Although the thesis focuses on cities' image, it is limited to their tourist facet. As Simon Anholt (2004, p.216) notes, tourism is only one "of the six basic categories of communication which form the place branding hexagon." The increasing popularity of cities as tourist destinations has raised many challenges, among them the discussion about the coexistence of tourist and local facets of the city (Valls, Sureda, & Valls-Tuñon, 2014). Thus, now more than ever, it is imperative that DMOs have access to tools and knowledge regarding how to optimize, project, and control the discourse about the destination.

Finally, the third area of knowledge in this study is branding. As the name of place or destination branding indicates, in the last decades the management of destinations has been led from the marketing field and, more recently, from the branding point of view. In particular, the main constructs of interest in this thesis are brand image and personality, which are two key components to position destination brands in a competitive context.

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[1] Perl Olof Berg (2016), at the Inaugural Conference of the International Place Branding Association, emphasized considering place branding as a multidisciplinary domain and not as a field of knowledge.

Hence, this thesis examines the construction of European urban destinations' brands through official websites, and aims to make useful contributions to both the academic and professional fields. The decision to limit the study the European brands is in line with two different objectives:

- To map different cities' personality in the competitive context, as will be explained later, the author considered it appropriate to select a sample of destinations that compete in the same market. In the same way that comparative studies on retail brands are only conducted with brands of the same category, here it is also interesting to compare similar brands, and European cities have similar historical trajectories (Therkelsen & Gram, 2010). Thus, the differentiation role of personality is more valuable.

- Furthermore, to conduct a benchmark study, only the most popular cities in Europe are considered in the sample. Since the pool of cities in Europe is large, and cases vary in size, history, and resources, the study focuses on those receiving more international tourists. These are considered to be successful cases that may contribute to orientating smaller cities with fewer resources.

As noted above, this study aims to contribute to both the academic and professional fields. On the one hand, the study analyzes the 12 most popular urban destinations in Europe as a benchmark. The analysis of their website communication practices, the most prevalent brand associations projected, and the common points between the cases will provide useful knowledge for practitioners in the urban tourism industry. In addition, this study will allow a better grasp of how the main European destination brands perform in an online context. The study includes a detailed analysis to progress in the understanding of the European competitive context. This is concretized as main objective A:

To identify outstanding characteristics of the European destinations' image projected in their official website communication.

In addition, this study also aims to contribute to the destination branding and projected image theory. As will be shown in Chapter 3, knowledge is lacking regarding the relationship between brand image and personality. Since these are two key constructs for positioning brands in consumers' minds and two fundamental concepts for brand communication, this study aims to understand how they interrelate in online communication acts. To this end, the first stage of the study comprises a thorough review of the literature and a questionnaire distributed among

experts to establish the state of the art and identify gaps in knowledge. Furthermore, all data gathered in the different cases is crossed to predict possible relationship patterns. This is concretized as main objective B:

To appraise the relationship between the functional dimension of the brand and its personality.

All in all, this study focuses on the role of the official websites' communication in creating and transmitting destination brands' image and personality. Therefore, considering the scope delimited earlier, the overall research is bound together under the following main research question:

> **How are functional and symbolic dimensions of destination image represented in the official website communication of the most popular European urban destination brands?**

To answer the main research question and make more operative the two primary objectives, specific goals and related hypotheses are proposed to guide the research. Thus, two blocks of goals related to the two aforementioned primary objectives are organized as a sequential progress logic: the fulfillment of the specific goals in main objective A's block leads to exploring and achieving those related to main objective B. In other words, only by achieving the goals related to how destination image is projected on the websites – the descriptive results – can the relationship between image and personality be examined – the relational outcomes. Moreover, within the first block, a distinction is made between the specific goals referring to single cases and those concerning the general European offer. All in all, the goals are split into three levels: describing cases, describing the European offer, and identifying relationships between constructs. The links between the different goals are demonstrated in Figure 1.2.

In the first instance, this study aims to **assess the overall quality of the European urban destinations' official websites communication (0.1).** Any further analysis of the website content needs to first consider the quality of the overall communication activity.

> Hypothesis 1. *The first urban destinations in Europe count on strong website communication.*

Hypothesis 2. *Official websites combine textual and visual content in coherent and expressive messages.*

As will be argued, websites are complex sources compounded of interactive and multimedia content. For this reason, the first step of the study is to ensure the overall quality of the sites by considering all variables contributing to the website communication to ensure the correct projection of the destination image. Once the overall quality of the site is confirmed, the analysis explores the brand image projected in the website discourse. In particular, the study **examines brand image functional and symbolic dimensions showcased in the website communication (O.2).** To this end, the functional dimension of destinations' image is analyzed by means of product-related associations, and the symbolic dimension via brand personality.

Hypothesis 3. *Official websites' content is composed of an itemization of product-related attributes.*

Hypothesis 4. *DMOs diversify the destination image based on different target profiles.*

Hypothesis 5. *The official websites use different vocabulary to evoke the same personality dimensions.*

As noted above, the functional dimension of the brand image is examined through product-related associations and one kind of non-product-related association: the target. As will be argued in Chapter 2, personalizing the website content to different tourist profiles is a key factor for destination communication success. Therefore, the study also explores the various specific tourist profiles in addition to attributes related to the destination offer. Furthermore, it also analyzes the symbolic side of destinations' image and projected personality.

After assessing all cases separately, the study explores the common tendencies in the sample. By comparing the data gathered in the first stage of the analysis, general European trends are identified. Regarding the specific traits that characterize the European brands' image, the study aims to determine points in common between the destinations at two levels. On the one hand, the objective is to **identify the product-related categories common to European urban destinations (O.3.)**. On the other hand, the study also seeks to **examine the overall tendency of European urban destinations' personalities (O.4.).** These two objectives emerge from the following hypotheses:

Hypothesis 6. *Some product-related categories are standard to the European urban destinations, or "must haves," while others are more specific to certain destinations.*

Hypothesis 7. *European destinations target similar tourist profiles by personalizing their content.*

Hypothesis 8. *Even though each destination personality is unique, there is a general tendency for the websites to project similar patterns since they represent the same type of destination.*

Finally, once all the descriptive data is gathered and compared across the European cases, the last stage of the study explores the relationship between the two main constructs of interest. Since brand personality is conceived as a relevant construct to position brands in a competitive context (Stokburger-Sauer, 2011), the first aim is to **confirm its capability as a measure to position destinations in a competitive context (O.5).** Subsequently, it is imperative for this study **to explore the predictive effect of brand image's functional dimension on brand personality (O.6)**. It is well known that communicating intangibles is more challenging than working with product-related attributes, or tangibles, since the former are difficult to delimit. This becomes even more challenging in tourism given the complexity of the field, as will be discussed in Chapter 2. Thus, any advances in identifying the relationship between tangibles and intangibles will not only contribute on a theoretical level, but will also orientate practitioners regarding how to empower brands' symbolic dimension and, more particularly, how to strengthen certain desired personality traits. The hypotheses related to this final stage are the following:

Hypothesis 9. *Some product-related categories are more expressive than others when projecting the destination's personality.*

Hypothesis 10. *Some product-related categories are more prone than others to projecting certain dimensions of personality.*

Figure 1.2. **Research question, goals, and hypotheses**

RESEARCH QUESTION

How are functional and symbolic dimensions of destination image represented in the official website communication of the most popular European urban destination brands?

Main Objective A.
To identify outstanding characteristics of the European destinations' image projected in their official website communication.

Main Objective B.
To appraise the relationship between the functional dimension of the brand and its personality.

O.1. To assess the overall quality of the European urban destinations' official websites communication.

H1. The first urban destinations in Europe count on strong website communication.

H2. Official websites combine textual and visual content in coherent and expressive messages.

O.2. To examines brand image functional and symbolic dimensions showcased in the website communication.

H3. Official websites' content is composed of an itemization of product-related attributes.

H4. DMOs diversify the destination image based on different target profiles.

H5. The official websites use different vocabulary to evoke the same personality dimensions

O.3. To identify the product-related categories common to European urban destinations.

H6. Some product-related categories are standard to the European urban destinations, or "must haves," while others are more specific to certain destinations.

H7. European destinations target similar tourist profiles by personalizing their content.

O.4. To examine the overall tendency of European urban destinations' personalities.

H8. Even though each destination personality is unique, there is a general tendency for the websites to project similar patterns since they represent the same type of destination.

O.5. To confirm brand personality's capability as a measure to position destinations in a competitive context.

O.6. To explore the predictive effect of brand image's functional dimension on brand personality.

H9. Some product-related categories are more expressive than others when projecting the destination's personality.

H10. Some product-related categories are more prone than others to projecting certain dimensions of personality.

Source: Author

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1.3. STRUCTURE OF THE THESIS

This thesis is organized in a classic style and comprises seven different chapters: introduction, literature review, state of the art, sample, methodology, results, discussion and conclusions, and references.

First, the introduction presents the main research problem addressed in the study, along with the specific goals and related hypotheses. This chapter is an initial approach to the subject.

Next, Chapters 2 and 3 comprise the theoretical review. In the first place, the theoretical framework provides the academic foundations of the three fields of study framing this research: tourism, branding, and communication. The chapter presents the starting point of the research and answers some initial questions. Why is tourism activity relevant? Why have brands acquired such relevance? Which role do communication practices occupy? How does the author delimit the concepts of brand image and personality? These are some of the questions addressed in this chapter. Next, the state of the art focuses on the most recent advances related to the topic. The purpose of this chapter is to go beyond the theoretical concepts and analyze and describe in detail recent research about brand image assessment.

Two points are relevant concerning the state of the art: it contains empirical results and it captures the knowledge of professionals in the field. On the one hand, the systematized literature review of the most recent publications about brand image assessment provides empirical data for use in this study, and serves to identify gaps of knowledge and other key characteristics regarding the current state of the field. On the other hand, some authors point to the importance of considering the professionals' perspective on certain topics related to communication practices. For this reason, a survey of experts in branding consultancy is used to explore the knowledge of professionals in the field.

Subsequently, Chapter 4 describes the sample of the study, and Chapter 5 the methods used for the analysis. The latter discusses the three content analysis techniques used to analyze the websites in the sample. The proposed methodological triangulation is designed to assess the projected image as an overall act of communication, and also to go into detail about the symbolic and functional dimensions of that image. Furthermore, the chapter also includes the data gathered from the systematized literature review and the experts' questionnaire.

Chapter 6 then summarizes the results of the content analysis. These are divided into three sections: the overall results of the study, the descriptive data about the projected image of each destination of the sample, and the relational results crossing the cases and the variables of the study.

Afterwards, the discussion and conclusions present the main contributions of this study. The findings are compared with previous research, the hypotheses are tested, and the main results are summarized. Finally, Chapter 8 lists all references used.

CHAPTER 2: THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

2. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

As mentioned in the previous chapter, this study is framed by three different fields: tourism, branding, and communication. It is imperative, then, to understand the theoretical context from which this research emerges. Hence, this chapter explores the current state of the literature in these three spheres.

The following is organized as a pathway, guiding the reader through the main points of discussion that enabled the author to narrow the study and validate its interest. The different sections of this chapter are arranged as a funnel that progressively narrows the scope of the study. As Figure 2.1 illustrates, the three fields of study begin describing the broader social relevance of the topic and then work towards the specific role of communication.

In the first step, the section related to the tourism field contextualizes the importance and the role of tourism activity in contemporary society. Through a theoretical review of previous research, the contemporary vision of tourism consumption is delimited and the relevance that this activity has nowadays in identity construction is justified. This section aims to answer questions such as, "Why are destination brands important?", "What interest do they have for society?", and "Do urban destinations have special characteristics?"

Figure 2.1. **Theoretical contents organization**
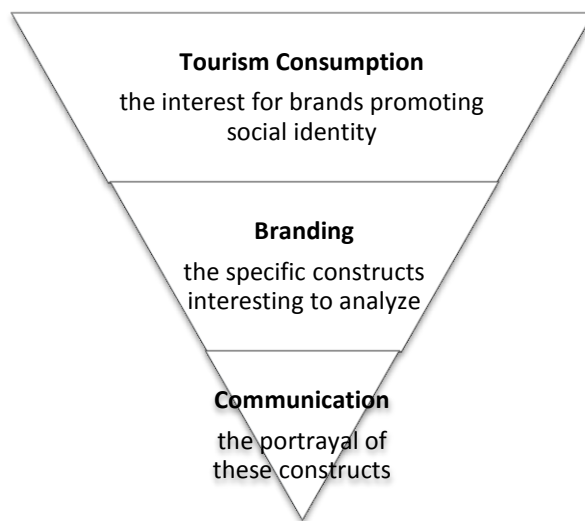
Source: Author

In the middle stage, the theoretical discussion centers on more specific branding concepts. Once the relevance of studying destination brands is justified, the specific constructs of interest for this study are identified. In other words, the second section aims to explore which are the most relevant concepts to assess brands in the previously delimited context. Finally, the section on communication focuses on the particular object of study in this thesis: communication as a key element in building brand image and personality – the two primary

constructs explored in the previous chapter – and, therefore, in contributing to the symbolic role of destination brand consumption in the postmodern context.

All in all, the scope of the study is narrowed as throughout the theoretical review. Furthermore, the chapter also identifies the theoretical perspectives on which this research is based.

2.1. TOURISM CONSUMPTION

This first section theoretically explains the relevance of tourism activities in a postmodern society. The aim is to understand the role of destination brands in postmodern consumption practices. To this end, the literature is explored to understand the current consumption society paradigm and the relevance of places and destinations therein.

In this theoretical foundation, it is argued that tourism activities have shifted from being considered to be leisure activities to becoming identity builders. As will be discussed, territories, nations, and cities have become much more than mere places to live or to go to the beach: nowadays, narratives and symbolisms attached to them are more valued than ever. In this context, cities have become key actors in the economic development of territories and, consequently, have also captured researchers' attention.

To define destination branding, it must be understood as a part of a broader domain: place branding. A destination and the place itself are inseparable concepts, the former representing a facet of the latter. Thus, understanding the overall role of the territory in postmodern society also provides an understanding of the relevance of destinations. However, it must be noted that developing a complete framework of place branding implications falls outside the ambition of this thesis. Instead, these sections focus on giving sufficient background to place the role of tourist destinations in context.

2.1.1. Consumers in the 21st century

The first step to understanding tourists' behavior and preferences when choosing different destinations is to understand their consumption. Places are no longer only where individuals live; they have also become commodities to consume. Therefore, it is imperative to understand the social behavior of contemporary consumption. Furthermore, thinking of consumption is thinking of society itself. For this reason, the purpose of the first section is to describe and understand how individuals behave in a social context and the current consumption paradigm.

2.1.1.1. 21st century postmodern society

Significant changes have delineated the 21st century society, known as the postmodern society. Borrowing the expression coined by Zygmut Bauman (2000), the transition to this postmodern society can be described as a migration from a solid culture to a liquid one. Fluids are always changing and do not preserve their shape; consequently, they value time flow rather than the space they occupie (Bauman, 2000). Through this metaphor, Bauman understands postmodern society as flexible, malleable, and transitory.

At the end of the 20th century, mainly as a consequence of the globalization phenomenon, new socioeconomic needs appeared in this changing society. The relaxation and globalization of the economy, production, and trade market management were imperative. At the same time, the increasing demand of a society reclaiming the values of individual freedom and open communication became the driver for a cultural transition at the end of the century (Castells, 2001).

In this process, several changes occurred, affecting structural pillars of society. Among others, two characteristics of the resulting model emerge as highly relevant to understand the importance of the new consumption tendencies and, therefore, the context of this thesis.

On the one hand, the relationship between space and time has evolved on different dimensions. At a physical level, improvements to means of transportation have made mobility more accessible to people while simultaneously reducing the length of journeys. Regarding communicational practices, advances in technology have made the immediateness of experience possible in spite of distance. The appearance of the Internet has made an instant

response possible, with instantaneous communications at the speed of only an electronic signal (Bauman, 2000). Among others, power, decisions, and communication no longer depend on the spatial dimension but are instead a click away.

On the other hand, the stability of the career path, fixed places of residence, and sedentary lifestyles have also evolved towards more nomadic practices. In the liquid and cyber culture, "the settled majority is ruled by the nomadic and exterritorial elite. Keeping the roads free for nomadic traffic and phasing out the remaining check-points has now become the meta-purpose of politics…" (Bauman, 2000, p.13).

These two characteristics evince a change in society's mindset, no longer seeking stability but a change in behavior, with technologies favoring mobility and the immediateness of communications; a new paradigm often referred to as the "consumer society" (Clarke, 2003). Consumption practices appear to be highly valuable not only to fulfill necessities but also to create identities around them. In postmodernity, goods are valued by their signification and symbolic representation (Firat & Venkatesh, 1993).

2.1.1.2. Postmodern consumption of symbolism

The debate about the emergence of a postmodern consumption society did not arise until the 1980s (Castells, 2001). While the activity of consumption has always been attached to society dynamics, several authors have highlighted a significant change of paradigm in the postmodern era (Clarke, 2003). For instance, even though the origins of new behavior are dispersed, Venkatesh (1999) identifies five major conditions that characterize the current consumption paradigm. Understanding the social behavior principles that condition every marketing activity is vital for the present study. For this reason, this section explores the Venkatesh's (1999) proposed classification of postmodern consumption into five major conditions: sign system, hyperreality, particularism, fragmentation, and symbolic consumption.

In the first place, it is important to highlight the relevance of symbols and signs in communication practices, consumption decisions, and relationships between individuals. The process of globalization has favored an economy where immaterial and symbolic benefits derived from consumption are more highly valued than tangible and functional ones. Other authors refer to this as the new signs economy (Lash & Urry, 1994). Symbolism is desired by the consumers of a global society, and as de San Eugenio Vela (2011) points out, these

symbolic representations of objects have triumphed within new intangible and ephemeral consumption.

This new reality of symbolic consumption leads to the self-construction of realities, built from individuals' cognitive capacity and their pragmatic needs – what Venkatesh (1999) calls hyperreality. This characteristic is related to Baudrillard's (1981) theory pointing to a world built on "simulacra and simulations," a world created from self-referential signs. Society lives in and connects with a social environment where realities are constantly created, negotiated, and, finally, consumed. To clarify this concept, Venkatesh (1999) exemplifies theme parks as an exaggerated form of hyperreality.

Different from hyperreality but also descriptive of consumption society is the characteristic of particularism: the uniqueness of individuals' thinking is also transferred to societies, which are not uniform across the world. Different communities and cultures have different solutions to the same global issues, even though they might agree on some global aspects. However, as Venkatesh (1999) points out, particularism and universalism are not mutually exclusive: societies have traditionally shared common points of view. In other words, even though globalization promotes breaking boundaries between cultures, these defend their uniqueness and particularities in their adoption of symbolism.

The same concept can also be understood as a characteristic of postmodern individuals, who no longer define themselves based on a unique and uniform culture, but can instead be part of several cultural groups (Lakoff, 2006; Rodrigo, 2000; Torkington, 2012). People are represented by different cultures simultaneously and use identity traits from each of them depending on the context. Furthermore, they can also be defined by subcultures within the these groups, such as class cultures (Martín, 2008). Therefore, not only do societies but also individuals within these societies adopt different identity traits to reclaim their singularity in a globalized world.

A similar concept used to refer to this same characteristic of society is glocalization. Roland Robertson (1995) popularized this term, which designates products that are simultaneously characterized by the universal and the local. The previously mentioned advances in information technologies and transportation have favored an international economy, immediate relations across the world, and the visibility of conflicts from far away territories, among others (Bauman, 2000). However, the same global phenomenon has also resulted in

the revaluation of local cultures, social identity traits, and particularities of religions and social groups: the need for differentiation (Chias, 2005; Rodrigo, 2000; Torkington, 2012). In sum, particularism here is understood as synergies between different social groups reclaiming their uniqueness, in contraposition to the global standards promoted by globalization.

This leads to the fourth characteristic of contemporary consumption society: consumers' fragmentation. This concept applies not only to groups of customers or the diversification of the audience, which has made marketing and advertising industries radically change their way of working, but also to individual fragmentation. In relation to the aforementioned particularism of individuals (Rodrigo, 2000), the construction of the own self from multiple identity traits can also be understood as fragmentation. In Venkatesh's (1999, p.155) words, "the self is conceived of more as a product of imitative assemblage than as a unified construction. In redefining the self, the consumer becomes continuously emergent, reformed, and redirected through relationships to products and people." From the marketing and communication perspectives, this is one of the most striking characteristics of postmodern society. It is in the power of brands to enhance consumer experiences, which will later be adopted as individuals' narratives.

Nowadays, consumers express their own identities through products consumption. Thus, symbolic attributes of brands are valued beyond the functional attributes in the brand choice process (Huang, Mitchell, & Rosenaum-Elliott, 2012). Adults show multiple identity traits related to their individual and social identities, which are flexible and renegotiated as they experiment and come into contact with new meanings (Lakoff, 2006; Mishler, 2006; Torkington, 2012). As consumers, adults seek new meanings in consumption practices coherent with their own identity paths and their own conception of themselves, either real or ideal. In other words, consumers build such strong relationships with some products and brands that these become part of their identity (Coombes, Hibbert, Hogg, & Varey, 2001). In this context, marketers must study and take into consideration what consumers expect to find in their brands.

Furthermore, although it seems reasonable to think that people consume as a response to logically organized needs stored in their minds, the contrary is the case. In postmodern society, consumption behavior varies in time and space (Venkatesh, 1999). The market offers a wide range of products and services that are accessible for consumers to experiment and innovate.

This new reality makes loyalty to stable consumption patterns more difficult since consumers are free to choose as they will.

This fragmented symbolic consumption behavior culminates in a host of individual experiences, turned into narratives about the person him- or herself. Though these narratives can be complementary or contradictory, they all coexist on the same level to describe consumers' identity (de Fina, 2006). In postmodern society, people do not have the urge to prioritize one over the other; thus, all acquired narratives are valid and possible within a fragmented identity that seeks particularism (Venkatesh, 1999).

Finally, the last major characteristic of postmodern consumption society goes back to the importance of signs, and overall symbol consumption. All above characteristics point to the same conclusion: the existence of a postmodern consumption behavior moved by symbolism that adds meaning to people's own narratives. People build, transform, and negotiate reality by means of this symbolic consumption (Coombes et al., 2001). Following Baudrillard's (1981) theory, consumption must be understood as communication acts. It must be noted, however, that all this symbolism contributes not only to the individual identity but also to the social one. Therefore, consumers have become decoders of this new symbolic language (Lash & Urry, 1994).

This paradigm can also be understood as the mercantilization of symbols as the motor for consumption and also the economy: the so-called informational economy (Castells, 2003). In this regard, Venkatesh (1999) notes that the main symbol broadcasters in current society are mass media, social groups, and families.

Conclusively, together with identity, the economy and culture are the basis of postmodern culture (Castells, 2003), which is ultimately built from symbols and the transactions of these symbols. Consumption society allows the negotiation of identities; it is characterized by consumption practices that change in time and space, and are variable from culture to culture, from social group to social group. In this context, communication is responsible for the transmission of these meanings.

2.1.2. Tourism in the 21st century

By combining all the aforementioned postmodern society characteristics, one can understand why the territory acquires a significant role in the development of society. As a consequence of the technological development that has made mobility practices more accessible, the value of the stability of a fixed residence changes, along with the value of the place itself.

Furthermore, many changes related to this shift in paradigm are directly related to the evolution of the way in which contemporary society experiences the territory. Globalization has made the world accessible: individuals can have access to and consume products from different cultures and societies. Nomadic practices promote mobility through countries at the same time as communication with any other state is possible at the speed of a click. Surprisingly, the value of the local and autochthonous appears to be more relevant than ever, as individuals and social groups are reclaiming their unique identity. Moreover, the new role of consumption as tightly related to the acquisition and differentiation of identities has also turned territories, nations, cities, regions, and destinations into commodities and symbolism to consume.

2.1.2.1. The new role of the territory

In this postmodern society context where symbolic consumption has become a critical component of individual and social identity construction and tourism activity has also gained relevance. More specifically, there are three key factors to understand the role of a place's activity in actuality. These are the globalized context that defends the value of particularity and authenticity; the commercialization of symbols, where everything has become goods to be consumed (Castells, 2003); and a society that tends towards nomadism and increasingly values mobility (Bauman, 2000).

These factors have favored the emergence of an identitarian value of places, and a change of role of the geographical territory now full of symbolism to be consumed (Sack, 1988). On the one hand, the land becomes the context where individuals and socials groups develop themselves, and thus contributes to the creation of their narratives. As Sack (1992) notes, the overall consumption activity is, in itself, a promoter of the symbolic role of places.

Moreover, de San Eugenio (2011) explains how products and goods are located in space and how, as a result of the advertising and communication activity, the territory is impregnated with their symbolism. Otherwise, the singularity of the place of origin adds to the products' meaning. Thus, in a globalized context that tends towards homogenization, the value of "the local" brings differentiation to goods (Lash & Urry, 1994). Thus, places have become new products that awaken consumers' interest. The territory is no longer only a contingent of all the goods that can be consumed within it: the place itself offers symbolism desired by consumers; "it becomes a commodity" (Nogué & Vicente, 2001, p.15). In other words, as new products to be consumed, territories are associated with signs, symbols, and narratives, transmitted from person to person, social group to social group, and even managed from communication, advertising, and marketing fields.

From the 1990s on, marketing took the lead in planning and managing territory strategies. Marketing techniques were found useful in strengthening places' economy and positioning them in a global market (Kotler, Haider, & Rein, 1993), and became one of the pillars of place management. However, marketers started to identify some difficulties in transferring commercial brands' strategies to territories, and some criticism was raised concerning the challenge of implanting the traditional marketing paradigm based on the 4P's (Kavaratzis, 2004; Pike & Page, 2014). For example, marketers cannot influence the product or distribution in destination marketing the way they can in the retail industry. Differently, promotion has thus become their main focus of action.

Therefore, at the beginning of the 21st century, new voices proposed branding as a different approach more suitable to place management (Kavaratzis, 2004). In line with the new economy of symbols tendency, with this new approach concepts such as image, identity, and communication became more relevant for place management and positioning. These disciplines invest significant effort in creating strong brands capable of binding together all these meanings. Brands not only represent the architectonical legacy, autochthonous products, and museums, among others, but also values, citizens' attitudes, and the place's personality. Furthermore, recent advances in this field point to the importance of collaborative place branding: an approach that considers the different stakeholders' voices to strengthen the place brand (Warnaby, Ashworth, & Kavaratzis, 2015).

In addition, another difficulty faced by territory brands is the need to compete in different markets simultaneously. The messages and narratives related to the territory frequently

pursue different objectives. Places are not represented by linear narratives but can build different messages for different purposes, all linked to a single brand. As Anholt (2004) highlights, six different types of communications contribute to building strong place brands, depending on their main focus: exportations, tourism, foreign and domestic policy, people, investment and immigration, and culture and heritage. This complexity in place branding messages usually brings contradictions and even conflicts between the narratives offered by the place, especially between place and destination brands.

In this regard, it is interesting to raise the issue indicated by Nogué and Albet (2007) concerning the authenticity crisis. Nowadays, the sustainability of places is a major concern, especially touristic territories where tourism narratives threaten the survival of the local ones but the former cannot be sustained without the latter. As the authors discuss, there is a substantial difference between reality and its representation, and one must be aware of the risks of what they call "the celebration of the *inauthenticity*" (Nogué & Albet, 2007, p.205).

For example, the historian and anthropologist Davis and Marvin (2004) explore this problematic in Venice. They note that "Venetian culture has become like Venetian space, available for appropriation by foreigners." The authors continue their analysis by pointing to some concrete examples such as that of the gondola: the original and singular means of transportation of the local population, it has now turned into an expensive tourist attraction, and "most locals now find it alienating and somehow embarrassing" (op. cit. p.238). For this reason, and with regard to the tourism facet of places, it is imperative to connect and stay in touch with the residents of the place as the main stakeholders of a destination (Morrison, 2013; Pike, 2005).

Although this discussion remains highly relevant to the sustainability of places and their future, the aim of this study is not to go further into this debate. Nevertheless, this conflict evinces the significant role and importance of place consumption. In the contemporary context, territory narratives and symbolism are more highly valued than the factual reality of a place.

2.1.2.2. Places as tourism destinations

Similar to the new value attributed to territories, places as tourism destinations have also shifted from mere leisure activities to consumption activities highly relevant for identity construction. As de San Eugenio's (2011) notes, the tourism revolution has moved from the

typical "sun, sand and sex" value to an aesthetic tourism surrounded by myths and symbols associated with the destination.

In this process of turning destinations into symbolic goods, brands are key components. Communication and marketing practices exalt the most differentiating characteristics of the territory, such as historical heritage (Nogué & Albet, 2007), binding them together under the same brand. Specifically selected images about the destination are produced and, from them, the reality of the territory as a destination is reconstructed. This new paradigm goes beyond traditional touristic promotion and enhances the persuasive and emotional tone of communications (Daye, 2010). Contemporary destination brands must evoke the imagery and possible worlds shared with the tourists (de San Eugenio Vela, 2011, p.92). Further, destinations must strategically manage their brands to match, to some extent, tourists' interests. In the era of symbolism, consumers are exposed to a vast amount of messages and, in their process of assimilation, they select and simplify only those perceived as more relevant to their interests and coherent with their identity path (Pike, 2012).

Therefore, to promote destinations in the postmodern context, a new style of communication based on intangibles increasingly represents places as tourist destinations in the media (de San Eugenio Vela, 2011). According to Sonnenburg and Wee (2016, p.325), "the production and consumption of tourist commodities are not only implicated in the transfer of capital but also in the transfer of meanings, emotions, experiences and sensibilities attributed to these commodities." These new practices encourage tourism by attributing a symbolic/identity-related benefit to it, making this activity more relevant for individuals every day. As a consequence of this increasing value of destination consumption, Chias (2005) describes the emergence of a new trend, represented by the expressions "have you visited?" and "you have to go", among others, typifying destinations as if they were fashion accessories. All in all, the popularization of destinations consumption has increased exponentially in recent years.

As a consequence, the international tourism market has become increasingly competitive (Morrison, 2013; Pike, 2012), as destinations need to differentiate themselves from competitors. Furthermore, Chias (2005) identifies three tendencies of postmodern tourism:

- The trend of the market towards more specialized tourism.
- The importance of strengthening what he calls the three E's: entertainment, excitement, and education.

- The polarization of tourists' preferences: on the one hand, those seeking pleasure and comfort, and on the other, those searching for adventure and culture.

Related to the last point, Pike (2012) also highlights the changes in tourists' interests. In his study, the author proposes a double-axis framework to describe visitors' interests. One end of the axis represents exploring the world, and the opposite end, engaging it. This is closely related to what Chias (2005) refers to as comfort and adventure. Furthermore, Pike (2012) identifies a second axis describing tourists' personal focus: outward and inward experiences. Altogether, the author personifies travel motivations into six different tourist profiles, as can be seen in Figure 2.2.

Figure 2.2. **Contemporary tourist motivations**
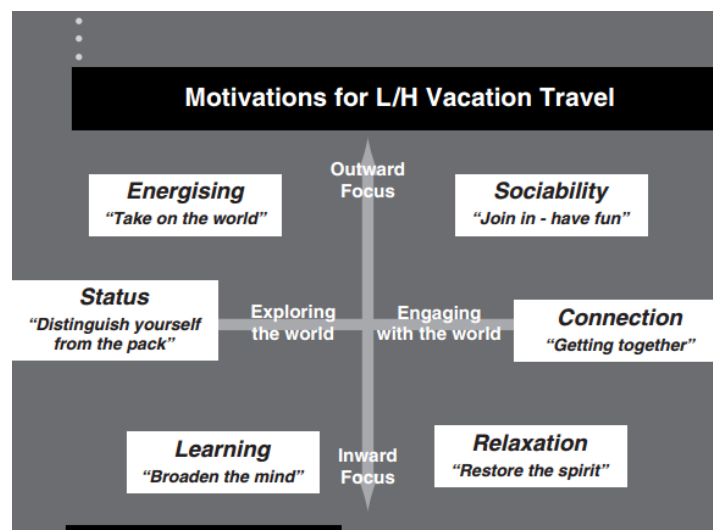
Source: Pike (2012, p.158)

Therefore, contemporary destination constructions still need to represent the traditional natural paradises and pleasure image, but also enthusiasm, excitement, leisure, and entertainment in a fictitious way: a reality created ad hoc for tourists to experience it (Sack, 1992). Destination brand managers must propose narratives that the tourists are willing to consume, narratives adjusted to different tourist profiles.

2.1.2.3. Tourists' active role in destination branding

In the process of creating the destination's narrative, tourists are not mere observers anymore, but active players, decoders of the symbolism linked to that destination (de San

Eugenio Vela, 2011). Furthermore, Sonnenburg and Wee (2016) argue that tourists consume in a "conscious, reflexive, and productive way," so they not only decode messages but also co-create them. Thus, postmodern tourists have the power to create and disseminate new meanings.

At this point, it is interesting to recover some of Bauman's (2000) contributions. To fully understand touristic postmodern consumption, the importance of technological improvements must be noted. On the one hand, new means of transportation have made international destinations accessible to all kinds of publics. Nowadays, mobility is more readily available in economic terms as well as in terms of space and time (Bauman, 2000). On the other hand, technologies have also revolutionized communication media. Spreading a message across the world is easier than ever, which has favored the creation and visibility of destination brands full of symbolism.

For tourists, the world becomes smaller every day: they can reach the corners of the world thanks to present-day means of transportation, and they can access their symbolic messages with a single click. Thus, tourists are independent and lead the decision-making process thanks to technology. As Chias (2005) notes, they can obtain all the information they need to create a customized experience. Moreover, Torkington (2012) indicates that users expect to find the most characteristic aspects of brand identities projected in brand discourse and, further, in their informational search. In particular, several authors point to the indispensability of the Internet in postmodern tourism practices (Chias, 2005; Law et al., 2010; Luna-Nevarez & Hyman, 2012; Park & Gretzel, 2007; Standing et al., 2014).

The role of tourists in co-creating these messages makes destination brand management more challenging, and this becomes even more complicated if one considers the diversity of tourist profiles and interests. Socio-demographic segmentation is not accurate enough to describe tourist profiles so, in the last decade, psychographic segmentation has become the first choice when it comes to analyzing the relationship between tourists and destinations (Valls et al., 2014). Reconsidering Figure 2.2, at least six different core motivations move travelers to search for, consider, and select destinations. It is imperative for destination brands' management not to ignore the heterogeneity of their target, since this could mislead the strategy and condition tourists' behavior (Castro, Martín Armario, & Martín Ruiz, 2007).

In summary, postmodern tourism is understood here as a set of artificially created narratives associated with a territory, co-created with tourists themselves. This symbolic tourism has the ultimate goal of differentiating a destination from competitors in a globalized context, and to reconstruct the identity of the destination by means of recovering the uniqueness and value of "the local" (de San Eugenio Vela, 2011).

2.1.3. Destinations in a competitive context

To adequately frame this thesis in the field of tourism, it is important to explore the relevance of differentiation in an international context. As demonstrated in the previous sections, destinations need to create a differentiated destination image full of symbolism to succeed on the contemporary scene. Marketers know well that identifying and occupying a differentiated market niche is the key to long-term success (Daye, 2010; Kotler & Keller, 2012). The competitiveness of a destination refers to the brand's capability to successfully compete for a market niche long term and, surprisingly, this sustained competitiveness was not explored in destination brands until the 1990s (Pike & Page, 2014)

As mentioned before, in the last years overall tourism practices have shifted to focus on increasingly specialized tourist destinations. International traveling is no longer only related to the traditional "sun and sand": new types of tourism have also emerged, such as sport tourism, conference tourism, rural tourism, gastronomy tourism, wine tourism, and studying tourism, to name a few. These new tourism niches emphasize a specific facet of a destination (Chias, 2005; de San Eugenio Vela, 2011; Wearing, 2002).

However, it is not enough for destinations to position themselves in one of these new specialized tourism categories. It is crucial for destinations competing in the same tourism category to differentiate themselves from the others occupying the same niche; similar destinations or destinations with a more undifferentiated product must highlight their unique traits to present the place to tourists and distinguish themselves through their communications (Daye, 2010; Pike, 2012). In Pike's (2005) words, "with travelers spoilt by choice of available destinations, never before has it been more important for a destination to develop an effective brand. Alas, to do so is also more difficult than ever before."

Managing destinations as if they were brands has been extensively supported as a useful way to enhance their success (Daye, 2010; Morrison, 2013; Pike, 2012; Pike & Page, 2014). However, giving destination brands a single attribute or fewer characteristics that simultaneously differentiate and represent the territory is more complicated than for retailing brands. Besides the multidimensionality of the tourism product itself and the impossibility of controlling the product's evolution, political decisions, low budgets, or the variety of stakeholders participating in the tourism industry are additional obstacles faced by branding destinations (Pike, 2005).

To succeed in an international tourism context, destinations must invest significant effort into making their brands increasingly competitive. Although it is true that destinations' competitiveness embraces many areas of action, such as economics or politics, the fundamental reason why tourists choose a destination is due to its resources and attractions (Enright & Newton, 2005). More specifically, Kotler et al. (1993) describe four different competitive strategies for place brands: design, infrastructure, basic services, and attractions, the last one being the closest to tourism dynamics. In other words, destinations' attractions are the most appealing characteristic for tourists. Thus, among all the marketing and branding actions, building a strategic destination image is key decisive factor (Kavaratzis, 2004).

For these reasons, it is crucial to understand the context, the specificities of the market niche, and the destination's reality to position it and, from it, plan and create a strategic destination image. In other words, it is imperative to understand the singularities of the tourism context before starting to create destination brands.

2.1.3.1. Urban destination brands in Europe

To understand the urban tourism context, it is first important to comprehend the growth and relevance that cities have achieved in the economic development of territories. In the globalized context, cities have competed with each other in different matters, such as to attract investment or human talent, to favor exportations, or to position themselves as tourist destinations (Anholt, 2004; Kavaratzis & Ashworth, 2010). This reality favors the adoption of marketing techniques to manage cities' positioning.

In their work, Kotler, Haider, and Rein (1993) point to the usefulness of marketing techniques in positioning cities in the international market. As key actors in national economic

development, cities used to rely on marketing science to attract investment. However, as Kavaratzis (2004) highlights, the marketing practices of the last three decades have recently led to a new conception of cities' management towards a branding perspective. This new focus represents a shift from the rational marketing perspective to creating brands associated with a more emotional and symbolic city image (Braun, 2012; Gertner, 2011; Kavaratzis, 2004).

Thus, the first step to understand urban destination brands is it to grasp the existence and relevance of the overall city brand, with destination brands representing only one facet. (Kavaratzis & Ashworth, 2010). As tourist destinations, cities need to strategically plan their positioning in the international context, not solely as tourist brands but also as part of an overall coherent city image that competes in different markets to attract various stakeholders (Anholt, 2004).

However, although all cities compete in different markets simultaneously, and tourism is one of the most popular and well-studied facets of place branding, not all cities are equally capable of attracting tourists, as they do not all possess the same attractive roots required to compete in the touristic market. According to Fainstein and Judd (1999), "some cities possess qualities that make them an easy sell, while others must undergo not only a change of image but a facelift if they are to be competitive." Cities that historically stood out in matters of religion, politics, culture, or military power have been transformed into attractions that tourists yearn to see today (de Rosa, Bocci, & Dryjanska, 2017; Judd & Fainstein, 1999).

In this sense, many European destinations possess a high historical value, now turned into striking signs, reminiscent of their power and magnificence in the past. Though few have analyzed the overall European destination image perceived by international tourists, some describe it as a "desirable consumer brands, an attractive cluster of cultural and tourism destinations, stable democracies and strong economies" (Therkelsen & Gram, 2010, p.114). Such definitions favor tourism activity for its attractions together with its political and economic situation.

It is not surprising, then, to note that 51% of international arrivals around the world occur in the European continent, and that the latter is home to many of the most mature destinations in the world (World Tourism Organization, 2015). Furthermore, tourism flows in European cities are ceaseless and diverse: from city-breaks to long holiday formats (Valls et al., 2014). However, it important to specify that more precise studies about the significance of urban

tourism in Europe point to a slightly less encouraging forecast for 2020: a study conducted by Bauernfeind, Arsal, Aubke, and Wöber (2010) indicates that urban tourism will continue to grow internationally, but the share corresponding to European destinations will decrease. Furthermore,

It is important to highlight that the European image as a whole cannot be considered equivalent to that of the different urban destination brands within it. In this regard, in the last decades, academic interest in the key characteristics of successful urban destinations has increased (van der Ark & Richards, 2006). It would appear that the attractiveness of urban destinations is ultimately linked to the cities' streets, hotels, restaurants, sights, museums, parks, and people, among others. However, considering the postmodern symbolic consumption practices, it is evident that this is not the case. To understand urban tourism in the 21st century and tourists' behavioral patterns, it is not enough to analyze the functional characteristics of the destination or the socio-demographic profile of the visitors. Instead, a study is needed to investigate the bond of symbolism to the destination and to psychographically analyze the tourist (Valls et al., 2014).

In this vein, it is interesting to highlight the work of Mazanec and Zins (2010). In their study, the authors aim to predict the behavior of city tourists in Europe based of psychographic criteria. In particular, their research is based on tourists' interest in different product-related features. The authors highlight 23 different attributes of the urban destinations that play a significant role in tourists' decision-making process. However, these attributes are not universally accepted. Though this study is the only one to specifically focus on urban destination, other authors have also highlighted several crucial components of destinations (Beerli & Martín, 2004; Choi, Lehto, & Morrison, 2007; Echtner & Ritchie, 1993; Echtner & Ritchie, 2003; Enright & Newton, 2005; Prayag, 2007; Wong & Teoh, 2015).

The variety of attributes highlighted by these different authors indicates room for further research in this regard and inspires one of the goals of the present study: to identify the product-related categories common to European urban destinations. Furthermore, whereas the work of Mazanec and Zins (2010) is only based on the destination of Vienna, the present study investigates the importance of these attributes for 12 different European brands.

In sum, it has been argued that urban tourism is a major activity in Europe's economy and that it will continue to expand, albeit with a slightly lower share of global arrivals. Moreover, this

section has indicated the similar characteristics of different European destinations, the competitive advantages of the overall European offer, and the increasing interest of scholars in enhancing urban destination brands' competitiveness; this further highlights the relevance of the scope of this study. However, most of the research about European urban destinations' attractiveness and competitiveness refers direct or indirectly to the importance of the destinations' image in this regard.

2.1.2.2. Destinations' image

In the last decades, the literature under the umbrella of place marketing and branding has investigated many concepts, with branding, brands, and image becoming the most popular concepts under discussion (Gertner, 2011). In particular, in the tourism-oriented literature, one of the most investigated topics related to destination marketing is destination image (Pike & Page, 2014). As Pike and Page (2014) identify in their literature review, this is one of the main constructs related to consumer behavior and satisfaction.

While some researchers consider brand and brand image to be synonymous, as will be discussed in the following chapters (Wong & Teoh, 2015), destination image here is understood as a part of the destination brand, and becomes the mediator between the brand and the consumer.

In general, destination image management can be described as "attempts to promote favorable images of the destination with the intent to make up for any deficiencies or negative perceptions that may be formed at the organic level" (Daye, 2010, p.2). As a result of branding management efforts, destinations aim to position positive images in potential or actual tourists' minds through the sum of cognitive and emotional messages linked to the destination (Baloglu & McCleary, 1999; Pike, 2012; Qu, Kim, & Im, 2011; Souiden, Ladhari, & Chiadmi, 2017).

Furthermore, like commercial brands, destination brands also comprise both symbolic and functional dimensions (Daye, 2010; Hosany, Ekinci, & Uysal, 2006; Qu et al., 2011). On the one hand, the functional dimension refers to those images representing the tangible and cognitive attributes of the destination, whereas on the other, the symbolic dimension is related to the emotional and affective ties that tourists develop to the destinations. Both dimensions are

considered to be highly accurate indicators of destination image (Baloglu, Henthorne, & Sahin, 2014; Qu et al., 2011) and keys to the long-term success of brands (Daye, 2010).

In this regard, most of the studies identified in Pike and Page's (2014) review focus on brands' cognitive dimension and omit their symbolic attributions: only six papers in the last decade have analyzed this emotional side. One of the main reasons for the greater interest in cognitive attributes might be the complexity of destination brands.

To ensure the success of any brand, all products must represent its main values (Kapferer, 2012), and the multiplicity of actors and attractions that any destination brand encompasses makes this process a challenge (Pike, 2005). Destination brands must be sufficiently unique to distinguish themselves from competitors, but also broad enough to accept all the elements of a destination's appeal. According to Enright and Newton (2005, p.341), " the core resources and attractions constitute the primary elements of destination appeal and include physiography, culture and history, market ties, activities, special events, and the tourism superstructure", and all of them must be able to participate in the brand construction and represent the same, or at least complementary, symbolic values.

More recent research also explored the symbolic and emotional side of destination brands. For instance, in a recent study Chen and Phou (2013) show that tourists develop emotional bonds with the destinations, while Zhang, Fu, Cai, and Lu (2014, p.213) state that the "overall image has the greatest impact on tourists loyalty". Therefore, it is important to understand the double-nature of destination brands.

All in all, even though this section evinces the relevance of destination image study, to fully understand the contemporary destination management this literature review needs to explore the concepts of brand and brand image in more detail from the branding perspective. The role that destination image plays in travel decisions is clear and widely accepted among scholars, but its particular composition and formation still need further research (Pike & Page, 2014). A universal classification of destination image attributes and associations does not yet exist; therefore, to better understand this construct, the following sections explore it in more detail from a general branding perspective.

2.2. BRANDS AND BRANDING

The importance of branding in the economic and social context of the 21st century is unquestionable. As seen in the previous section, consumption has gone from being mere acts of humans' need fulfillment to representing symbolic, identity-related practices. Branding efforts and the construction of solid and stable brands then gain a more significant role. Though this thesis focuses on destination brand image, it has also shown that destinations are currently managed from the branding perspective. For this reason, any research that aims to analyze any aspect of destination brands need to understand, first, the bases of any branding process and later apply it to the particular field of study.

Therefore, the following sections explore the meaning and composition of brands and all the related concepts that contribute to the branding process. The scope of the second phase of the theoretical framework narrows and focuses on more detailed aspects of brands, serving as a basis for the later analysis of destination brands.

The term brand is widely used on a daily basis but a more accurate definition it is not always well understood. A substantial number of concepts and terminologies describe different components of brands, designate different branding process phases, or identify outputs and complementary concepts related to trademarks. Among them, some terms, such as brand equity, brand image, brand personality, brand loyalty, brand identity, brand awareness, brand performance, etc., have stood out and gained special relevance in research and practice in the branding field. This has created an elaborate scene that makes it more complicated to have an overall and exhaustive understanding of what branding entails.

Given these facts, a holistic approach to all branding implications goes far beyond the scope of this study; instead, the following focuses on the key concepts of interest in this thesis. In particular, these sections explore the notion of brand and its value, the construct of brand image, and the symbolic attributions this image is given.

2.2.1. Brands, branding, and brand equity

2.2.1.1. What do we mean by brand?

The first step to understanding what makes a brand is to define the concept itself. The American Marketing Association dictionary, a widely accepted source among practitioners, defines a brand as a "Name, term, design, symbol, or any other feature that identifies one seller's good or service as distinct from those of other sellers" (Brand, 2015). In other words, a brand is equivalent to a logo. The dictionary entry continues as follows: "a brand is a customer experience represented by a collection of images and ideas; often, it refers to a symbol such as a name, logo, slogan, and design scheme. Brand recognition and other reactions are created by the accumulation of experiences with the specific product or service, both directly relating to its use, and through the influence of advertising, design, and media commentary. (Added definition) A brand often includes an explicit logo, fonts, color schemes, symbols, sound which may be developed to represent implicit values, ideas, and even personality."

Even though these are broad and non-academic definitions, they are interesting because they illustrate the two major tendencies in understanding brands. The former definition considers a brand as a synonym of logo, while the second understands it as a broader concept including images, ideas, experiences, values, etc. associated with a name. In this thesis, brands are understood as complex entities full of associations represented by a name/logo (Alonso, 1993; Kapferer, 2012; Keller, 2009; Kotler & Keller, 2012; Velilla, 2010).

In this vein, Kapferer (2012) proposes a more accurate attempt to explain the relationship between this name and all the ideas linked to the brand. In particular, he proposes a framework based on the coexistence of the logo and the system of associations linked to it, but also defends the existence of a third vertex, the own product experience, as can be seen in Figure 3.2. In his words, brands can be understood as "living systems made up for three poles: products or services, name and concept" (op. cit. p.9).

Figure 2.3. **Three-vertex brand composition**

Brand concept (remarkable value
proposition) tangible and intangible
values.

Brand name and symbols,
semiotic invariants

Product or service
experience at contact
points
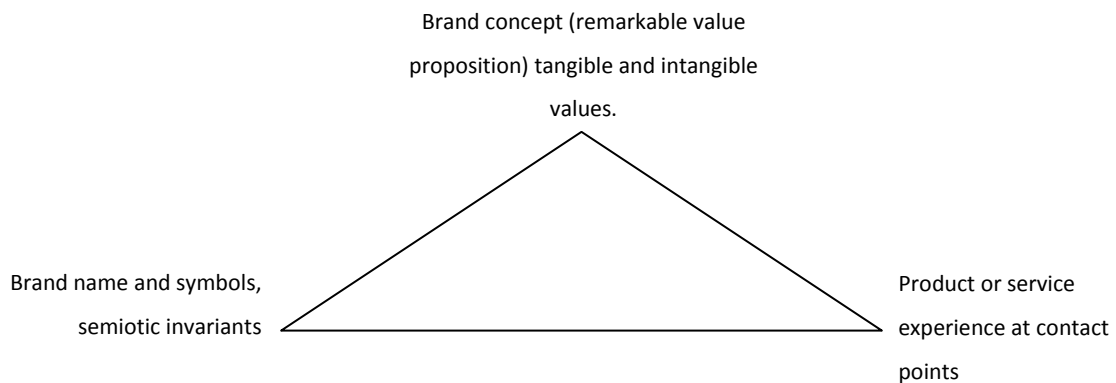
Source: Kapferer (2012, p.10)

On the one hand, the brand name, logo, and other graphic or audiovisual labels that represent a brand, the so-called brand elements (Keller, Apéria, & Georgson, 2012), are the physical expression of an idea embodied in the product or service known and desired by the consumer. This is a representation composed of different **brand elements**: what Kotler and Keller (2012, p.272) define as "devices, which can be trademarked, that identify and differentiate the brand." These physical expressions bind together both the reality of the product and the attributions of the brand that go beyond the mere product experience.

In this regard, Géraldin Michel (2000) distinguishes two main purposes of brands: to integrate and to differentiate. A brand must bring together a range of products and services under the same recognizable label that cannot be mistaken for any other. This idea of integration is crucial for destination brands that must encompass several particular brands. The brand name has the power to call to action; it is "a name that influences buyers, becoming the purchase criterion" (Kapferer, 2012).

However, a logo not linked to a specific product or symbolic attributions does not have the power to differentiate anything, and consequently has no value beyond the illustration itself. A brand only exists when it is recognized and has the power to somehow influence the market (Kapferer, 2012).

Thus, secondly, the product or service experience itself must also be considered as a component of the brand. In the past, many marketers have fallen into the trap of product-related attribute fixation, but this strategy no longer works in contemporary society (Aaker,

1996). However, it must not be forgotten either. The act of experiencing the product or service produces some of the strongest associations that are later added as part of the brand system. Indeed, "brands only exist via its products or services" (Kapferer, 2012, p.249).

However, as mentioned, in the contemporary market the product or service behind the brand name is not enough to differentiate it; a larger and expandable brand concept is needed. The last pole of the brand entity is the primary source of differentiation and meaning for the consumer, where the core value of a brand is located.

One of the first studies to clearly discuss the brand concept was that of Park, Jaworski, and MacInnis (1986). The authors described the brand concept as a "firm-selected brand meaning derived from basic consumer needs (functional, symbolic, and experiential)" (op. cit. p.136). Back in the 1980s the consumption context led the authors to consider three different conceptual strategies related to consumer needs: the functional concept, symbolic concept, and experiential concept. However, this classification is no longer applicable, since a purely functional brand concept would not be effective in an environment where the consumption process has a symbolic and identity-related meaning for the consumer (see section 2.1).

Since then, the construction of the brand concept has increased in relevance in the profession and awakened a growing interest among scholars. Nevertheless, it should be noted that the study of the brand's system connections has not always been identified with the label of "brand concept": it must also be equated to the study of brand image. Either way, academics agree on the study of bi-dimensional brand concepts formed by functional and symbolic associations (this matter is revisited in section 2.2.1.3).

In summary, a brand is understood as a system where a product/service reality is represented by a name or logo linked to a collection of tangible and intangible associations; thus, it expands the meaning associated with the name beyond the product reality. Companies need to create brands to differentiate themselves in a highly competitive and atomized market and become relevant for the consumer. Ultimately, as Keller and Lehmann (2006, p.740) state, "brands are one of the most valuable intangible assets that firms have."

2.2.1.2. The value of brands

Building brands is crucial to differentiate companies and their products on the market; brands are one of the most valuable assets of a company through which to achieve an increase in profits and company growth. But where exactly do brand managers make greater efforts to position the brand in a dynamic market? And how can a brand keep gaining value, keep growing? Reexamining the three-vertex brand scheme proposed by Kapferer (2012), shown in Figure 2.3, not all dimensions contribute in the same way to increasing the brand value or, in other words, equity.

Although the product is the primary purpose of a company's activity, it is difficult to change, has a limited range of expressive possibilities, and thus has a low capacity to gain differentiation. Similarly, a brand name and logo should be stable across time to ensure their recognition. To this end, making significant changes to brand names does not contribute to increasing their value. Therefore, the brand concept is the most helpful dimension of the brand when it comes to market growth. The brand concept, or brand image, is the most flexible and expandable pole of the brand system, and making efforts to strengthen it thus helps to increase the brand's differentiation, customers' preference for it, and other brand-customer relations.

For example, Kotler and Keller (2012, p.32) highlight that "the buyer chooses the offerings he or she perceives to deliver the most value, the sum of the tangible and intangible benefits and costs to her." Moreover, Kapferer (2012, p.9) notes that the differentiation of a brand "is summarized by the brand concept, a unique set of attributes (both tangible and intangible) that constitute the remarkable value proposition made by the brand." To summarize, the more optimal the brand image is, and the greater the potential consumer's awareness is, the more powerful and valuable the brand will be (Keller, 1993, 2008; Keller & Lehmann, 2006).

This means that identifying the best strategic brand positioning is the starting point of any branding process so that later, marketers can invest effort into creating the brand's image and generating brand knowledge among consumers. These efforts have the ultimate goal of achieving greater brand equity.

This last concept, brand equity, has garnered the attention of marketers since it was introduced in the field in the 1980s (Keller, 2008). Ultimately, any branding effort aims to increase the brand equity, and to achieve a different and more positive consumer response to

the marketing efforts of branded products, greater than to those products that are not branded (Kapferer, 2012; Keller, 1993, 2008). However, scholars do not agree on the way to quantify this value. There is a breach between two different paradigms: an economic measurement perspective that aims to quantify numerically the value in a specific currency; and a customer-based perspective that also includes the intangible value of the brand, considering its relationship with the consumer and its strategic position in the market (Kapferer, 2012; Velilla, 2010).

For the purpose of this thesis, **the customer-based perspective is more interesting**. Hence, the study follows the official Marketing Science definition of brand equity: "the set of associations and behavior on the part of a brand's customers, channels members and parent corporation that permits the brand to earn greater volume of greater margins than it could without the brand name" (Leuthesser, 1988, as cited in Kapferer, 2012, p.13). This paradigm takes into account information such as customer loyalty, brand relevance, brand knowledge, and brand love to assess the brand's value in its specific market (Kapferer, 2012; Keller, 1993; Velilla, 2010). The evaluation of brands from the customer-based paradigm provides a great deal of valuable information for marketing departments.

Furthermore, building brand equity is not a matter of one-shot effort, but the result of a constant endeavor to produce brand experiences for consumers. According to Kapferer (2012, p.9), "it takes time to build brand saliency (brand awareness), trust (trusted beliefs about the brand's unique benefits) and emotional bonding."

Marketers must emphasize their aim to recognize those activities that may strengthen the brand and add new meanings. They should also increase their efforts to create and manage brand experiences such as creative advertising campaigns, the organization of a specific event, or any other kind of communication. As Kotler and Keller (2012, p.281) note, "failure to reinforce the brand will diminish brand awareness and weaken brand image." Precisely this last concept is the core interest of the present study.

2.2.1.3. The dual dimension of brands

Before introducing the specific construct that this thesis aims to analyze, this last section further explores an idea introduced in section 2.2.1.1: the dual dimension of the brand concept. It is relevant in this study to understand the existence of a functional but also a

symbolic dimension that characterizes the brand's concept or image (Baloglu et al., 2014). The terms *symbolic* and *functional* are some of the most popular and common words used to refer to these two dimensions, but they have also been examined under other labels.

On the one hand, the functional dimension is frequently described as encompassing all functional attributes, perceived as utilitarian, rational, tangible, physical, or product-related (Aaker, 1997; Kapferer, 2012; Keller, 1993; Keller & Lehmann, 2006; Kim & Lehto, 2012). It is a set of characteristics that imply a functional benefit for the consumer. On the other hand, the symbolic dimension is understood as the set of characteristics that are not noticeable at first sight or in a consumer's cursory reading: a symbolic, intangible, and more emotional dimension that is intrinsic to any brand. As Kim and Lehto (2012, p.119) indicate, "brands have significance that goes beyond their functional benefit." Brands provide the consumers with an affective and emotional component, thereby arousing feelings about these brands.

As an example, Keller, Apéria, and Georgson (2012, p.5) note that "a brand is therefore a product but one that adds other dimensions that differentiate it in some way from other products designed to satisfy the same need." The authors further add that "these differences may be rational and tangible – related to product performance of the brand – or more symbolic, emotional and intangible – related to what the brand represents."

Further, some authors not point to the need to bind together all tangible assets of the different products and services as well as an assortment of intangible, recognizable, and unique values of the brand, and also highlight the relevance of the symbolic dimension in reaching consumers (Aaker, 1997; Cho & Fiore, 2015; Fournier, 1998). Some have attributed to this dimension the power to make brands unique and different from the rest of the market, and thus the brands' differentiation value.

A symbolic dimension that has a major effect on consumers' perception and, thus, it is an important component of the consumption experiences (Belk, 1988; Kleine, Kleine, & Kernan, 1993). This importance of a symbolic dimension has led some scholar to define a brand solely by its symbolic dimension or, similarly, as only the set of added perceptions or mental associations held by consumers. It should be noted that these definitions omit the importance of the product or service, the starting point of any branding effort, and the prime vector of the perceived value (Kapferer, 2012).

To conclude, for marketers, creating a brand is not just a matter of labeling a product: it entails increasing the value of the product or service behind the name, and creating and extending the brand concept. Defining the brand as "a unique set of attributes (both tangible and intangible) that constitute the remarkable value proposition made by the brand," as Kapferer (2012, p.9) proposes, may be broadly accepted. All in all, the main contributions of this chapter can be summarized as follows: [1] brands are complex systems of associations, and [2] branding requires a long-term effort to create new experiences and contact points with the consumer to create strong and highly valuable brands. In this process, communication messages are crucial to transmit and to create a positive brand image in the consumer's mind.

2.2.2. Brand image

Brand image is a delicate topic, since the word image is as polysemic as the image itself (Alonso, 1993). In other words, the word image is not exclusive to the brand perspective and can encompass a broad range of different definitions. It is used in several domains to refer to various concepts, making more arduous an overall consensus regarding what the construct of brand image encompasses. The following sections explore this construct's conceptualization from a branding perspective.

At the end of section 2.2.1, the notion of brand image was introduced as one of the main pillars in the construction of a brand. From a customer-based brand equity perspective, the creation of a singular image in the consumer's mind is a vital requisite to strengthen the brand concept and, consequently, to achieve major brand equity. Thus, brand managers and researchers in the branding field invest great effort in this regard. In this vein, Keller (2008, p.49) notes that "although strongly influenced by the marketing activities of the firm, brand equity ultimately depends on what resides in the minds of consumers."

The first definitions of brand image emerged in the 1950s, pointing to a "psychological aspect associated with expectations and the value of the product, service or the company providing them" (Youn Kim & Yoon, 2013, p.58). Years later, Keller (1993, p.3) defined brand image as "perceptions about a brand as reflected by the brand associations held in consumer memory," and this definition became broadly accepted (Cho & Fiore, 2015; John, Loken, Kim, & Monga, 2006; Latif, Islam, Noor, Saaban, & Azad, 2014; Zenker, 2014). Researchers seem to agree on describing brand image as the recreation of the product, service, or company and the

associations related to them in the consumer's mind – in other words, the result of customer perceptions, or the different brand associations in the consumer's mind (Keller, 2008; Latif, Islam, Noor, Saaban, & Azad, 2014).

Regarding Keller's (1993) definition and returning to the idea of the importance of customer-based brand equity, where the center of the brand value is set in the relationship between brand and consumer, it can be stated that brand image is a key element of brand management. Moreover, it must be understood as the overall output of six different antecedents: brand awareness, brand association, brand superiority, brand affection, brand resonance, and corporate social responsibility (Latif, Islam, Noor, Saaban, & Halim, 2014).

It is especially interesting to highlight that, along with brand awareness, brand image is a key pillar to achieve major brand knowledge, and consequently brand equity (Keller, 2008). According to Latif, Islam, Noor, Saaban, and Halim (2014, p.3), the brand awareness concept "has a direct pressure on brand image in that it is the first step in building strong, positive associations in the consumer minds." It is common sense that the brand image cannot exist without brand awareness.

Keller (1993) explains the brand awareness notion as being the result of brand recognition and brand recall performance. The first step in a temporal development of the brand awareness phenomenon is brand recognition: consumers' capability to "correctly discriminate the brand as having been seen or heard previously" (op. cit. p.3). Shortly afterwards, the brand recall takes place, corresponding to consumers' ability to correctly identify the brand within its specific market or product category. In other words, "brand recall requires that consumers correctly generate the brand from the memory" (op. cit. p.3). Subsequently, brand image comes into action.

On this basis, the importance of brand awareness lies in its ultimate purpose to make brands familiar to consumers, and to create a connectivity that converts unfamiliarity to familiarity with the brand (Latif, Islam, Noor, Saaban, & Halim, 2014). After all, the perception of familiarity with the brand is of great significance in the purchase process and the adoption of new brand meanings, symbols, or associations (Campbell & Keller, 2003). But how can marketers build brand image if it only exists in the consumers' minds?

Kapferer (2012) highlights the importance of developing a strong brand concept as the core dimension to position any brand. In an earlier publication, Park et al. (1986, p.136) state that

"the identification and management of a brand concept represent the means for developing, maintaining, and controlling the brand image." Thus**,** as mentioned earlier, brand concept and brand image are intimately bound together**.** Similarly to the brand concept definition, brand image is what is left in the consumer's memory following all marketing efforts to build the brand concept (Keller, 1993, 2008; Keller, Heckler, & Houston, 1998). Briefly, from all tangible and intangible associations promoted by brand managers and other actors, a brand's image is what remains in the consumer's mind.   Furthermore, context situations and following psychological processes also contribute to creating new associations with the brand.

However, while an overall definition of brand image is broadly accepted, its particular composition and relationship to other constructs is less clear (Cho & Fiore, 2015). Although there is a basic agreement about the essential meaning of the brand image notion, a broad range of different techniques and measurement methodologies aim to evaluate it (Cho & Fiore, 2015; Keller, 2008). Furthermore, many studies have investigated specific components of the brand image held in consumers' minds but have not established the relationship between them (Schmitt, 2012).

This last issue highlights the complexity of the brand image construction and comprehension. There is a strong relationship and a mutual influence between many of the concepts studied in the marketing field (Kapferer, 2012; Keller, 2008; Schmitt, 2012). Specifically, the brand image notion is linked not only to other concepts used in this field, but also to other concepts from the field of psychology. Knowing about these relationships would reinforce the comprehension of the brand, the branding process, and consumers' brand image creation. In this vein, the following sections focus on two relevant constructs of brand image formation: brand associations and brand personality.

2.2.2.1. Brand image psychological formation

Due to its importance in the creation of brand equity, the study of brand image is highly popular among scholars. However, these different studies do not always coincide in terms of focus, and the investigations often fail to consider previous work or to connect the latter to their own (Schmitt, 2012). Moreover, the understanding of brand image remains a challenge due to the different starting points of investigations and the inconsistent use of terminology (Schmitt, 2012; Syed Alwi & Kitchen, 2014). Accordingly, this chapter aims to put together

different concepts that have been studied separately and that are all related to the psychological formation of brand image.

As previously explained, brand image is a notion that refers strictly to the reconstruction of the brand identity in consumers' minds. Therefore, brand image and all other concepts related to it are, ultimately, **psychological constructs**. Thus, for the study of destination image, which is one of the purposes of this thesis, more detailed explanation about the factors influencing the overall image construction is still needed (Beerli & Martín, 2004).

This section explores the relationship between brand image and different psychological constructs in an attempt to describe a conceptual framework that can be useful in understanding and clarifying the formation of the brand image and its composition. The section also aims to highlight those outcomes that may act as indicators of brand image in the consumer's mind.

Certainly, previous attempts have been made to describe a conceptual framework of brand image. Some researchers have proposed frameworks for brand image as the result of set of antecedents and outcomes (Latif, Islam, Noor, Saaban, & Azad, 2014; Latif, Islam, Noor, Saaban, & Halim, 2014), while others have focused on its inner composition, highlighting the different elements, characteristics, or associations (Keller, 1993). However, none of them have included all the psychological constructs related to brand image that have been studied separately.

However, one recent study successfully puts together the different marketing and psychological concepts to describe an exhaustive framework. Following an exhaustive literature review, Schmitt (2012) describes a theoretical framework including all the psychological concepts related to the branding process. The present study uses this approach to identify the most relevant components of brand image.

Although Schmitt does not refer specifically to brand image but to brand in general, his proposal includes only psychological constructs occurring in consumers' minds. For this reason, it is useful to understand all the constructs related to brand image and taking part in it, as argued in previous sections. In his work, the author identifies the different constructs analyzed in previous studies and classifies them according to two variables: the level of consumers' engagement and the different brand-related processes; this is shown in Figure 2.4.

Figure 2.4. **Consumer psychology model of brands**

Object-centered engagement
Self-centered engagement
Social engagement
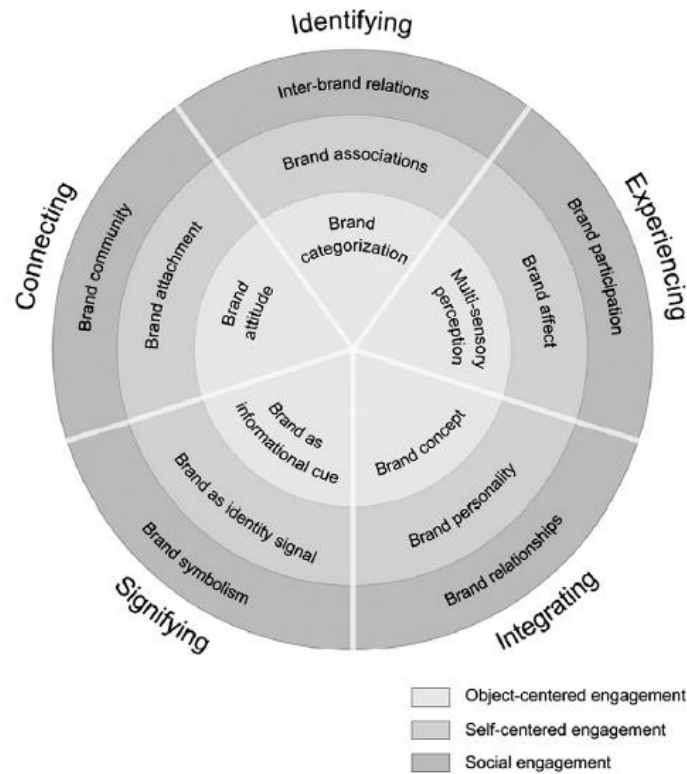
Source: Schmitt (2012, p.9)

Each triangular section in Figure 2.4 corresponds to different types of processes between brand and consumer. Starting with the lower level of engagement, Schmitt (2012)highlights an initial identification state, where consumers recognize the brand and activate its association network. In a second stage, consumers experience the brand, provoking several psychological outputs, and this is then followed by an integration stage, where consumers transform brand information into an overall appreciation of the brand. Finally, in the fourth stage, all this integrated information is used as an identity sign, allowing consumers to connect with the brand through explicit attitudes and attachments.

These stages can also be read at three different levels of consumers' engagement, meaning at various degrees of personal implication. In Figure 2.4, the inner layer represents functional engagement, with consumers expecting to obtain a practical benefit from a good. In contrast, the second layer encompasses all self-centered constructs: consumers perceive this brand as personally relevant. Third, the outer layer contains all those constructs somehow related to social engagement, which is relevant for individuals' social interactions.

Thus, all constructs included in Schmitt's model are psychological processes derived from the brand image formation in their mind. However, to correctly understand this framework and to identify the most useful constructs to assess brand image itself, the following three additional premises must be considered.

1. While all the constructs are related to brand image, since they are all psychological they do not all have the same potential to describe the brand image. Some of them might be more related to outputs derived from brand image (Latif, Islam, Noor, Saaban, & Halim, 2014). Hence, since the present investigation aims to assess the characteristics of different brand images, some constructs related to connecting and signifying fall outside of its scope.

2. As mentioned in section 2.1, this thesis primarily focuses on the symbolic value of consumption and its role as an identity expression for individuals. For this reason, the most suitable level of engagement between the brand and the consumer is "self-centered" (Schmitt, 2012). It is certain that individuals consume to adopt identities so that they can later project a specific image of themselves to others; therefore, the concept of social identity has a crucial role. However, whether the consumer acquires a product because it is coherent with his identity or with the ideal self that he aims to project socially, the focus on the image formation process is still in the self-concept. Thus, this thesis specifically focuses on self-centered constructs.

3. As Schmitt (2012, p.8) highlights, "while each construct is assumed to be conceptually distinct, a given construct may overlap, to some degree, with another construct, and different constructs may interact." Therefore, not all the constructs have to be placed on the same level or independently from one another. In the same way, some constructs may be part of others. Thus, even though this framework is useful to understand the relationship between the investigated concepts, the reality is much more complicated. For example, some authors have pointed out that brand personality, an integrating self-centered construct, can also be part of brand associations, an identifying self-centered construct (Kapferer, 2012).

All in all, to understand and describe different brands' image, this thesis specifically focuses on associations and personality constructs. However, although brand affect also fits the above premises, due to methodological limitations it is not considered.

2.2.2.2. Brand associations

Brand association is one of the most important concepts related to brand image. Keller (1993, p.3) popularized this concept in the marketing field, describing it as informational nodes linked to a specific brand in the consumer's memory and containing the core meaning of the brand. Thus, brand associations consist of every single idea that consumers link to a specific brand name in their memory. In addition, many researchers support the holistic definition of the brand image as an associative network comprising nodes linked to the core brand node (Farquhar & Herr, 1993; Kapferer, 2012; Keller, 1993; Schmitt, 2012). This is organized as a bidirectional web of information: a brand name can guide consumers towards certain brand associations; while a given node of information can lead them to consider a specific brand (Farquhar & Herr, 1993). In both directions, positive associations strengthen brands' image.

Brand associations are, then, a key factor to enhance brand value in customers' minds, even though the perceived value ultimately depends on customers' perspective (Latif, Islam, Noor, Saaban, & Halim, 2014). In this vein, it has to be noted that the result of these associations in customers' minds will vary depending on each individual's background, additional inputs he or she receives, and personal information that he or she has already associated with the brand name.

Therefore, like the concept of brand image, brand associations are mainly a phenomenon that occurs in consumers' minds, and not something that brand managers can directly control and create. Keller (2008, p.56) states that "consumers can form brand associations in a variety of ways other than marketing activities." Still, marketers also manage and work with associations (Ghodeswar, 2008; Kohli, Harich, & Leuthesser, 2005). Brand managers identify and relate their brands to a list of desired associations, usually concerning their desired position on the market (Latif, Islam, Noor, Saaban, & Halim, 2014). Thus, for marketers, brand associations are the key ideas that characterize the brand, making it unique and bringing it to the desired position in consumers' minds.

Two main factors strengthen brand associations and make them more likely to be adopted by the consumer: [1] personal relevance and [2] consistency over the time. On the one hand, consumers are more likely to incorporate those pieces of information that are relevant to themselves into their association network (Schmitt, 2012). On the other hand, it is important to develop a strategic plan that clearly identifies the brand's ideal positioning. Once the

desired positioning is defined, all marketing efforts and communication messages should guide the consumer in the same direction.

The acquisition of new brand associations is strongly influenced by other brand associations already existing in consumers' memory; therefore, similarities among brand associations enhance their recallability (Keller, 1993). In this vein, Wilcox, Cameron, Xifra, and Moreno (2012, p.152) emphasize the importance of systematic and strategic planning to avoid incoherent communication and thus inefficiency. As Keller (1993) explains, congruency between brand associations makes it easier to recall pre-existing brand associations, and it also makes it possible to easily link new inputs to the brand node in the consumers' memory.

Furthermore, not all brand associations are equally powerful or valuable for the brand. The different associations may be consolidated in a consumer's mind in different ways and contribute to a greater or lesser degree to achieving the ideal positioning. All these factors of influence in the adoption of associations ultimately determine a better or worse brand image.

Beyond mere descriptive information, three main determinants modulate the way consumers adopt brand associations: favorability, whereby customers consider associations as more or less positive; strength, whereby some associations are more strongly linked to the brand node than others; and uniqueness, whereby associations are perceived as competitive advantages over competitors (Keller, 1993). In this regard, some authors highlight the greater importance of maintaining the unique associations that give brands a competitive advantage, instead of adding new associations (Krishnan, 1996). Customers contrast all this information with the competitors' brand image and, besides a descriptive image, they also generate an overall value of the brand, which is known as **brand superiority** (Miniard, Barone, Rose, & Manning, 2006; Pechmann & Ratneshwar, 1991). As Keller (2008) states, creating brand superiority in consumers' minds should be the major goal of any positioning effort. Thus, it can be considered as an indicator of brand image.

However, the aspect of brand associations of greater interest in this study is the different existent typologies of these associations. Though the multidimensional nature of the brand association construct is widely accepted (Cho & Fiore, 2015), and one of the most accepted and followed criteria to classify these associations has been their level of abstraction, a holistic classification is controversial. The notion of brand associations refers to the network of information linked to a brand name; thus, any information can be included, making it more

arduous to determine a universal classification. These might even include outputs of other psychological constructs, such as brand personality (Kapferer, 2012).

One of the most accepted frameworks of brand associations is Keller's (1993) approach, where different-natured brand associations are identified and made operative for further studies in this regard. Similar to previous attempts, Keller proposes a classification based on three levels of abstraction of the associations: attributes, benefits, and attitudes.

- **Attributes:** descriptive associations related to the product, whether they are descriptive of the product itself or related to indirectly affecting the product. The former, called product-related, are understood as the core characteristics of the product, compounding the physical product or the service's requirements (e.g. materials, colors, shapes, etc.). The latter are non-product-related and are considered to be external characteristics related to the purchase or consumption of the product (e.g. price, packaging, user imagery, and usage imagery).
- **Benefits:** those associations related to personal values that consumers link to the brand node; judgments about what the brand do for the consumer. In this regard, Keller highlights three kinds of benefits: functional, experiential, and symbolic benefits.[2]
- **Attitudes:** those associations emerging from the judgment of consumers, their reaction to a specific association. Briefly, these form the overall evaluation of the brand.

More recently, Cho and Fiore (2015) have proposed a new classification that combines Keller's perspective with a professional's point of view, based on Roberts's (2005) work. They highlight the great attention that cognitive associations have garnered in academic research and propose a framework that also includes emotional and sensory associations. There are three types of interrelated brand associations:

- Cognitive associations are a "consumer's personal beliefs, thoughts and evaluations of a brand related to its product attributes (e.g. style), service attributes, performance and meaning of a brand" (Cho & Fiore, 2015, p.256). These are mainly equivalent to the product and non-product-related associations highlighted by Keller.
- Emotional associations "involve subjective feelings, such as excitement, happiness and joy" (Cho & Fiore, 2015, p.257). These emerge from the cognitive associations and from the

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[2] To learn more about benefit-related associations, see Keller (1993).

experience and interaction with the brand. Emotional associations are more abstract than cognitive ones.

- Sensory associations "reflect engagement of the consumer's physical senses (i.e. vision, smell, sound, touch and taste)" (Cho & Fiore, 2015, p.257). These are the most novel type of associations to be examined in the field of marketing.

Before concluding, it is important to note that some of these associations highlighted by Cho and Fiore (2015) correspond to other psychological constructs highlighted in the previous section, such as brand affect. For the purpose of this thesis, cognitive associations will guide the analysis of the functional side of the brand image. This study mainly focuses on product-related and some non-product-related attributes to describe the tangible brand image projected on destination websites; this is complemented by the study of the symbolic dimension of the brand via the brand personality construct.

2.2.2.3. Brand personality

The symbolic dimension of destination brands is examined in this thesis by means of the brand personality construct, understood as "the set of human characteristics associated with a brand" (Aaker, 1997, p.347). The study of brand personality has attracted a great deal of attention from many scholars, as it has been proven to have a significant influence on consumers' preferences and purchase decisions (Aaker, 1996; Fournier, 1998; Hosany et al., 2006; Keller, 2008; Keller & Richey, 2006).

The expression of brand personality arises from a personification of the brand, associating it with human personality characteristics. Human beings tend to associate human attributes with non-living objects, a phenomenon that has been widely explored by psychologists with regard to the anthropomorphism theory and consumption practices (Hur, Koo, & Hofmann, 2015). This theory points to many key ideas on how individuals consume and, specifically, how this may contribute to understanding the brand personality formation.

Specifically, anthropomorphism in the branding field has been explained as a metaphor or "weak anthropomorphism", using desires, feelings, and human attributions as an analogy, instead of as "strong anthropomorphism" (Taber & Watts, 1996). Furthermore, the attribution of human qualities to products has been proven to have a direct effect on individuals' intention to consume. As Hur, Koo, and Hofmann (2015, p.340) note, "consumers are less likely

to initiate self-control and are more likely to indulge in the product" when an effort is made to anthropomorphize that product. A relationship exists between anthropomorphism, branding, and consumer behavior, where consumers attribute human characteristics to brands in their minds. Due to this relationship's effect on the decision-making process, brand personality has a significant role in the formation of brand image's symbolic dimension.

At this point, it is appropriate to emphasize that brand personality in the purchase decision also has a major role at an identity level. For example, it has been proven that the impression that people generate of other a stranger's character is influenced by the inferred personality of the brands to which this person is related (Fennis & Pruyn, 2007). Consequently, individuals choose those brands that are perceived as coherent with their own personalities.

This is known as the self-congruity theory. Theorists of self-congruity explain how the perceived personality of products and brands interact with consumers' self-concept and influence their decisions (Sirgy, 1986). This phenomenon has been shown to have an effect on brand loyalty, brand relations, consumer behavior, brand image, and other psychological constructs (Graeff, 1996; Kressmann et al., 2006; Malhotra, 1988; Tuškej, Golob, & Podnar, 2013). Furthermore, as some authors note, the brand personality construct fits the self-congruity theory (Opoku, 2009). In other words, people prefer brands that show characteristics that are congruent with their own characteristics, mainly referring to symbolic constructions such as character. In this context, brand personality prevails above other constructs as a major one to investigate.

Finally, the most relevant aspect of brand personality that is of interest in this study is its composition. Although several authors had discussed brand personality before, Aaker's (1997) study explicitly connected the concept to the anthropomorphic theory and, simultaneously, imported a methodology from human psychology (Avis, Aitken, & Ferguson, 2012). The novelty of Aaker's research was the development of a scale that made the construct operative, allowed a systematized analysis, and favored comparisons between brands. Her work resulted in the popularization of and increasing interest of scholars in the study of brand personality.

Aaker's (1997) study analyzed the "personality" of 36 international and American brands, imitating the studies developed in human psychology, to identify an equivalent of the *Big Five*[3]

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[3] In psychology, human personality is defined based on a five-dimensions model, the so-called Big Five: openness to experience, conscientiousness, extroversion, agreeableness, and neuroticism.

personality traits applicable to brands. From a given list of 114 traits of personality, the study concluded with five distinct personality dimensions associated with brands: sincerity, excitement, competence, sophistication, and ruggedness (Aaker, 1997). Table 2.1 presents the personality facets associated with each dimension.

Table 2.1. **Brand personality scale**

Sincerity	down-to-earth; family-oriented; small-town; honest; sincere; real; wholesome; original; cheerful; sentimental; friendly
Excitement	daring; trendy; exciting; spirited; cool; young; imaginative; unique; up-to-date; independent; contemporary
Competence	reliable; hard working; secure; intelligent; technical; corporate; successful; leader; confident
Sophistication	upper class; glamorous; good looking; charming; feminine; smooth
Ruggedness	outdoorsy; masculine; Western; tough; rugged

Source: Aaker (1997)

Despite the success of Aaker's contributions, some points of discussion also emerged. Even though the validity of the scale to measure brand personality is accepted, the main concern regarding Aaker's contributions is its applicability to different kind of brands and cultures (Eisend & Stokburger-Sauer, 2013). Nevertheless, though there is still no agreement on an universal valid scale, most of the work published in this regard is based on the human Big Five personality scale and Aaker's Brand Personality Scale.

This is an ongoing discussion that has awakened the interest of many researchers, leading them to work on new scales and measurements of brand personality. For this reason, the specific methodologies of analysis and the scales of personality are further explored in the state of the art chapter before delimiting the methodological approach of the present research.

2.2.3. Projected or perceived brand image

It has been argued that the key to brand differentiation is to strategically position the brand not only in the market but also in the consumer's mind (Healey, 2009; Kapferer, 2012; Keller,

2008). The brand image construct is present across the entire marketing process: marketers work to create, maintain, and feed new meaning to the overall brand image held in consumers' minds. Therefore it is not only relevant to determine the brand's strategic position in the market, but it is also a key element during the implementation of strategic actions and programs, the evaluation of the brand's performance, and additional strategies to increase brand equity (Keller, 2008).

But if researchers agree that the brand image construct only exists in consumers' minds, how can marketers create, maintain, and feed it with new meaning? How can they enhance brand image in consumers' minds? These questions concern a point of discussion in academic research: the differentiation between projected and perceived image. To be precise, brand image only exists in consumers' minds, whereas the senders' conception of their own brand is represented by the concept of brand identity (Aaker, 1996; Kapferer, 2012; Keller, 2008). Nevertheless, many researchers have used the term image to describe the image perceived by consumers, but also the image that is desired and projected by the company (Qu et al., 2011).

Differences in terminology aside, since the present investigation focuses on the projected image, it is important to understand how marketers can promote and enhance the characteristics of a construct that is psychological in origin. In this study, the concept of **projected image is used to describe the efforts of a specific brand to promote the desired brand associations**. Therefore, the brand image from the sender's perspective is understood as the set of associations linked to a brand name that brand strategists aim to position in consumers' minds (Alonso, 1993; Keller, 2008; Ollé & Riu, 2009; Schmitt, 2012).

It is imperative for marketers to endeavor to transmit the brand identity or desired image to influence consumers' perception of that image. In this regard, many authors have found that desired and perceived images often do not correspond (Költringer & Dickinger, 2015). In other words, there is a difference between what we are, how we describe ourselves, and how others perceive us (Alonso, 1993). Thus, greater efforts to project coherent messages are needed; as Kotler and Keller (2012, p.32) point out, "all companies strive to build a brand image with as many strong, favorable and unique brand associations as possible."

Once marketers have designed the brand's identity according to the desired image and positioning, the efforts to promote these core associations must be well directed. In this process, one of the main channels that companies use is communication and advertising

(Alonso, 1993; Keller, 2008). Marketers can enhance brand image through great stories and experiences with the brand transmitted over and over in a succession of coherent messages (Alonso, 1993; Cho & Fiore, 2015; Roberts, 2005). For this reason, the last part of this theoretical framework focuses on exploring the characteristics of useful and effective brand communication.

2.3. COMMUNICATION

This final section focuses on communication and the possibilities it brings in transmitting destination brands' image. In other words, which kinds of communication contribute to the creation of the brand concept? Although advertising is the most popular form of commercial communication, it is not the only one. Consumers receive many symbolic messages through a highly diverse assortment of communication sources. As Kotler and Keller (2012, p.273) explain, "customers come to know a brand through a range of contacts and touch points: personal observation and use, word of mouth, interactions with company personnel, online or telephone experiences and payment transactions." Therefore, brand communications are crucial to expanding the brands' meaning and to increase their value or, in other words, brand equity.

In postmodernity, communication activity has changed radically due to the appearance of the Internet. This new medium not only offers a new channel to communicate but also provides a novel range of possibilities for communication, which shocked the field at the beginning of the century. Traditional communication techniques are not equally effective in a context where users, consumers, and citizens have an active role in any communication activity. This change of communication practices has considerably affected destination branding, now centered on exploiting the possibilities offered by the Internet (Buhalis & Law, 2008; Standing et al., 2014).

For this reason, the following sections explore the online communication practices, and the role of official websites in particular, not from a technological point of view but as new tools that contribute to branding practices. As was done in previous sections, brand sites' characteristics are first explored from a generic perspective so that in a second stage, the specificities of the website can be examined in the tourism context.

2.3.1. Internet: the new communication paradigm

From the origin of postmodern society, the liquid culture has evolved at the rhythm of technology improvements and the newly developed mechanisms at their service – an accelerated technology race. Nowadays, the original World Wide Web is popularly conceived of as a web 2.0. This new conception does not understand web communication as a showcase of information to be passively consumed, but as an interactive area of communication instead. In particular, six fundamental advances are crucial to comprehending online communication practices nowadays. The Internet must be understood as a universal library of knowledge, as a global market, as a puzzle of information nodes, as a public area to meet and communicate, as an increasing set of multimedia and audiovisual expressions, and as an artificially created ecosystem for human experience (Area & Pesoa, 2012). The following lists the six challenges of contemporary communication.

1. First, the vast quantity of information and knowledge stored on the Internet is why it is considered a universal library (Area & Pesoa, 2012). Nowadays, the liquid culture society has access to a huge volume of information; however, this phenomenon leads to information saturation of individuals, who struggle to determine which information meets their needs, among other problems. The abundance of information started to become a problem in the 1970s, and the expression *information overload*[4] was born. Nowadays, with the exponential increase of information available on the Internet, this phenomenon has been renamed *Infoxication*.

2. Not only the huge volume of information has disrupted the communication practices, but also the high value attributed to it as an economic activity, known as Informational Economy, New Economy, or Digital Capitalism (Area & Pesoa, 2012; Castells, 2003). As Castells (2003) points out, companies' productivity and competitiveness, referring to business but also regions and nations, depend on their ability to manage, process, and successfully apply available information. Furthermore, even information itself becomes a product to commercialize, or at least a virtual space for financial transactions (Area & Pesoa, 2012).

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[4] In his book <u>Future Shock,</u> Alvin Toffler (1970) introduced the term Information Overload (Infoxication) to describe the problems emerging from the excess of information available in the postmodern society.

3. Another significant change in postmodern communication is its hypertextuality. Kerckhove (1999) defines hypertext as a "link to contents or industries based on knowledge." Online content is compound by a net of micro contents: a puzzle of separate content units all linked to each other for fast consumption (Area & Pesoa, 2012). In a postmodern society, people build their knowledge through their navigation across distinct information nodes. This structure causes the fragmentation of culture and different experiences of information consumption, creating a challenge for communicators. On the one hand, we can access contents isolated from their context, while on the other, we can mix this data with complementary information from other sources and authors that were not created to go together. Consequently, individuals can develop their own meaning and unique informational experiences.

4. Furthermore, the Internet has become a public meeting place to communicate with people with the same interests, problems, hobbies, etc., favoring the emergence of new and diverse communities (Area & Pesoa, 2012). Social media and chats are the main platforms that promote online relationships between individuals without intermediaries (Flores, 2009) – not only on a personal level but also on a professional one (Area & Pesoa, 2012). Many companies have seen the Internet as an opportunity to strengthen their communication with different stakeholders, creating networks to favor internal communication with an increasingly horizontal structure, to improve teams' leadership and management, and to maximize contact with suppliers and clients (Castells, 2003).

5. Expressiveness is another interesting characteristic of postmodern communication and the Internet in particular. We face audiovisual and multimedia communication rich in images, text, video, animations, sounds, etc. In this context, users become decoders of complex messages, capable of decoding each of these languages and combining them into a single message (Area & Pesoa, 2012).

6. Finally, online communication must be understood as not only a container of information, but an artificial ecosystem for human sensory experiences in three dimensions (Area & Pesoa, 2012). Videogames and the recreation of virtual worlds in the web 2.0 provide emotional online experiences based on communication and relation with other users (Cherbakov, Brunner, Smart, & Lu, 2009). This offers a new cultural experience based on user-machine interaction.

These new characteristics of information consumption emerged due to the technological advances and the appearance of the World Wide Web in Europe in the 1990s; however, they

then spread rapidly into society, becoming not only an online behavior but a new culture and social mentality (Area & Pesoa, 2012; Castells, 2001). Therefore, far removed from the lineal communication of traditional media, nowadays we can locate contemporary communication as information organized in a net structure – in other words, a new way of knowledge and communication built into networks of information, and a new structure more closely related to how humans organize this information in their brains (Castells, 2001; Kerckhove, 1999).

2.3.1.1. Online brand communication strategies

For business competitiveness and brand communication in particular, information technology is universally considered to be a crucial. This new language structure opens new expressive possibilities for companies to build meaning around their products or services. The unidirectional and traditional linear messages are unnoticed by consumers, who are engaged by more dynamic, interactive, and multimedia messages (Simmons, 2007). Considering the characteristics mentioned above, it is apparent that commercial messages must overcome an extremely competitive communication environment; promote interactivity between consumer and message while also connecting individuals; and build multimedia messages that create a unique experience in an online environment.

The study of the web has captured the attention of a considerable amount of academic research, as well as practitioners' efforts to build competent websites. In this regard, most studies focus on the technical features of the website and user experience, but slightly fail to examine the web as a communicative environment to transmit a determined brand and its identity (Opoku, Abratt, & Pitt, 2006). However, the website as a brand image transmitter has garnered growing attention (Chapleo, Carrillo Durán, & Castillo Díaz, 2011; Dou & Krishnamurthy, 2007). Some lines of research have approached the study of websites from a marketing perspective. According to Chiou, Lin, and Perng (2010, p.286), "the typical web visitor is not merely a web user but also a potential customer who needs product information, attractive promotional activities, convenient order process, and after-sales services." Website communication not only needs to be accessible and well positioned, but it must also strengthen the marketing and branding strategy on all levels.

Website communication success has no other secret than the correct application of the strategy behind it. However, as Simmons (2007) argues, companies must search for innovative online branding strategies to distinguish themselves in the virtual marketplace and also engage customers. In this regard, he identifies four main pillars that characterize online branding strategy, which he calls i-Branding: marketing communications, understanding customers, interactivity, and content, as seen in Figure 2.5. In his words, these are "critical in developing the internet successfully as a branding tool" (op. cit. p.545).

Figure 2.5. **Four main pillars of brands' online strategies**
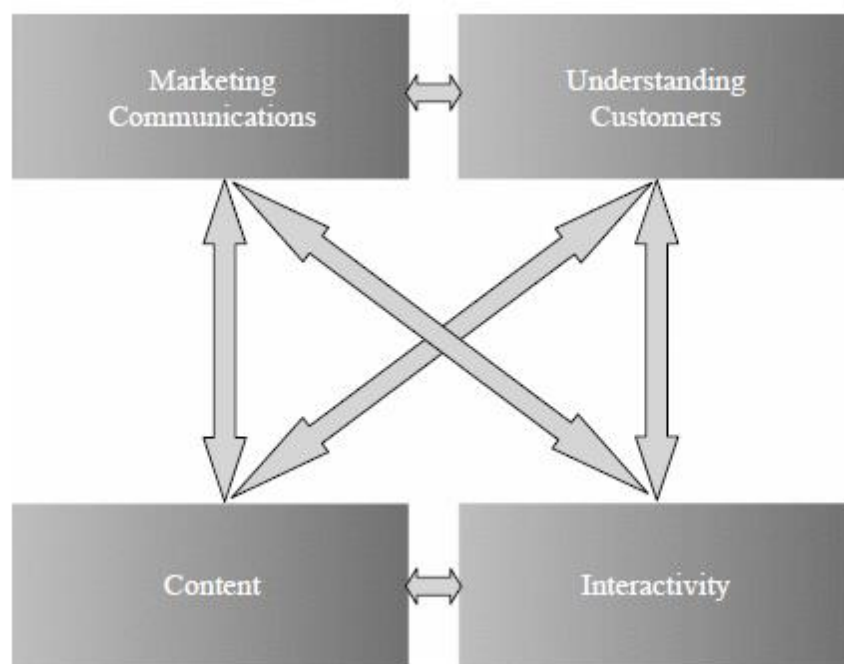
Source: Simmons (2007, p.545)

On a marketing level, Chiou et al. (2010) propose a Web-Marketing Mix based on the traditional 4P model and adding a fifth component: customer relationship. As the authors argue, reinterpreting the traditional 4Ps in the online context will enable marketers to strengthen their online strategy. They suggest the following definitions:

- Product as the online information about and activities regarding the product or service.
- Promotion as the particular activities that give visibility to the store or main source of information, such as the official website.
- Price as the online experience of purchase; not only setting the value of the product, but also considering the online possibilities of purchasing.

- Place as the overall design of the information distribution or purchase platform. In this regard, matters such as navigation, security, structure, and easiness to understand and read the content should be considered.

A correct understanding of online marketing characteristics presents branding opportunities by creating three favorable conditions: major visibility, a closer relationship between consumers and brands, and the generation of mutual value (Rowley, 2004; Simmons, 2007). The latter two conditions are mainly promoted by the interaction possibilities of the web. In that same vein, Chiou et al. (2010) add a fifth component to the Web-Marketing mix: customer relationship. All these approaches refer to the importance of personalization possibilities to engage customers with more relevant messages. This demonstrates the importance of understanding customers.

Furthermore, online communication strategy must understand the supremacy of interaction: "interactivity as a central component in efforts to engage customers online" (Simmons, 2007, p.551). By nature, online information consumption is interactive; the information network structure makes users build their own content by navigating from node to node (Kerckhove, 1999; Morville & Rosenfeld, 2006; O'Rielly, 2005); thus, any commercial communication must understand this dynamic. The web offers a wide range of interaction possibilities, from direct interaction in social network, blogs, and online communities, to interactive features within the official website itself. There is no doubt that brand managers must consider the way their brand will interact with its followers. All in all, making consumers interact becomes a three-stage challenge: attract, remember, and respond (Marcolin, Coviello, & Milley, 2005; Simmons, 2007). It is not enough to make users participate: the brand has the duty to listen, understand consumers' contributions, and remember them to be able to offer appropriate and interesting responses (Marcolin et al., 2005).

Finally, Simmons (2007) proposes a fourth pillar of online communication less explored in academia: the content. The characteristics of postmodern communication have empowered consumers, who can select specifically that content in which they are interested while skipping the rest. Some authors relate this change of paradigm to a migration from push to pull strategies (Govers, Go, & Kumar, 2007; Rowley, 2004; Wilcox et al., 2012). Communication effectiveness is no longer a result of repetition, as it is in traditional media: instead, communication activities need to pique the customers' interest; it is the era of content. Furthermore, Simmons (2007) argues that it is not only a matter of creating interesting

content, but also of structuring them and making them easy to access in an environment crowded with other messages. "If a web site user is interested in a particular item of information/transaction, what similar or related items of information/transactions would they also be interested in?" (Taylor & Engrand, 2006 cited in Simmons, 2007, p.554). Anticipating user interests is a major concern in online communication strategy in general, and in official sites' communication in particular.

2.3.1.2. Official website communication as a branding tool

In this context, official websites have acquired the important role of building and concentrating the overall desired brand image. In the general marketing and communication field, these websites are also known as "brand sites", where the overall brand strategy is reflected (Dou & Krishnamurthy, 2007). Although they may be given different names, their main characteristic is that they are promoted and controlled by the brand managers, the official voice of the company. Without a doubt, official websites have become a central component of brand communication strategies (Schultz, Hatch, & Holten Larsen, 2000).

Furthermore, several studies have highlighted the importance of official websites for consumers. For example, the Report on Brand Web Sites conducted by CRM Metrix in 2003 (cited in Dou & Krishnamurthy, 2007) shows that consumers consider official websites to be the best source from which to learn about a brand, far beyond the credibility given to other advertising forms. Therefore, to optimize destinations' official sites as brand communication tools, it imperative to explore these sites' characteristics (Chapleo et al., 2011).

First of all, it must be noted that each website pursues specific goals; thus, the overall final performance will depend on each site's objectives. However, some features appear to be common to all commercial websites. The first step in planning an official website is to determine whether the main goal of the site is to educate consumers about the product and brand, or to give it a purchase orientation (Dou & Krishnamurthy, 2007). In that same vein, Chiou et al. (2010) distinguish three phases of website marketing communication: information, agreement, and settlement. Brands must decide on the extent to which their site will focus only on the stage where users seek information from the official website and other sources; will offer closer contact with users to enable negotiation or a relationship between potential buyers and the seller; or will allow for the completion of the purchase process, thereby

facilitating the transaction (Chiou et al., 2010). In other words, with regard to official destination websites, one can identify those that only provide information about their attractions; those that offer the possibility to combine different attractions in a trip plan or to find restaurants in a particular location; and those that facilitate the booking of hotels, making reservations at restaurants, or even buying different event tickets.

In this regard, it is interesting to draw a parallel between official websites' aims and the taxonomy of users' web search, another phenomenon well studied in communication technologies. Understanding users' behavior in web search helps in understanding their future behavior on the official website. Broder (2002) proposes three different types of search behavior: informational, navigational, and transactional. First, informational searches refer to users intending to obtain information about one topic from several sources. Similarly, users of the official website read several different pages to gather general information about the brand. In contrast, navigational queries in search engines are meant to find a particular site, which is equivalent to aiming to find specific content on an official website. Finally, transactional queries focus on conducting a web-mediated transaction. Following the parallel, official websites that pursue a final settlement with consumers will have to ensure the use of the appropriate technology but also online assistance, contact possibilities, safety guarantees, etc. (Chiou et al., 2010). This taxonomy has recently expanded into five different search types, but the new proposal proposes two variations of informational and transactional types that concern web search characteristics that are not useful in this parallel (Anthony, 2016).

It is interesting to consider that, similar to web search behavior, users' experiences on an official website may follow different goals. Brand managers must provide a variety of information on the site's pages, offer navigational shortcuts that allow users to obtain the desired information faster, and display transactional banners if this is in line with the strategy.

Once the strategy is clear and managers have considered the different phases of communications between users and official brand websites, several specific features must be considered to strengthen the site. In their study, Dou and Krishnamurthy (2007) analyze official websites for drinks, candies, and accounting services, investigating six different categories identified in the academic literature and common to different products and services: text content, multimedia, design, loyalist support, promotion synergy, and interactivity.

Text and multimedia content

Text content is possibly the most traditional component of official websites' communication. Under this name, Dou and Krishnamurthy (2007) indicate the role of official websites in disseminating content about the company and the product, as well as more experiential and functional information. FAQs, contact, privacy, press, or investor content comprises a set of relevant and required functional information. In addition, informing the user about practices beyond the product itself, for instance educating consumers, adding testimonials from customers, or adding other sub-branded content (i.e. brand stories) will also strengthen the site's textual content, bringing it to a more engaging level.

However, website content cannot be understood solely as a set of interactions of multimedia content: pictures, videos, animated content, audios, etc. The key to success in this regard is in the structure and combination of multimedia content promoting emotional responses (Standing et al., 2014).

Many studies point to the prominence of content in the assessment of websites' quality (Huizingh, 2000). This is reasonable if we consider that the basic stage of any official website communication is informative (Chiou et al., 2010). Brand and communication managers must carefully select the appropriate information to be represented on the website by different content units. In this regard, Huizingh (2000) identifies three recurrent types of content on commercial websites: commercial and non-commercial information, transactional content, and entertainment. Firstly, transactional content is highly dependent on the site's strategy. Secondly, similar to advertising, websites must offer entertaining content, also known as infotainment. Thanks to the interactivity possibilities and multimedia expressiveness of website content, official sites must offer videos, images, music, and other kinds of content units that not only inform but also entertain users. Finally, brand websites provide commercial information about the core characteristics of their product and their brand's mission and character, as well as about non-commercial activities. Official websites might display information that is relevant for their customers but not directly related to the brand's commercial purpose (Huizingh, 2000). This is related to the next category of brand websites.

Promoting synergies

Promotion synergies is mainly related to a website's offer of discounts or other promotional campaigns, but also to the possibilities of combined activities with third parties, such as

sponsorships (Dou & Krishnamurthy, 2007). A brand's website content can also include information about sponsored events, collaborations with other companies, or complementary services not directly dependent on the brand itself (Huizingh, 2000), i.e. information about a hotel brand on a destination website. All in all, brand websites are complex sources of information and persuasion that need to pay great attention to hierarchy, structure, and organization of a high volume of content that would otherwise overwhelm users.

Website design

Design is also a significant matter to consider in the conceptualization of an official website. Unlike graphic advertisements, design online comes with a huge technical component that goes beyond traditional aesthetics (Djonov, 2007; Miller & Remington, 2004). Navigation structure, inside search boxes, site maps, architecture, online shopping functionality, and updatedness are design features that add to the traditional brand logo, introductions, or pop-ups advertisements while loading (Dou & Krishnamurthy, 2007).

It is universally accepted that website contents are not single pages with text to be consumed in a linear way, meaning from beginning to end. On the contrary, users create their own information package by navigating through different pages on the site, usually without looking for a particular item, only as a result of navigation experience (Miller & Remington, 2004). For this reason, website design must emphasize the building of intuitive structures that successfully guide users through the contents. Hence, technical solutions have great relevance in website design. Nevertheless, the influence of semantics and traditional design must not be forgotten. Whereas many studies have analyzed the optimal number of links per page to guide users, Miller and Remington (2004) suggest that there is no such number, and that good navigation experiences depend on the clarity and appropriateness of the links and their labels.

The main challenge in this regard is that most websites' design is planned without considering user behavior on the site (Hollink, Van Someren, & Wielinga, 2007). To provide a meaningful structure that successfully guides users towards information they are looking for or interested in, website managers must know user interests and behavior on the web and adjust accordingly. This is usually achieved by improving the visual appearance of the links and, more importantly, the structure of the links that connect the different pages (Hollink et al., 2007). To overcome this challenge, most website designs resort to re-ordering their link structure based on each page's frequency of visits, prioritizing those pages that are more frequently visited, or

according to the last visited pages and recurrent navigation paths (Pazzani & Billsus, 2002). As mentioned in the previous section, it is not enough to make users interact with the content: the website must understand their behavior and offer an accurate response. In this regard, learning users' past behavior may help in predicting their interests, and thus outperform the model adjusted to users' needs (Radinsky et al., 2013). Since the aim of this study is to analyze the content of destinations' official websites, it is imperative to understand that besides the importance of the main body text, other links on the same page also contribute significantly to creating the overall information experience for potential tourists.

Loyalist support

Regarding loyalist support, Dou and Krishnamurthy (2007) highlight the relevance of applications that might encourage potential tourists to stay loyal to the brand. As specific features that promote it, the authors emphasize the role of fan clubs, the history of the brand, brand souvenirs, the possibility of recommending to friends, and the use of bulletin boards. While some of these features also bring dynamism and interactivity possibilities to websites, their effects go beyond this interactivity to engage consumers with the brand. Furthermore, the same authors point out that some brand websites' strategies focus solely on facilitating relationships and building an online community (Dou & Krishnamurthy, 2007).

Interactivity

Finally, interactivity appears to be a relevant activity for promoting not only on the Internet in general, but also within the same website. There are several possibilities for official websites to enhance their interactivity, such as online gaming, downloading options, allowing customers to make suggestions, personalized options, virtual reality, and live customer support (Dou & Krishnamurthy, 2007).

2.3.2. Destination online communication

As mentioned previously, one of the key features that have facilitate the postmodern consumption society is technological advances in communication technologies (Bauman, 2000; Castells, 2003). This new paradigm has a direct impact on places' and destinations' communication (Buhalis & Law, 2008; Govers, 2015; Govers et al., 2007). As Chias (2005) notes, to brand destinations, it is not enough to work on a visual identity or to promote

destinations in traditional advertising campaigns: it is also imperative to spread a stable and always accessible message.

Nowadays, travelers find information about destinations, make decisions, organize their own trip plans, and buy touristic products on the Internet (European Commission, 2017; Patkose et al., 2004; Xiang, Wang, O'Rielly, & Fesenmaier, 2014), more so than from traditional travel agencies or tourism magazines. Furthermore, some studies point to the importance of the pre-experience as a crucial part of the overall tourist experience (Frías, Rodríguez, & Castañeda, 2008). Kapferer (2012, p.249) states that "the first contacts with the brand are determining factors in the formation of a long-term image," and communication messages are the first contact points between potential tourists and the destination. According to Gretzel, Fesenmaier, and O'Leary (2006), the pre-trip phase, corresponding to the information gathering and journey planning, and the post-trip phase, corresponding to sharing the experience of a traveling consumption act, are part of the overall tourist experience.

Consequently, in recent years websites and their possibilities in the field of tourism have awakened the interest of both practitioners and researchers (Opoku, 2009; Standing et al., 2014). The assessment of the official destination image is a main point of interest, since it should match the characteristics and values set in its identity and strategy. In addition, the multiplicity of destination images' representation on the web is also becoming a challenge that needs to be explored by researchers and practitioners (Choi, Lehto, & Morrison, 2007). The following sections summarize some of the most revealing findings in this regard.

2.3.2.1. Destinations' website discourse

Online communication and websites in particular have become the new channel of tourism information consumption (Buhalis & Law, 2008; Law et al., 2010; Luna-Nevarez & Hyman, 2012; Park & Gretzel, 2007). As argued in the previous section, corporate/brand websites allow communication managers to articulate a constant and controlled communication adjusted to the needs of the brands (Wilcox et al., 2012), connecting the corporate voice with the potential consumer.

Regarding official destination websites, studies have found a significant influence of official websites on tourists' intention to travel and on their perceived image of a destination (Kim & Fesenmaier, 2008; Lepp, Gibson, & Lane, 2014; Morrison, 2013). In this vein, Luna-Nevarez and

Hyman (2012) describe the official website as a destination representative on the Internet, a reflection of everything that the destination has to offer. It is critical, then, to strategically design the official website since dispersed, limited, or boring content will discourage potential tourists, who will then search for information from other sources, thereby losing a communication opportunity for the destination (Chias, 2005).

Any discourse that aims to transfer traits of identity desired by the consumer, such as tourism discourse, should create worlds of meaning where identities interact with actions and concrete experiences; this is not only a matter of which content is provided, but also of how it is expressed (de Fina, 2006). Destinations that aim to differentiate their brand from that of competitors should project a unique character through their website discourse, which must be consistent across messages, unique, and distinguishing of the destination (Morrison, 2013; Opoku, 2009; Stokburger-Sauer, 2011). Elaborating symbolic and appealing messages through the different destinations' communications would significantly contribute to this end (Govers, 2015; Pike & Page, 2014; Torkington, 2012).

In other words, destinations must project a personality that is "distinctive, robust, desirable, and constant (...) when an organization presents different messages to the consumer, the brand becomes confused and its impact diluted" (Opoku, 2009, pp.81-82). As Keller (2008) points out, once a brand is characterized by a strong personality, consumers will be resistant to trusting information inconsistent with it.

Furthermore, to successfully transmit the identity of a territory it is crucial to appeal to particular characteristics of the place as a part of its global identity; these are known as small identities. For example, local gastronomy and typical products are smaller traits of identity that take part in the large identity of the territory. These must be reflected in the website discourse. As Georgakopoulou (2006, p.84) highlights, "large identities can be best traced in discourse through an analytic emphasis on the 'small,' that is, the details and sequential management of talk." Well-articulated, rich, and expressive website discourse that refers to particular elements characteristic of an overall destination identity are the key for website communication success. Thus, it is necessary to understand the overall brand image as a set of different brand associations, the same way territory identity is a collection of minor identity traits projected in the communication actions.

Nevertheless, considering the previously mentioned complexity of the tourism offer and the destination brands, building attractive and fruitful official websites becomes a challenge. These websites must be more than a layout design or a set of programming rules: they must articulate a coherent and compelling discourse that guides users through the site's contents (Inversini, Cantoni, & De Pietro, 2014; Park & Gretzel, 2007; Van der Geest, 2001). As Tang, Jang, and Morrison (2012) note, while website design influences the perception of high and low engaged users about the website, information quality is imperative for highly engaged potential tourists and has a significant impact on their destination perception. Furthermore, the traditional tourism promotion as a mere showcase of information, as was contained in web 1.0 (Contreras, 2010), is no longer enough to attract visitors. Tourist communications are shifting towards "new settings focused on arousing persuasion and emotion of the place" (de San Eugenio Vela, 2011).

Nowadays, the static web 1.0 has evolved to web 2.0, where users can interact, participate, and contact the organization or other users, while simultaneously offering dynamic, rich, and different voices (Wilcox et al., 2012). As previously mentioned, destination narratives are co-created with tourists; thus, any official communication should focus on users' interests to encourage them to participate and not only to try to sell them the brand (Therkelsen, 2015). Contemporary communication has experienced a transition from push communication strategies to pull websites (Contreras, 2010; Wilcox et al., 2012).

Furthermore, the accessibility of website communication has helped small destinations with less economic resources to compete in an international market with a compelling image and broad range (Dedeke, 2016; Pitt et al., 2007). Users can search for destinations that fit their interests no matter how far away or how popular they are; nowadays, there are no geographic limits (Huertas-Roig & Fernández-Cavia, 2006). In fact, small destinations are aware of the possibilities that online communication brings to gain international visibility, and they are putting great efforts into their online and website communication activities. Small destinations recognize this communicative opportunity more than larger destinations, which still depend to a greater degree on their established reputation (Dedeke, 2016).

Considering the above, website communication has become an opportunity and a challenge for destinations – an opportunity to disseminate a strategic message that might capture the attention of potential tourists and persuade them by spreading the destination's identity. In this regard, official websites are increasing in importance, even though it is a demanding task

for DMOs to fill these sites not only with promotional information but also with attractive discourse. In this process, several features of websites offer new communication possibilities for destinations.

2.3.2.2. Official destination website

The importance of destinations' website communication is well accepted and its positive effect on tourists' attitudes has been demonstrated (Tang & Jang, 2011). However, official websites have not always achieved the expected level of influence on potential tourists' information process. In 2005, a study highlighted the struggles of destinations' official websites in finding their role (Miller, 2005; Pike, 2012). According to Morrison (2013), official sites have traditionally executed nine main roles. Represented in the first square in Figure 2.6, Morrison describes websites as *information sources.* The foremost goal of old websites in the field now represents only the most basic aim that official destination websites pursue.

Figure 2.6. **Nine main roles of official destination websites**
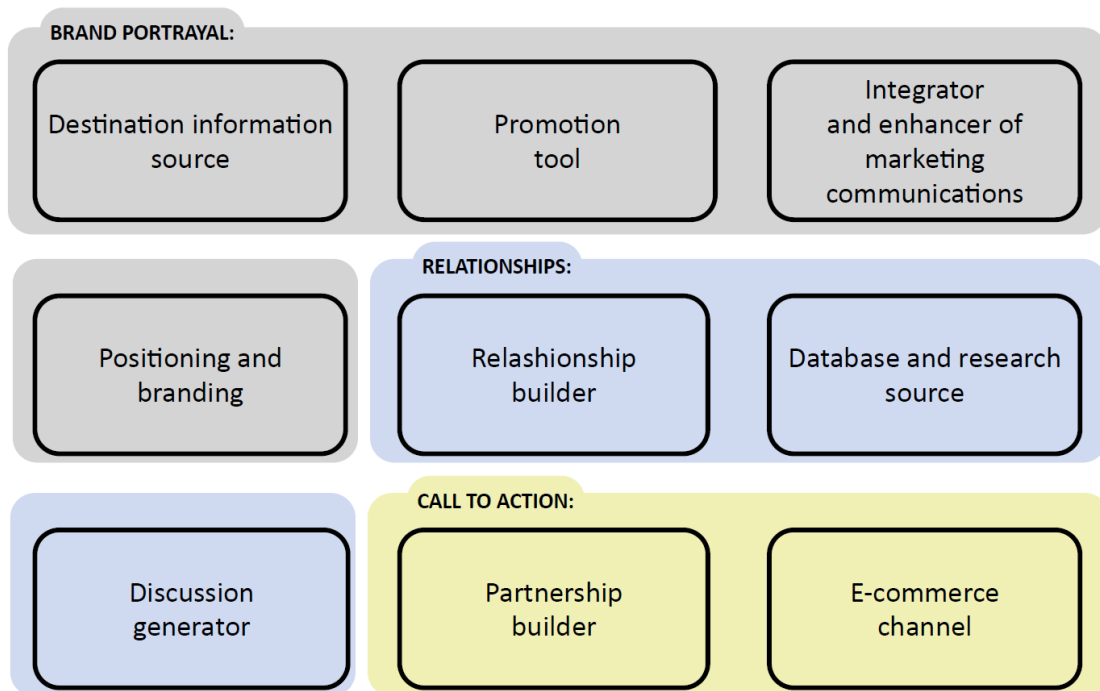
Source: Replicated and extended from Morrison (2013, p.373)

Beyond tourist information, official websites have the role of promoting the product. This means not only presenting information but also enhancing it persuasive effect by strategically using pictures, colors, presentations, interactivity features, etc. Furthermore, as shown in the

third square, official websites support the remaining traditional promotional actions. This role is highly relevant for the present study, since Morrison (2013) describes it as the place where all official messages come together. These sites act as the union nexus of integrated and multiplatform communication strategies (Pike, 2012).

Inevitably, as a strategic communication tool, websites also become a space where the branding efforts to position destinations must be more evident. In Morrison's (2013, p.373) words, "websites reflect the image that the DMO wants to create for the destination and support the chosen approach to branding the place." These four roles represent different levels of brand representation on the website, which go from the poor information service to more elaborate content as the brand's voice representative.

The following three roles of official destination website focus on establishing relationships with different stakeholders, including tourists but also travel agents or other actors. Simultaneously, information is gathered in a database to enable future research about website users or potential tourists. This role also involves interacting by means of social media activity. Finally, Morrison (2013) highlights two additional roles of the website that are related to calling to action to different stakeholders: allowing for partners' participation in the site narrative, and stimulating tourists' purchase action.

Besides this classification, it is important to note that in the last decades, many researchers have explored the possibilities of destination websites to guide future improvements to these sites and enable them to achieve their greatest potential. For example, the study presented by Miller (2005) at the Travel & Tourism Research Association Conference identified some critical points of destinations' websites that must be enhanced if they are to become sources of information. Some of these critical points refer to technical matters, such as navigation and architecture, the need for more elaborate information, and the impact of the homepage's appearance (Miller, 2005; Pike, 2012).

This example highlights the importance of understanding destination websites as a complex and multidisciplinary tool (Ip, Law, & Lee, 2010). Many studies have focused on different features of websites, such as information quality and characteristics (Inversini et al., 2014; Law & Bai, 2008; Rodríguez-Molina, Frías-Jamilena, & Castañeda-García, 2015), technical aspects (Dedeke, 2016; Kang & Kim, 2006), and overall performance (Dickinger & Stangl, 2013), design matters (Lee & Gretzel, 2012; Vinyals-Mirabent, 2014). Thus, many dimensions must be

considered when assessing destination website communication (Cho & Sung, 2012; Fernández-Cavia, Rovira, Díaz-Luque, & Cavaller, 2014). Further, while a vast amount of literature examines different website features, there is still no consensus nor globally accepted overall model to assess the multidimensionality of destination websites (Law et al., 2010). Therefore, a positive approach to this communication tool should not be limited to excellent technical development (Inversini et al., 2014).

Destination websites must be conceived as an overall experience driven from several multidisciplinary efforts to be attractive for users; the lack of attention to one or more of these areas of action might cause a failure in the global communication act. Tang and Jang (2011, p.104) highlight the "need to understand that both high-quality information and well-designed context (*e.g.*, website design characteristics) are indispensable factors in potential tourists' formations of favorable attitudes and generation of travel intention". In particular, Park and Gretzel (2007) identify three relevant areas of the website that researchers have failed to examine: communication, persuasion, and interactivity. Therefore, unlike other types of sites, official destination websites must specifically consider three critical factors:

- The first important consideration is the aforementioned complexity of the tourist product. The widespread offer of destinations sometimes turns official websites into complicated sites containing a large volume of information. Destination managers must understand that more information is not equivalent to a good user experience (Inversini et al., 2014). Information must be complete, but greater efforts must be made to process and organize this content to ensure a positive experience (Piñero & Igartua, 2013).
- It is also important to reflect the destination's identity on the website. As goods to be symbolically consumed, destination websites must project the destinations' personality, image, and other symbolic associations (Lee & Gretzel, 2012). Official websites are an opportunity to project the desired character of the destination set in the marketing strategy (Wilcox et al., 2012).
- Third, interactivity and user participation should be promoted on the website. It is important to understand that destinations' narratives are co-created by official and users' voices (Therkelsen, 2015). Thus, these websites must enhance user participation in the message, towards a 2.0 website (Contreras, 2010; Wilcox et al., 2012).

With particular emphasis on the aforementioned areas of improvement, DMOs must invest great effort into developing strong websites that ensure that users have a positive experience.

In this regard, studies have proposed different assessment methodologies considering different characteristics of the site. Though the models to analyze official destination websites differ on many variables, most concur on compartmentalizing the analysis based on different areas of knowledge (Han & Mills, 2006; Law et al., 2010; Li & Wang, 2010; Luna-Nevarez & Hyman, 2012; Morrison, 2013; Park & Gretzel, 2007). The following section explores the specific features that play a fundamental role in the overall website experience.

2.3.2.3. Characteristics of successful official websites

Given the importance of the official website as the union nexus of more extensive campaigns and the place where the core message of the destination and its image is summarized, many studies have focused on developing methodologies and patterns of analysis that allow DMOs to assess their website communication practices. Investing resources in the improvement of different elements of the official websites is not a one-time effort; instead, DMOs should evaluate their website constantly to keep it updated (Morrison, 2013). In Standing's et al. (2014, p.108) words, "tourism professionals cannot rely on website developers to design an effective website; they need to be aware of design features that sell their product or service". Therefore, it is interesting in this thesis to take into consideration the specific characteristics of official destination websites that different researchers have pointed as key contributors to these sites' success.

To more precisely identify the relevant website features, four different studies are compared. Figure 2.7 summarizes the various elements highlighted by different researchers as characteristics that official destination websites must take into account. However, in comparing these different studies, the present author considered the influence and possible bias derived from the different approaches proposed. As Law et al. (2010) highlight, five different methodological approaches have been proposed for the overall assessment of a website's features: counting, automated, numerical, computation, user judgment, and combined methods. However, each concludes with different outcomes, making a direct comparison impossible. Instead, the purpose of Figure 2.7 is to highlight the areas of agreement between the different studies' results.

Figure 2.7. **Characteristics of official destination website assessment**[5]

Park & Gretzel (2007)	Li & Wang (2010)	Morrison (2013)	Fernández-Cavia et. al (2014)
Information			
Information quality	Information	Destination information	Home page
			Content amount
			Languages
Technical			
Easy to use	Technical merit	Technical perspective	Information architecture
Security		Customer perspective	Usability and accessibility
			Web positioning
Persuasive			
Fullfillment	Transaction	Marketing effectiveness	Marketing
Visual appearance	Communication		Discourse analysis
Trust			Branding
Personalization			
Relational			
Interactivity	Relashionship	—	Interactivity
Responsiveness			Social web
			Mobile communication

Source: Author

Even though each study highlights different features/dimensions of the website, the first interesting thing to notice is that a four-dimensional model underlies all studies: informative, technical, persuasive, and relational dimensions. As seen in Figure 2.7, the studies all highlight one or more items related to these four dimensions. The only exception is Morrison's work (2013), which does not include relational aspects.

Certainly, Morrison's (2013) and Li and Wang's (2010) studies present less detailed models than those of Fernández-Cavia et al. (2014) and Park and Gretzel (2007), which highlight 12

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[5] The framework proposed by Morrison (2013) is based on the DMO WebEVAL system, the assessment methodology proposed by the Belle Tourism International Consulting Group (2012).

and 9 different areas of assessment of the official destination websites, respectively. Moreover, similar to the dimensions in Figure 2.7, Fernández-Cavia et al. (2014) also group the 12 parameters into four broader categories, corresponding to communicative, technical, persuasive, and relational dimensions.

It is not surprising that all studies highlight the importance of information quality, even though Fernández-Cavia et al. (2014) split this category into four minor concepts, as well as the importance of technical matters. They all agree on the importance of usability and accessibility (also labeled as customer perspective and ease of use) and website architectural matters. Beyond these, Fernández-Cavia et al. (2014) also highlight the importance of positioning as a technical parameter. Search engines such as Google are the primary route that users use to reach the official website; thus, it is crucial to strengthen the site with specific domain names and particular keywords according to users' search words (Pike, 2012). Furthermore, Park and Gretzel (2007) also include an additional technical item, namely security, which is related to privacy and information protection during transactions and contact through the website. However, this parameter depends more on users' experience and evaluation than on an item that DMOs can assess directly from the website.

This last item, security, is partially related to the marketing and transaction parameters that involve commercialization possibilities highlighted by Fernández-Cavia et al. (2014) and Li and Wang (2010). However, given that commercializing is the last stage of a persuasive act, it has been grouped together with other marketing strategies such as brand strengthening, trust (related to brand consistency and credibility), and visual appearance. All in all, as the present author expected, all the studies note the relevance of the website as a persuasive tool and a portrayal of the overall brand image.

An interesting contribution made by Park and Gretzel (2007) is the personalization characteristic. With this characteristic, the authors highlight the importance of customizing the website contents to different target groups. The idea of developing specific sites to serve different target groups has also been highlighted as a key advantage for destination websites (Pike, 2012). Moreover, this same idea is considered by Fernández-Cavia et al. (2014) as well; the latter include several child indicators within the discourse analysis parameter regarding *possible worlds* adjusted to different tourist profiles.

Finally, the last important group of characteristics is related to the possibilities that websites offer to establish relationships between themselves and users. In this regard, the different authors point to the importance of interactivity at different levels. In a first tier, Li and Wang (2010) identify, under the relationship label, the importance of contact possibilities and the attractiveness of offering virtual tours; this is besides personalization of the site, which is more related to the previous group of characteristics. Park and Gretzel (2007) go beyond the previous definition and indicate the importance of not only contact information, but also especially the availability of help functions for complex tasks. Similarly, the authors also highlight the relevance of virtual tours as well as the importance of other interactive options, such as guest books or chats. And even more exhaustive is Fernández-Cavia et al.'s (2014) approach that, besides the previous features, also points to the increasing relevance of social media and the importance of enhancing interactivity not only between the user and the website but also between the user and the OMD, and between the users themselves. In his book, Morrison (2013) also highlights the importance of social media and the interactivity with the user, but does not link this activity to the official websites.

All in all, there is general agreement on the importance of the constant maintenance and improvement of the website features, not only at the technical level or in terms of giving basic information, but also considering the persuasive possibilities of the site communication and conceiving it as a window to encourage users and potential tourists to participate. Finally, the consensus about the branding possibilities for official websites is another idea highlighted and reinforced in the literature, and it is a crucial point in framing this thesis. As several authors state, the official website summarizes the destination voice; thus, it should be the communication tool where the desired brand image is most accurately projected.

CHAPTER 3: STATE OF THE ART

3. STATE OF ART

As many methodology manuals highlight, no research project can begin without first analyzing the related previous research and the present state of that research (Berganza Conde & Ruiz San Román, 2005; Ruiz Olabuénaga, Aristegui, & Melgosa, 1998). Even though the theoretical context was described in the previous chapter, this chapter on the state of the art aims to complete the knowledge about the field of study. The purpose of this chapter is to **go beyond the theoretical concepts and to analyze and describe in detail recent research about brand image assessment**.

One of this doctoral thesis's primary goals is to identify the outstanding characteristics of European destinations' images. To that end, it is imperative to know in detail the characteristics of previous investigations that have also assessed brand image. Identifying the trends, variables of study, and methods of analysis will form the basis for the present study. Further, the presence of the personality construct within the study of brand image also becomes a core interest, since it is the second primary goal of this thesis to appraise the relationship between the functional dimension of the brand and its personality.

With that goal in mind, this chapter is divided into three main sections. First, a **systematized literature review** is conducted due to its high performance in forming the basis of any extensive research (Grant & Booth, 2009). As already mentioned, this review focuses on brand image assessment and pays special attention to brand personality presence. Second, a complementary section about brand personality assessment is included. Since the systematized literature review does not cover all important matters concerning personality evaluation, this complementary section is included to explore two core aspects in this regard: **methodology and personality scales**. Even though these are two highly specific subjects, they are greatly relevant for future decision-making.

Finally, the last section focuses on professionals' knowledge on the topic. Though this is not common in a doctoral thesis, the present author finds it interesting to include some empirical findings of professionals' opinions. A **questionnaire directed to professionals** and consultants in branding matters reveals their understanding of brand image and personality in brands' daily live. Sometimes, in the communication field, professionals have more insights into certain topics than scholars do due to the former's routine and daily contact with branding challenges; this must be considered (Cho & Fiore, 2015). For this reason, it is interesting to examine their

knowledge for possible further insights into how image and personality interact. Communication and branding research history support this decision, since some practitioners' perspectives have had great influence in the academic field as well, such as those of Wally Ollins (Balmer, 2014; Ollins, 2004; Schultz & Hatch, 1997) or David Ogilvy (Avis et al., 2012).

3.1. BRAND IMAGE ASSESSMENT

As seen in the previous chapter, the academic study of the brand image construct goes beyond the interest in the branding discipline. This construct has garnered great interest among researchers from different fields of study: besides marketing, researchers of social psychology (Graeff, 1997; Schmitt, 2012), business-to-business (Campbell, Papania, Parent, & Cyr, 2010), communication (Hsieh & Li, 2008; Keller, 2009; Miniard et al., 2006; Muhcină, Popovici, & Popovici, 2014; Woisetschläger & Michaelis, 2012), medicine, tourism, and consumer behavior (Kapferer & Laurent, 2015; Romaniuk & Nenycz-Thiel, 2013), among others, have investigated the role of this dimension in specific fields and its relation to other variables. This increasing interest has resulted in a large amount of literature exploring the same concept from different perspectives.

However, although the overall definition of brand image is broadly accepted as "perceptions about a brand as reflected by the brand associations held in consumer memory" (Keller, 1993, p.3), the composition and nature of these associations is not as clear. Since technically, brand image is created in consumers' minds, its specific composition can vary significantly from person to person and from brand to brand. Therefore, it is a complex task to completely understand it.

Nevertheless, scholars are still contributing to the knowledge on brand image. Significant studies have pointed to new related psychological constructs such as personality, identity, feelings, affect, and attachment (Fournier, 1998; Keller, 2003; Schmitt, 2012); establishing relationships between other brand concepts such as loyalty, preference, and equity (Kapferer, 2012; Keller, 2008); and exploring outcomes and effects of the brand image construct, such as brand trust, customer satisfaction, and attitudinal brand loyalty (Latif, Islam, Noor, Saaban, & Azad, 2014).

Thus, since this field of study is still capturing the interest of academics, a deeper understanding of the current state of the research is needed. Recent investigations related to this topic may have different focuses, obtain different results, and, most importantly, utilize a variety of research techniques and methods that may orientate the starting point of the present investigation.

This thesis focuses on evaluating urban destinations' brand image. Therefore, a first step in the research must be the examination of previous research focusing on brand image assessment. The understanding of the current standing of the literature on this topic, from a generic point of view, will later allow the author to apply it to the tourism field. For this reason, a more exhaustive literature review is conducted focusing on **brand image assessment**. More precisely, in Grant and Booth's (2009) words, this chapter presents a systematized review.

The following literature review aims to define the state of the art of the research on brand image assessment. It is thus imperative to analyze in detail a select corpus of studies that pursue this same objective. More precisely, this literature review arises from three main objectives related to several hypotheses that guide the analysis:

1. **To identify the most recent papers focused on the assessment of brand image.** This identification is understood in terms of authorship, field of origin, volume of research, most productive years, etc. Related to this goal, the following hypothesis is proposed: most of the recent research about brand image has been conducted in the marketing and branding fields (hypothesis 1).

2. **To examine the advances in the definition and the understanding of the brand image construct.** As mentioned before, much research has been conducted on this topic but there is still no overall accepted definition of what comprises brand image (Keller, 2003; Pike, 2002; Pratt, 2013). This is because, as Kapferer (2012) notes, everything can be an association. Thus, the expectation is to find literature that deepens the understanding of brand image associations. In this regard, the analysis starts with the hypothesis that a great amount of descriptive research exists examining the understanding and explanation of the brand image composition (hypothesis 2)**.** The keywords describing the investigations, *brand image* and *assessment*, are also important in this hypothesis, as will be explained in the following section.

   Furthermore, three additional hypotheses accompany the second goal. Firstly, given that all the papers contain the brand image keyword, this construct is expected to be a variable

of study in all the analyzed articles (hypothesis 3). Furthermore, it is hypothesized that among the other investigated variables, brand personality is a relevant variable to study and understand brand image (hypothesis 4). Therefore, a greater presence of this construct in the research focused on brand image assessment is expected. Finally, it is also expected that the investigations build different brand image theoretical frameworks based on various references and authors (hypothesis 5).

3. **To identify and analyze the most used methodologies for the evaluation of brand image.** As seen in the previous chapter, this concept is strictly a psychological construct in the consumers' minds. Therefore, it is crucial for brand managers to influence consumers' perception by spreading messages full of strategic meaning. In this regard, two hypotheses emerge. The first is that the most popular methods used in brand image assessment research delve directly into consumers' perceptions of brands (hypothesis 6). However, online media has opened a new space to communicate with consumers, and thus to influence their opinions and perceptions regarding a specific brand. Therefore, it is also hypothesized that in recent literature, online content analysis emerges as a useful and reliable method to understand projected brand image (hypothesis 7).

Figure 3.1. **Goals and hypotheses of the systematized review**
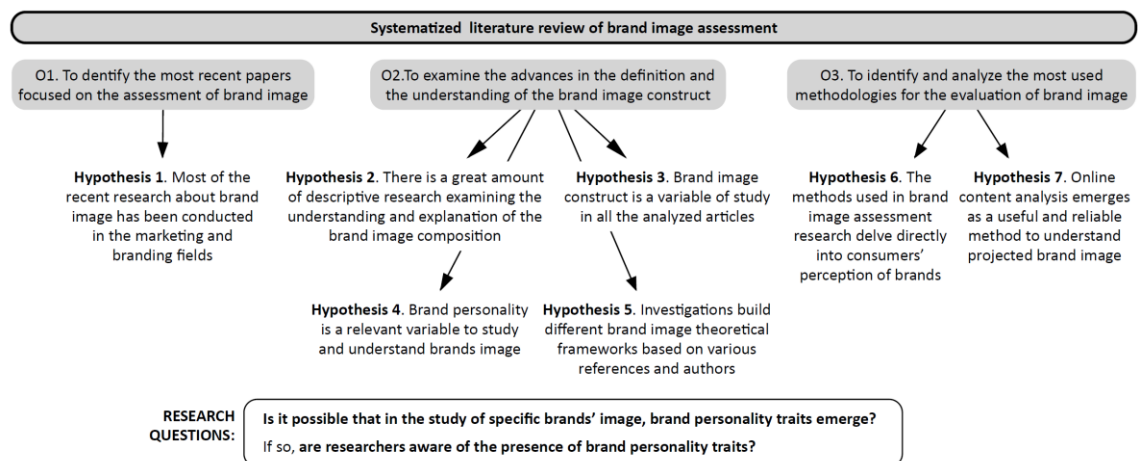
Source: Author

Moreover, in this thesis the concept of brand personality is another relevant dimension to consider with regard to brand image formation. Although previous studies have examined this dimension separately from the brand image construct, the present work aims to evaluate the specific relationship and dependence between both concepts. To this end, the final stage of

this literature review is based on two research questions related to the presence of brand personality in studies not explicitly mentioning this as a variable. First, **is it possible that in the study of specific brands' image, brand personality traits emerge?** And second, if so, **are researchers aware of the presence of brand personality traits?** Figure 3.1 summarizes the goals and hypotheses presented in this chapter.

3.1.1. Recent literature on brand image assessment

With the above goals in mind, all papers focusing on the assessment of brand image published between 2006 and 2015 were collected, and a systematized literature review was conducted. More precisely, the academic articles were identified based on the keywords brand image and assessment.

The analysis criteria followed an indicator-based model, as many previous studies have done before (Eisend & Stokburger-Sauer, 2013; Park & Gretzel, 2007; Zhang et al., 2014). Besides the paper identification, this review was conducted based on 10 additional indicators to gather useful information. For further details about the criteria, see Chapter 5.

The search identified a total of 35 published articles in 28 different journals. However, although the search was highly specific, the results did not match the criteria perfectly. Two articles were excluded from the results because their keywords did not match any of the required ones and their focus was far removed from the marketing perspective. Similarly, a third article was also omitted because the term valuation was not used as a synonym of assessment in this context. In contrast, Shao Yeh and Li's (2009) article was included in the corpus because, although its keywords did not match the criteria, one of the variables of study was found to be brand image.

Finally, some articles only partially matching the keywords defined were also accepted: Since the keywords city image, body image, destination image, and B2B brand image are equivalents of the brand image in specific contexts, papers containing these terms were accepted. All in all, the final corpus of study comprised 32 articles from 25 different journals, published between 2007 and 2015, as shown in Table 3.1. No articles from 2006 were found.

Table 3.1. **Bibliographic information about the articles**

Author	Year	Journal
Dereumaux	2007	Market Management
Guthrie, Kim, & Jung	2008	J. of Fashion Marketing and Management
Parker	2009	J. of Consumer Marketing
Shao Yeh & Li	2009	Online Information Review
Lee, 2009	2009	Place Branding and Public Diplomacy
Torres & Bijmolt	2009	European Journal of Operational Research
Mulyanegara & Tsarenko	2009	J. of Fashion Marketing and Management
Chan, Jiang, & Tan	2010	IEEE Transactions on Engineering Management
Campbell et al.	2010	Industrial Marketing Management
Martin & Xavier	2010	J. of Strategic Marketing
Sierra, Heiser, Williams, & Taute	2010	Brand Management
Sahin & Baloglu	2011	Anatolia
Bouten, Snelders, & Hultink	2011	J. of Product Innovation Management
Schnittka, Sattler, & Zenker	2012	Int. Journal of Research in Marketing
Tsiotsou	2012	J. of Services Marketing
Danes, Hess, Story, & Vorst	2012	J. of Brand Management
Jara & Cliquet	2012	J. of Retailing and Consumer Services
Wang, Soesilo, Zhang, & Di Benedetto	2012	Advances in International Marketing
García, Gómez, & Molina	2012	Tourism Management
Zenker & Beckmann	2013	J. of Brand Management
Dolnicar & Grün	2013	J. of Travel Research
Youn Kim & Yoon	2013	Tourism Review
Pratt	2013	J. of Travel and Tourism Marketing
Pina, Dall'Olmo Riley, & Lomax	2013	J. of Business Research
Banerjee & Ray Chaudhuri	2014	J. of Asia Business Studies
Zenker	2014	Place Branding and Public Diplomacy
Stepchenkova & Li	2014	Annals of Tourism Research
Felício, Duarte, Caldeirinha, & Rodrigues	2014	The Service Industries Journal
Michaelidou, Micevski, & Cadogan	2015	J. of Business Research
Gómez, Lopez, & Molina	2015	Tourism Management
Költringer & Dickinger	2015	J. of Business Research
Pich & Dean	2015	Qualitative Market Research

Source: Author

3.1.2. Characteristics of the most recent papers on the subject

<u>**Related to hypothesis 1**</u>

H.1. Most of the recent research about brand image has been conducted in the marketing and branding fields.

To place the articles' content in context, the first step was to identify their formal characteristics and delimit their scope. Considering the data shown in Table 3.2, it can be stated that the most productive year in this matter was 2012. However, the most significant data in this regard is the lack of studies from 2006 and the low volume in 2007 and 2008, when only one article was published per year. This result indicates a lack of attention to the subject during this period. It was not until 2009 that interest in brand image assessment increased significantly. Since then, it has remained fairly constant, except for a drop in 2011.

In this regard, it is interesting to comment on the first hypothesis: a great volume of literature originates from the marketing and branding fields. A closer inspection of the journals with publications in this area of study seems to confirm the hypothesis. Specifically, 72% of the journals are indexed under the categories of Marketing, Strategy & Management or Management (http://www.scimagojr.com/), which are business-related categories and therefore linked to the marketing field. From the remaining 24% of the sample, stands out the presence of journals belonging to the categories of *Tourism, Leisure & Hospitality Management,* and *Geography, Planning & Development*. Only one journal was not found to be indexed in the SJR portal[6].

However, to strongly confirm the studies' main focus, journal categorization was not enough. For a better description and definition of their scope, further analysis was conducted, and additional indicators were taken into consideration: [1] the focus, ideally matching "brand image analysis" or its relation to other branding concepts; [2] the industry concerning the study; and finally, [3] the object of study.

Most of the studies of the sample focus on the analysis of brand image and its relation to other brand-related concepts. However, it must be noted that not all the articles have the same

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[6] The remaining 4% correspond to the Journal of Asia Business Studies, which is not indexed in the SJR portal.

prime objective: a significant 31.3%, 10 articles, focus on the development and improvement of a methodological procedure suitable for the analysis of different components of brands.

Furthermore, 6.3%, two articles, focus on the evaluation of collateral effects of brands' consumption. On the one hand, Martin and Xavier's (2010) focus is on the influence of advertising models' body size on consumers' weight control beliefs and how this affects the perception of the brand. On the other hand, Sierra, Heiser, Williams, and Taute (2010) analyze the effect of consumer racial profiling on consumers' image of retail brands.

Regarding the industry of reference, it has to be noted that the majority of the articles, 53.1%, focus on commercial brands, including consumer goods, retailers, franchises, luxury, and fashion brands. Among these articles, it must be noted that luxury, fashion, and retailer brands capture receive greater attention. Nevertheless, political parties, B2B, sports teams, non-profit organizations (one article each), and tourism brands are also investigated. The great amount of research that focuses on destination, country, or place branding is surprising, comprising 34.4% of the sample.

Finally, referring to the study object, a noteworthy aspect is that 75% of the studies, 24 articles, focus on a reduced sample of brands, consisting of case studies or samples of less than 10 brands. In contrast, only four articles, 12.5% of the sample, analyze more than 10 brands or, similarly, all existing brands in the specific sector of interest. These articles do not focus on the analysis of a specific brand; instead, three of them review previous investigations as their object of study, and one is a theoretical essay with no empirical or analytical data.

On the whole, the data obtained from the formal characteristics analysis and scope identification confirm hypothesis 1. The information about journal indexation also confirms it. Furthermore, the articles' main focus on the brand image itself or the methodology development for the evaluation of different brand components also supports the relevance of the marketing/branding perspective.

However, the marketing perspective must be understood in its broadest definition. By deepening the scope of the studies, the present author identified that the marketing concept does not only apply to commercial brands but also to many other industries not traditionally marketing-related. For instance, the presence of journals from the tourism and geography categories supports the importance of branding in other fields besides the pure, traditional marketing field.

3.1.3. Advances in the understanding of the brand image construct

Related to hypothesis 2

H.2: A greater amount of descriptive research exists examining the understanding and explanation of the brand image composition.

At this point, it is appropriate to examine another noteworthy aspect of the studies in the sample: the nature of their specific objectives. As Ruiz Olabuénaga et al. (1998) note, there are two kind of hypothesis, and they entail two kinds of research: descriptive and relational. In short, the first can be defined as research aiming to explain the reality of a phenomenon. In contrast, relational hypotheses guide investigations aiming to associate, relate, compare, and analyze the relationships between variables and to determine when, how, and why these are related (op. cit.). This section explores this differences in the examined articles.

Given the search criteria based on the *assessment* keyword, the second hypothesis predicted a greater volume of research based on descriptive hypotheses, but the results indicate otherwise. A significant 62.5% of the research pursues relational objectives, while only 34.4% of articles have descriptive objectives. The remaining 3.1% (one article) corresponds to the aforementioned theoretical essay.

All in all, these results show that the focus of the current literature is on establishing causal relationships between the brand image dimension and other branding areas of study, instead of descriptive investigations into brand image composition. Establishing relationships with other concepts can also be understood as an indicator of the maturity stage of the field, since it suggests that researchers are expanding their scope (Cheon, Groven, & Sabherwal, 1993).

To explore these findings in detail, all variables considered in the studies and the relationships between them were identified. The first step of this analysis was to identify all those variables considered in more than one study from the 20 relational investigations. Next, the type of variable was also distinguished. Table 3.2 summarizes the list of variables considered in the investigations and their frequency; brand image is the most evaluated, considered 13 times in 12 different articles.

Table 3.2. **Variables studied in the literature**

VARIABLES FREQUENCY					
Variable	Dependent	Independent	TOTAL	Articles	References
Brand image	7	6	**13**	12	Shao Yeh & Li (2009); Banerjee & Chaudhuri (2014); Zenker, S. & Beckmann, S. (2013); Danes et al. (2012); Jara & Cliquet (2012); Chan et al. (2010); Torres & Bijmolt (2009); Sahin & Baloglu (2011); Sierra et al. (2010); Stepchenkova & Li (2014); Felicio et al. (2014); **Pina et al. (2013)**
Brand personality	2	5	**7**	6	Parker (2009); Campbell et al. (2010); Sahin & Baloglu (2015); Felicio et al. (2014); Mulyanegara & Tsarenko (2009); **Guthrie (2008)**
Attitude	6	1	**7**	6	Parker (2009); Martin & Xavier (2010); Jara & Cliquet (2012)[7]; **Wang et al. (2012)**; Pina et al. (2013); Guthrie et al. (2008)
Methodology	1	3	**4**	3	Danes et al. (2012); **Dolnicar & Grün (2013);** Stepchenkova & Li (2014)
Awareness		3	**3**	3	Banerjee & Chaudhuri (2014); Jara & Cliquet (2012); Felicio et al. (2014)
Fit[8]		3	**3**	3	Bouten et al. (2011); Wang et al. (2012); Pina et al. (2013)
Attributes[9]		2	**2**	2	Zenker & Beckmann (2013); Torres & Bijmolt (2009)
Product evaluation	2		**2**	2	Banerjee & Chaudhuri (2014); Bouten et al. (2011)
Satisfaction	2		**2**	2	Yeh & Li (2009); Felicio et al. (2014)[10]
Purchase intention	2		**2**	2	Martin & Xavier (2010); Chan et al. (2010)

Source: Author

Taking into consideration that all the articles include the brand image concept in their keywords, its detection as the most studied variable is reasonable. In fact, it is surprising that not all the studies include it as a variable, and that some examine it by means of other

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[7] Jara and Cliquet (2012) take "consumer response" as the dependent variable. Nevertheless, given than the concept of attitude constitutes "a person's overall evaluation of a concept; an affective response involving general feelings of liking or favorability" (AMA, 2016). Consumer response has been considered here as a partial synonym of attitude.

[8] The Fit category embraces all the studies interested in the evaluation of different kinds of fit between brands and products.

[9] The Attributes category refers to those investigations that consider the difference between product attributes as a variable affecting other constructs.

[10] Even though Felício et al. (2014) aim to assess brand performance, the authors take satisfaction as one of the performance indicators.

variables. Among the relational studies, 35% analyze brand image as the dependent variable, and another 30% include it as an independent variable. It is also interesting to note the high relevance of personality and attitude variables, considered in six and five articles, respectively.

In contrast, 34.4% of the articles in the total sample pursue descriptive objectives. Of these articles, only 36.4% aim to describe the overall image of certain brands. The other 63.6% focus on the explanation of new methodological approaches (five articles); specific parts of the brand image, such as negative brand image (Lee, 2009); and the personality of sport teams' brands (Tsiotsou, 2012). Descriptive investigations are further explored in section 3.1.5.

Related to hypothesis 3

H3. Brand image construct is a variable of study in all the analyzed articles.

To put together all the information on relational investigations in a graphical, easy-to-interpret way, a diagram was created to represent the type of variables, the frequency of study of these variables, and their relations to other variables. This information is summarized in Table 3.3. This diagram is called the **Brand Image Investigation Network**, as it illustrates the importance that researchers have given to the different concepts and relationships that they have explored. As indicated by hypothesis 3, brand image was expected to be found as a variable of study in all the articles in the sample.

The Brand Image Investigation Network in Figure 3.2 captures the main interests of the recent research in this field. It must be noted that the figure only captures the relationships established between the variables that are the most considered in the articles, shown in Table 3.3. Figure 3.2 presents the most important variables inside bubbles. At this point, it is appropriate to introduce some considerations regarding the interpretation of the figure.

Firstly, the thickness of a bubble's outline represents the attention given to the respective variable; the more often the variable has been studied, the thicker the line becomes. In addition, all the explored relationships between variables are indicated with a line in the diagram. Those variables analyzed once only appear in the diagram when they are linked to a major variable (the ones in Table 3.3); these are placed inside squares.

Secondly, the arrows indicate the type of relationship between the variables. The independent variable is placed at the beginning of the arrow, while the dependent variable is located at the

sharp end. In addition, dotted lines represent relationships explored in more than one article. No relationships were explored on more than two occasions.

However, there are two cases where the variable is considered as both dependent and independent. In these cases, a lighter grey square with the repeated variable name is added to illustrate the relationship. These are the variables brand image and attitude, both of which act as dependent and independent variables in the same investigation. Similarly, the independent variable method is also linked to a methodology-related dependent variable: questionnaire optimization.

Figure 3.2. **Brand image investigation network of variables**
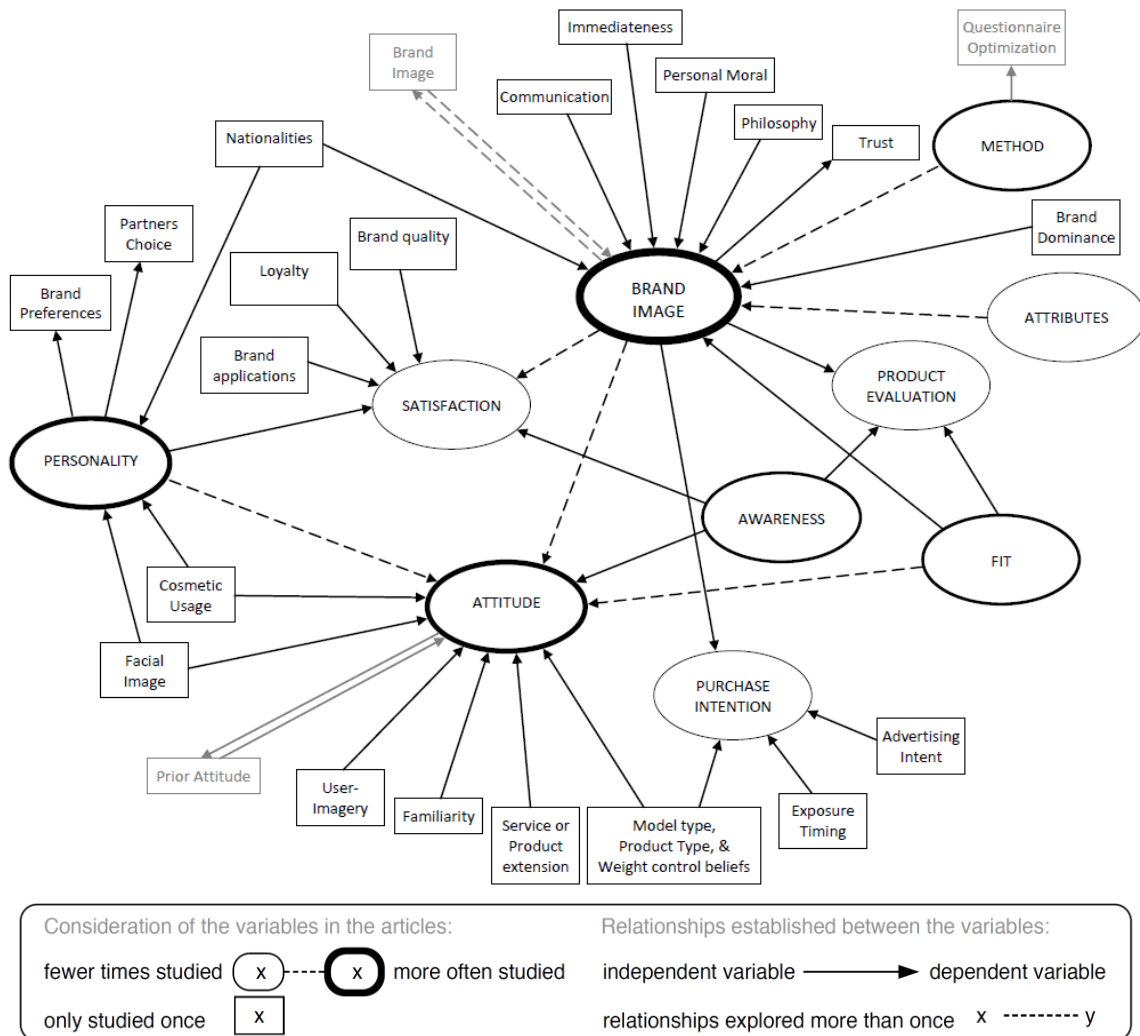
Source: Author

Regarding the findings summarized in Figure 3.2, the first noteworthy relationship to highlight is the importance of brands' *coherence/fit* and its effect on overall brand image. In particular, several studies examine the phenomena of co-branding (Bouten et al., 2011; Wang et al., 2012), brand extension (Pina et al., 2013), and partners' collaboration (Campbell et al., 2010) and their effect on the overall brand image. All of them are part of the variable "fit". Thus, the idea of coherence between different but related brands is relevant.

An interesting article is the one published by Felício, Duarte, Caldeirinha and Rodrigues (2014). In their investigation, they take the dependent variable satisfaction as an indicator of brand performance and evaluate the effect of six independent variables on it. Their most interesting finding is that they analyze the awareness, personality, image, loyalty, quality, and brand applications as parts of brand equity, and examine all of them at the same importance level. This investigation captured the present author's attention because it combines psychological constructs and branding outcomes.

Similarly, Sahin and Baloglu (2011) investigate brand image and brand personality as parallel dependent variables affected by visitors' nationality. This leads to inferring the importance of the brand personality construct at the same level as the brand image, as if they coexist separately in consumers' mind.

Furthermore, another noteworthy finding is the lack of the brand image notion as a variable in some articles. Though all the articles in the sample contain the *brand image* keyword, the literature review revealed that eight papers do not explicitly identify it as a variable of study. In these cases, even though the studies have to do with brand image assessment, the explored relationships are:

- Brand personality and user imagery congruity → Brand attitude (Parker, 2009)
- Model type, product type, and weight control beliefs→ Attitude and purchase intention (Martin & Xavier, 2010)
- Different elements' fit → Product evaluation (Bouten et al., 2011)
- Prior attitude, fit, and familiarity → Attitude (Wang et al., 2012)
- Methodology → Questionnaire optimization (Dolnicar & Grün, 2013)
- Brand personality → Partner's choice (Campbell et al., 2010)
- Personality and values → Brand preferences (Mulyanegara & Tsarenko, 2009)

- Facial image, cosmetics usage, and brand personality → Cosmetics usage, brand personality, and brand attitude (Guthrie et al., 2008)

Regarding the brand image variable, one link is especially relevant for this thesis: the effect of attribute dominance in the brand image perception. Torres and Bijmolt (2009) and Zenker and Beckmann (2013) explore the effects on brand image perception when a characteristic or attribute of the product is emphasized. In both cases, the results indicate a positive effect, which reinforces the importance of functional associations in the image construction.

To conclude, even though brand image is the most studied variable and interesting advances have been made regarding this construct, the results of the literature analysis do not fully support hypothesis 3. In some instances, brand image is studied by means of other related variables. Thus, the brand image keyword does not always refer strictly to the psychological construct delimited in previous literature (Keller, 1993).

Related to hypothesis 4

H.4. Brand personality is a relevant variable to study and understand brand image.

As mentioned earlier, 40% of the relational investigations in the sample do not specifically incorporate the brand image concept as either a dependent of independent variable; instead, they focus on other outlying concepts that are somehow related to it. Put differently, alternative variables are studied, representing some aspect of brand image. In this regard, it is interesting to highlight the significant presence of brand personality among these articles: it is explored four times as an independent variable and once as dependent in investigations that do not contain brand image as a variable.

This is in contrast to two articles analyzing brand personality at the same level of importance as brand image. It seems contradictory that several studies investigate personality as a representative of some component of brand image, or as an indicator of brand image, while others study these two concepts separately and as parallel constructs.

However, the most surprising finding in this regard is that the brand personality variable is never studied in relation to the brand image variable. All the most relevant variables are examined in relation to brand image at least once – with two exceptions: no recent investigations explore the relationship between awareness and brand image, and personality

and image. This finding evinces some areas for further exploration that are not currently capturing researchers' attention.

Furthermore, another noteworthy finding is that a significant 46.9% of the all articles refer to the concept of brand personality at some point of their literature review. To be precise, 34.4% refer to Aaker's (1997) definition of brand personality, while 12.5% quote other authors. Furthermore, while six articles only mention the concept briefly, another eight pay considerable attention to its contextualization in the literature review.

In addition, it is interesting to highlight that in five articles, the authors mention the concept of brand personality even though it is not included as a variable of study nor as a main purpose of the descriptive investigations. In these cases, the concept is assimilated in the literature review despite the fact that it is not a component of the analysis. One finding interesting to highlight given the purpose of this thesis is that Campbell et al. (2010) and Guthrie et al. (2008) understand brand personality as a part of the brand image construct.

All these findings regarding the prevalence of the brand personality construct in investigations related to brand image support hypothesis 4. Personality stands out from all the possible associations linked to brand image. However, to understand the relevance of the brand personality construct in more detail, it is further explored in section 3.1.5.

Related to hypothesis 5

H.5. Investigations build different brand image theoretical frameworks based on various references and authors.

The contradiction of articles having the keyword brand image and not adding it as a study variable might be related to hypothesis 5. A lack of consensus regarding the specific description and composition of brand image may be related to researchers' interest in exploring other variables.

However, this hypothesis is rejected, since 68.8% of the articles in the sample refer to Keller's (1993, 1998, 2003) brand image conceptualization in their literature review. Only 6.3% cite other authors and their corresponding conceptualizations, and another 25% do not refer to a specific theoretical framework. Within this last group, it must be highlighted that Youn Kim and Yoon (2013) and Pratt (2013) do include a theoretical framework for the specific concept of destination image.

3.1.4. The most used methodologies to assess brand image

Related to hypothesis 6

H.6. The most popular methods used in brand image assessment research delve directly into consumers' perceptions of brands.

To understand the current procedures and interest in investigating brand image, one of the most interesting matters that this literature review aims to explore is the methodological approach. The most remarkable finding in this regard is that 65.6% of the studies in the sample use the survey technique as primary data collection method at some point in their research. Considering that brand image exists in the consumer's mind (see Chapter 2), it is reasonable to think that asking consumers about it directly is a useful way to analyze it. Furthermore, 40.6% of the articles are based exclusively on the results obtained via questionnaire. Hence, this finding seems to support hypothesis 6.

Nevertheless, other techniques are also used, such as literature reviews, focus groups, interviews, experiments, content analysis, and collaborative online techniques. It must be noted that, although four investigations use the literature review method, three of them combine it with a posterior survey phase. Only one article uses a literature review as a sole primary data collection technique to conduct a subsequent meta-analysis.

Similar results are found regarding the use of the interview method: only one study uses it as the sole method to gather primary data. In four studies, interviews are combined with a questionnaire, and in one case with the focus group technique. Likewise, the latter is also used as a single method on one occasion. Lastly, the investigation using a collaborative online tool to assess brand image also combines it with a survey. All in all, surveys and questionnaires are the most popular technique to gather data regarding brand image, either as single methods or combined with others. Furthermore, other methods involving consumers' opinions are also used in the literature.

Alternatively, however, experiment and content analysis methodologies are also used as independent methods valid for primary data collection in this field. On the one hand, three investigations develop their study only through experimentation. It must be noted that some of the investigations using a survey to gather the primary data also exposed the subjects to an intentionally designed stimulus: mostly communication/information materials (Wang et al.,

2012; Zenker, 2014). On the other hand, content analysis also appears to be useful to gather primary data in studies on brand image. This finding leads to the final hypothesis.

Related to hypothesis 7

H.7. Online content analysis emerges as a useful and reliable method to understand projected brand image.

Although the number of articles utilizing content analysis, 12.5% of the sample, indicates that it is still not the most popular method to study brand image, all of these articles conclude with satisfactory results. This result partially validates hypothesis 7. Furthermore, three of these four investigations include an analysis of online content and test this approach as a useful and reliable methodology to assess brand image. Thus, even though it is not a widely used methodology, it is worth considering its use for brand image evaluation.

Another interesting finding in this regard is that the investigations using content analysis date from the second half of the period analyzed: between 2010 and 2015. This indicates that in recent years, researchers have started to explore new methodologies to assess brand image, a situation that may be related to the degree of maturity of the research in this field.

To conclude this section, the statistical data processing proposed by the articles is also examined. The majority of the studies include a statistical analysis to identify further meanings and relations among the gathered data. The following five statistical techniques are used:

- Factor analysis, used in 15.6% of the studies (five articles);
- Structural equation modeling, used in another 15.6% of the cases;
- Correspondence analysis, in 15.6% of the investigations;
- Multiple regression analysis, in 9.4% of cases (three articles); and
- Brand concept maps, in two investigations.

3.1.5. Brand personality in brand image studies

Related to the research questions

Is it possible that in the study of specific brands' image, brand personality traits emerge?
And second, if so, **are researchers aware of the presence of brand personality traits?**

The last open question that this review aims to answer concerns the role of brand personality in the study of brand image. Firstly, it is interesting to discuss the importance of the brand personality evaluation in the analyzed articles. Four studies adopt the brand personality dimension as a variable somehow representative of brand image (see hypothesis 4), and two additional articles analyze brand personality at the same importance level as brand image: on the one hand, Felício et al. (2014) include brand personality and brand image, besides other constructs, as variables of study at the same level to evaluate certain brands' equity; on the other hand, Sahin and Baloglu (2011) assess both components as equally relevant dependent variables of the study.

Furthermore, besides these six relational studies, two descriptive articles also evaluate brand personality. Firstly, Tsiotsou (2012) focuses on the personality dimensions of sport teams' brands; it is a descriptive study. In this case, the brand image concept is only included in the study as a keyword; it is not a variable of study and there is no theoretical framework related to it. In the other study, Michaelidou et al. (2015) describe non-profit organizations' brand image based on a previous study including brand personality as a part of brand image. However, Michaelidou et al. (2015) define the theoretical framework of both personality and image constructs.

In summary, a total of eight articles, 25% of the sample, consider brand personality as a significant dimension closely related to brand image and even, in some cases, as a variable representative of it. Although these articles concur in referencing Aaker's (1997) definition of brand personality in their theoretical frameworks, the concept's role in the brand image evaluation is not clear. Only six of these articles connect it to a brand image theoretical framework: four cite Keller's conceptualization, while Sahin and Baloglu (2011) refer to other authors. Meanwhile, the remaining three articles do not give any explanation of brand personality's representativeness of brand image.

In short, a significant volume of research considers that brand personality is either a part of brand image (Parker, 2009; Shao Yeh & Li, 2009), a way of interpreting it, or an approach to capturing it (Campbell et al., 2010; Michaelidou et al., 2015). This is in contrast with the high consensus in using Keller's brand image description as a framework to understand the construct.

In this regard, it is interesting to note that, although Keller mentions the existence of brand personality in the consumer's imagery in his article Conceptualizing, measuring, and managing customer-based brand equity (1993), he does not categorize or include it as a brand image association. In his conceptualization of brand image, Keller only indicates the possible relationships between user imagery attributes and the posterior personality construct. Furthermore, in Dimensions of brand personality, Aaker (1997) distinguishes brand personality from product-related attributes by linking the former to a self-expressive function and the latter to a utilitarian one. Thus, the authors describe neither the specific relationship between the two concepts nor how they interact. It is only recently that Souiden et al. (2017) suggest that brand image acts as an antecedent of brand personality. Nevertheless, the relationship between both constructs needs further investigation.

On this basis, the existence of a relationship between both concepts can be confirmed, even though a theoretical framework involving the two seems to need improvement and clarity. To further identify the extent of this relationship, a second phase of analysis was carried out. Following the methodology defined by Pitt et al. (2007) for the evaluation of brand personality through content analysis, the results of different descriptive studies were analyzed for the presence of personality traits.

To this end, the results of 31.3% of the sample, corresponding to 10 articles, were further explored. The selected articles are those offering an explicit list of associations or a brief description of the studied brands' image in their results: in other words, descriptive outputs. Firstly, the identified descriptions were copied into a separate document and unified in a list format, distinguishing each association separately.

Secondly, a dictionary was compiled of synonyms for the personality traits. This preliminary dictionary served to examine the literature, but also functioned as a pre-test of the methodology used in the final study (see section 5.3.3). The dictionary compilation used the online Oxford thesaurus to gather a final list of 509 synonyms of personality traits: 54 related to ruggedness, 99 to sophistication, 111 to competence, 132 to excitement, and 113 to sincerity.

Finally, using the analysis software NVivo 10, the identified associations were searched for the presence of personality-related vocabulary . Given the different scopes and brands analyzed in

the articles, the purpose of this analysis was not to compare the results but to identify personality traits (any dimension) among them.

All in all, the results identified 168 brand associations for 12 different brands[11] described in the articles. The examination of the associations identified 57 terms matching synonyms of personality traits. Figure 3.3 shows the percentage of the associations matching traits of personality for each brand described in the articles. To visualize and more easily understand the importance these traits' presence in each brand image description, Figure 3.3 summarizes the percentage of personality traits identified in each study. Given that each investigation highlights a different number of associations, the results in Figure 3.3 show the relative percentages of each study's results.

Figure 3.3. **Match between brand associations and personality traits**
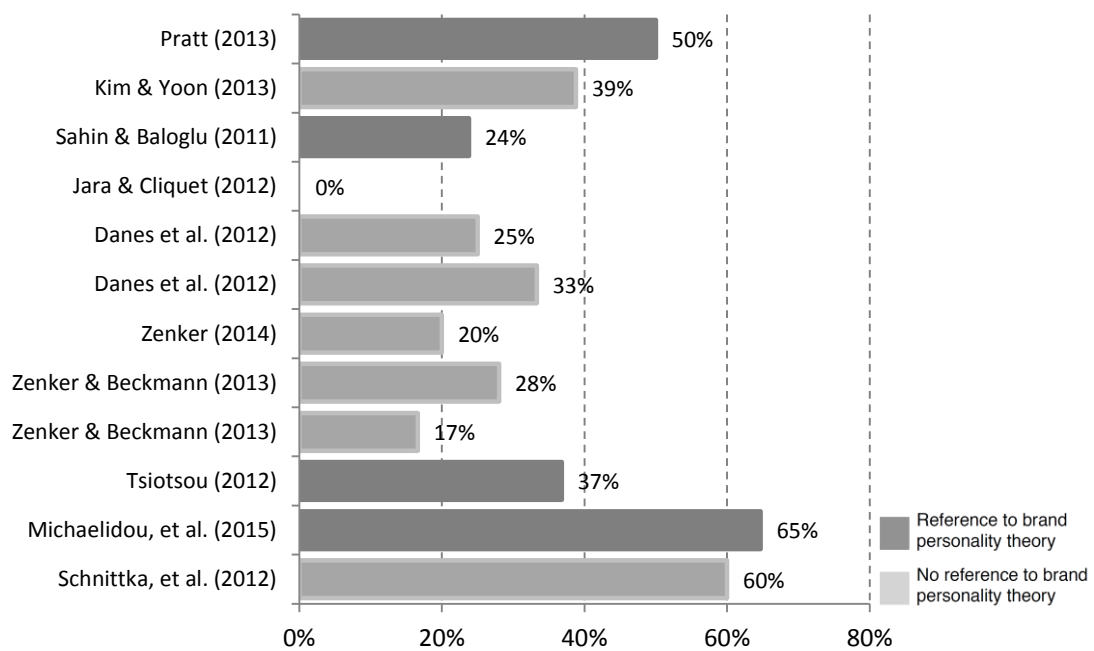
Source: Author

With one exception, all the articles show correspondence between some of the associations highlighted in the study and a synonym from the personality traits dictionary. Only Jara and Cliquet's (2012) study does not contain vocabulary related to personality traits; instead, it refers only to product-related associations, even though the personality concept is mentioned in a generic way. The remaining studies mix different kinds of associations, product-related

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[11] The Hamburg brand is counted twice, since it is the object of study of two different articles with slightly different procedures of analysis.

being the most popular ones. For example, Table 3.3 shows the description of the Hamburg brand image and analysis presented in Zenker's (2014) study.

Table 3.3. **Brand associations highlighted in Zenker's (2014) study**

Zenker, S. (2014)			
Brand	Image Traits	Association type	Theoretical Framework
Hamburg (aBCM)	Elbe	Product-related	BP:NO BI: Keller 1993
	Harbor	Product-related	
	Alster	Product-related	
	Major City	Product-related	
	Multi-cultural	Product-related	
	Open and tolerant	Sincerity (Openness)	
	Reeper bahn	Product-related	
	City at the waterfront	Product-related	
	Bars and restaurants	Product-related	
	Beautiful	Sophistication-Glamorous	

Source: Author

As can be seen in Table 3.3, most of the associations highlighted in Zenker's (2014) study are product-related. However, two associations do match personality traits: beautiful, as a synonym of glamorous; and open and tolerant, which are related to sincerity. Another variable that is also considered is the presence of a theoretical framework of personality and image constructs. In Zenker's study, only references to the brand image theoretical framework – Keller's – can be found. In Figure 3.3, those studies with references to a theoretical framework of brand personality are marked in darker grey, while those shown in a lighter color do not make reference to brand personality in their literature review.

Upon closer inspection, the results show a significant presence of personality traits within brand image definitions: 33.9% of all the associations highlighted in the 12 descriptions match personality traits. Furthermore, in most of the studies, more than 20% of the associations appear to be related to personality vocabulary. Only the associations highlighted by Zenker and Beckmann (2013) show a lower match (17%).

At this point, it is necessary to note that Tsiotsou (2012) specifically aims to develop a new scale for sport teams' brand personality, which explains the coincidence of 36.8% between his

and Aaker 's (1997) personality traits. Likewise, Michaelidou et al.'s (2015) study is based on a previous one that also takes brand personality as a "common approach to capture brand image" (p.1658). Finally, Sahin and Baloglu (2011) specifically identify brand personality as one of the dependent variables to analyze, together with brand image. In all these cases, the authors intentionally consider brand personality and define the theoretical framework of this construct.

However, the most interesting finding is that in five articles, seven brands' image descriptions include traits of personality in their results without the researchers' conscious intention of doing so. It must be noted that Danes, Hess, Story, and Vorst (2011) and Schnittka, Sattler, and Zenker (2012) make a brief mention of the notion of brand personality, even though they do not develop the concept or offer a complete theoretical framework to contextualize it. Nevertheless, it is especially surprising that in studies aiming to give a description of a brand's image, more than half of the associations correspond to personality traits (Michaelidou et al., 2015; Pratt, 2013; Schnittka et al., 2012). More surprisingly still, Schnittka et al. (2012) do not mention the brand personality concept in their theoretical framework.

These results confirm the hypothesis regarding the tight relationship between both constructs and the need for further research on this topic. In this vein, different scenarios are possible. On the one hand, researchers might assume that the personality dimension is one possible type of association linked to image. In this case, additional references are needed to reinforce the theoretical framework of the brand image construct. On the other hand, it could be that researchers are not aware of the role of this kind of association in the brand image dimension. Furthermore, the investigations that offer a theoretical framework for brand personality do not treat it explicitly as one of the brand image associations, but as an equivalent or a same-level variable.

Therefore, the answer to the preliminary research question is positive, indicating that brand personality traits emerge among brand image associations. This is in line with Kapferer's (2012) definition of brand associations but goes beyond Keller's (1993) proposed framework. Furthermore, there also seems to be a clear lack of attention from researchers to the relationship between personality and image, providing substantial evidence for the need to further investigate this field.

3.1.6. Brand image assessment - Conclusions

Beyond testing the proposed hypotheses, the results obtained in this literature review have far deeper implications. In the first instance, several indicators suggest that the research into brand image assessment has reached its maturity. As Cheon, Groven, and Sabherwal (1993) highlight, assessing the maturity of a specific field of study is difficult, since it needs time and has no overall pre-defined pattern. However, the authors list three criteria that may indicate the degree of maturity of a specific field:

- The diversity of variables in studies. The higher the volume of investigated variables, the stronger and thus more mature the paradigm is.
- The usage of multiple methodologies. Less mature fields use a limited range of methodologies of analysis.
- Hypothesis testing. Non-mature fields put emphasis on describing the phenomenon.

Accordingly, three of the findings presented above satisfy these criteria and thus indicate maturity in the field. Firstly, the current research aiming to assess the brand image construct mainly focuses on its relation to other variables, and not on the comprehension of brand image itself. There is a clear dominance of relational investigations over descriptive hypothesis. This finding indicates that researchers already have a clear idea of the brand image construct, and investigations now focus on strengthening the paradigm. Researchers are interested in the identification of new outcomes and relationships of brand image, and certainly not in deepening its description or composition.

Secondly, the great majority of the articles coincide in referring to Keller's work in proposing a brand image theoretical framework. This also indicates the maturity of the research on brand image. There is no discussion about what exactly brand image is: it is simply understood as the "perceptions about a brand as reflected by the brand associations held in consumer memory" (Keller, 1993, p.3).

Thirdly, the popularity and stability of the use of a single methodological approach to study a phenomenon is not a sign of maturity. In this case, there is a clear dominance of the survey methodology among empirical studies to evaluate the consumers' perceptions of brands. This consensus and the lack of debate in this regard is not a sign of maturity, which slightly contradicts the previous findings. However, upon closer inspection, the literature review

shows that in recent investigations, researchers have explored new methodological approaches to evaluate brand image. Among them, experimentation and content analysis methods stand out. In particular, the case of content analysis has especially captured the present author's attention. In the last five years, researchers have started to explore it in their search for another reliable and less expensive method to evaluate brand image (Campbell et al., 2010; Danes et al., 2011; Költringer & Dickinger, 2015; Lee, 2009; Pich & Dean, 2015; Tsiotsou, 2012; Youn Kim & Yoon, 2013).

In conclusion, the validation of hypotheses 2, 5, 6, and 7 confirms the maturity of the brand image field. However, some findings of the analysis indicate discrepancies and contradictions between studies: specifically, the significant presence of brand personality traits in their results, even when researchers were not considering brand personality as a variable; and the absence of studies focusing on the relationship between brand personality and brand image.

The initial research questions regarding brand personality and brand image resulted in a relevant point of discussion: it is interesting to notice the relevance of brand personality for brand image evaluation. Nevertheless, the consensus in identifying Keller's description of the brand image (1993), tested in hypothesis 5, implies agreement with his proposed network of brand associations. In his description, three types of associations are distinguished: attributes (product-related and non-product-related), benefits (functional, experiential, and symbolic), and attitudes.

Even though Keller points to the relationship between some non-product-related attributes and the origins of associated personality traits, he does not identify personality as an intrinsic component of brand image. Therefore, the presence of brand personality traits among the brand associations suggests either a lack of knowledge about the relationship between the two constructs, or that methodologies are not capturing the expected results.

Similarly, some articles include brand image and assessment as keywords but use brand personality as the indicator in their evaluation, leading to the same point of discussion: what is the relationship between these two constructs. At this point, it is appropriate to propose the second main conclusion of this literature review: evidence confirms the strong relationship between the two constructs, and personality appears to be more relevant in image studies than other kinds of association are. However, further examination appears necessary, since it

is not clear how the variables interact. Is it a type of association? Is it a separate indicator of brand image? Are the two different constructs simply coexisting in parallel?

This conclusion is highly related to research by Keller (2003) that indicates the need for a holistic theoretical framework of brand knowledge, including an overall description that encompasses the different constructs involved. Specifically, Keller states that "by assembling the different dimensions of brand knowledge, their comparative effects could be traced and valued to address causal questions such as the relative importance of brand personality or other imagery and brand feelings, which different dimensions of brand knowledge have to be created to gain the benefits from branding, and so on" (Keller, 2003, p.597). He does not refer specifically to brand image dimensions, but given the closeness of brand image and brand knowledge, a parallel can be drawn between this contribution and the problematic identified in the present study. Again, advances in this regard have been made by several authors, but some pieces of evidence presented in this chapter suggest that there is still need for further knowledge.

All in all, while the conclusion in this respect remains tentative, it provides substantive evidence to support one of the proposed hypotheses: brand personality and brand image have a close relationship. As previous research suggests (Hosany et al., 2006; Kapferer, 2012; Kim & Lehto, 2012), brand personality is an intrinsic part of brand image, not as an independent and isolated type of association, but interrelated with other brand image indicators. Thus, this issue would be interesting to address in further research.

3.2. BRAND PERSONALITY ASSESSMENT

As mentioned in the theoretical framework, brand personality has become a major topic of discussion in the academic field. Furthermore, it is considered to be a highly relevant construct due to its influence on consumers' decision-making process (Hosany et al., 2006; Keller, 2008). Consumers feel "self-centered engaged" with specific brands that they consider to be congruent with their own self-concept, and infer an additional meaning from the overall brand concept (Schmitt, 2012). The perceived congruency between this inference and the consumers' own self-concept plays an important role in the purchase decision (Kressmann et

al., 2006; Sirgy, 1985; Usakli & Baloglu, 2011). Thus, personality plays a key role in brand image formation.

The systematized literature review above explored the relationship between brand image and personality among studies focused on the former. Evidence was found of their interrelation, and the results showed that previous studies have analyzed them in parallel. However, the two constructs cannot be studied in the same way. Even though both appear in several studies as associations compounding brand image at the same level, personality- and attribute-related associations differ widely. The former are related to a symbolic dimension of the brand, while the latter represent the functional dimension (Aaker, 1997; Echtner & Ritchie, 1993; Keller, 1993). This thesis aims to analyze these constructs within brands' discourse. In this vein, the following is a suitable metaphor to describe the difference between them: attributes are the things that brands talk about, while personality is how they do so.

The following sections complement the knowledge on personality assessment by exploring crucial topics that have not been addressed in the previous chapters. The first section presents new insights into the methodologies used, and the second section then discusses the scales used for the personality measurement. Although these sections are complementary to the previous systematized review, they are also crucial for further decisions delimiting the present research.

3.2.1. The most used methodologies to assess brand personality

Gardner and Levy (1955) were the first scholars to write about brands having personality, but Aaker (1997) was the one to explicitly connect the concept to the anthropomorphism theory and to simultaneously import a methodology from human psychology (Avis et al., 2012). In short, an anthropomorphic conception of brands occurs when consumers attribute human characteristics to non-human beings (Kallery & Psillos, 2004).

The acceptance of Aaker's (1997) Brand Personality Scale encouraged academics in this field. In tourism, Hosany et al.'s (2006) study was the starting point of a growing interest in the subject, motivating many discoveries and much progress. Since then, researchers have focused intensively on the development of systematic methods and analytical tools that allow the evaluation and identification of brand personalities.

The first interesting finding to highlight is the difference between the brand personality perceived by tourists'/consumers' and the projected one, which is embedded in communication messages about the brand. The present study is interested in the latter. Organizations responsible for brand management are in charge of creating and disseminating what is known as the projected image through different communication techniques: advertising, public relations, etc. The main research question that this section aims to answer is: how do researchers analyze brands' projected personality?

Table 3.4. **Articles related to brand personality assessment**

Author(s)	Year	Journal
Pitt, Opoku, Hultman, Abratt and Spyropoulou	2007	Tourism Management
Opoku	2009	Journal of Internet Commerce
Tsitsou, Rodoula	2012	Journal of Services Marketing
Kim and Lehto	2012	Journal of Travel Research
De Moya and Jain	2013	Public Relations Review
Sahin and Baloglu	2014	Journal of Hospitality Marketing and Management
Pereira, de Jesus Henriques Correia and Schutz	2014	Anatolia
Rojas-Méndez and Hine	2017	Journal of Vacation Marketing

Source: Author

To this end, eight studies were identified that analyze projected personality in a systematized way. They comprise an accidental sample of articles that date from 2007 to 2017 published in eight different journals, as shown in Table 3.4. Besides the papers' identification information, the analysis focused on five more indicators related to their methodological approach (see chapters 5).

Regarding the scope and the study object, a first observation is the presence of studies referring to the tourism industry: seven out of eight focus on destination brands, which is interesting for this thesis. It must also be noted that one of them analyzes specialized tourism brands: golf destinations. The remaining article analyzes sport teams' brand personality (Tsiotsou, 2012). While there is no agreement on the brands in the sample, there are three case studies and five investigations analyze a broader sample and all of them have a common denominator: the website analysis. In most of the cases, not only official websites are analyzed, but Facebook pages (De Moya & Jain, 2013) and alternative sites are also considered (Pereira, de Jesus Henriques Correia, & Schutz, 2014; Sahin & Baloglu, 2011; Tsiotsou, 2012).

Similarly, all the studies use content analysis to gather primary data at some point in their investigation. In this regard, two different types of content analysis emerge: traditional and computer-assisted. Only two studies use traditional content analysis, a manual examination of the content focused on the identification of adjectives related to personality traits (Sahin & Baloglu, 2014; Tsiotsou, 2012). In both cases, a second phase of analysis follows using the survey methodology. In contrast, five different investigations use computer-assisted content analysis.

Pitt et al. (2007) were the first to use a computer-assisted content analysis methodology, where all the dimensions and traits of personality defined by Aaker were coded and introduced to software called WordStat. Before then, studies were based on a survey distribution prepared ad hoc only to evaluate a specific destination. The elaboration of this computerized technique allowed the researchers to analyze and compare a wider sample: in this case, the study of the projected personalities of 10 African countries.

One of the key factors of this methodological approach is the importance of creating the dictionary that serves as basis for the tracking of the text. In Pitt et al.'s (2007) study, the dictionary consisted of a 922-word list of synonyms of the different traits and dimensions of the Brand Personality Scale. To avoid a possible bias, this list was developed simultaneously by two different researchers using the online version of the Encyclopedia Britannica's thesaurus. After comparing and choosing those words present in both researchers' version, the list was unified and the dictionary was created and introduced in the software, enabling the analysis of any textual content based on the exact same criteria.

Next, the process of examining the textual content highlighted several words related to personality terms. Subsequently, the data was statistically analyzed using the correspondence analysis technique. All in all, this methodological approach was a turning point in the study of projected personality. De Moya and Jain (2013), Opoku (2009) and Rojas-Méndez and Hine (2017) use a very similar process of analysis, while Kim and Lehto (2012) and Pereira et al. (2014) follow an inverse process: first the most frequent words are identified, and then their correspondence with synonyms of personality traits is assessed.

At this point, it is appropriate to raise the main limitation of these computer-assisted methods: they are limited to textual content. Images, audiovisual, and interactive content are excluded

from the analysis. Although scholars are aware of this disadvantage, it has not been addressed in more recent studies.

To statistically identify the connections between the data obtained in the textual content analysis procedure, the studies suggest the use of two different techniques: correspondence analysis (De Moya & Jain, 2013; Opoku, 2009; Pitt et al., 2007; Rojas-Méndez & Hine, 2017) and exploratory factor analysis (Kim & Lehto, 2012; Tsiotsou, 2012). While the former is useful to map brands in a competitive context, the latter serves to identify relationships between personality traits with the aim of identifying new scales. Of the two, correspondence analysis appears to be more useful for the purpose of the present study.

Finally, regarding the last indicator of this analysis, seven studies are based on the contributions made by Aaker (1997) with the Brand Personality Scale; they all use his five dimensions of personality as a starting point. However, some researchers incorporate additional personality dimensions.

The main goal of Tsiotsou's (2012) study is the development of a specific scale that describes the personality of sports teams. Her results highlight five different dimensions than the ones proposed by Aaker: competitiveness, prestige, morality, authenticity, and credibility. Furthermore, two other studies also support the existence of different dimensions of personality. First, Kim and Lehto (2012) identify two additional dimensions of personality in their analysis of South Korea: uniqueness and family. Second, Pereira et al. (2014) provide evidence supporting the need for a new personality scale to explain golf-related destinations' personality. After checking the synonyms related to the Brand Personality Scale and the Big Five scale, the authors conclude that none match their results regarding these specific brands. Only Rojas-Méndez and Hine (2017) base their analysis on the Big Five human personality dimensions.

All in all, based on the above, a valid approach to analyzing projected personality is to conduct a content analysis based on synonyms of personality traits. Furthermore, the support of software of analysis has been proven to be useful and reliable. Finally, though the Brand Personality Scale is a common starting point for all the examined studies, differences in their outcomes and complementary dimensions indicate the necessity to further explore the validity of personality scales.

3.2.2. Brand personality scales

While there is still no general agreement on a unified scale (Rojas-Méndez & Hine, 2017), researchers have proposed several scales and measurements to evaluate brand personality (Aaker, 1997; Eisend & Stokburger-Sauer, 2013; Geuens, Weijters, & De Wulf, 2009; Pan, Zhang, Gursoy, & Lu, 2017; Rojas-Méndez, Murphy, & Papadopoulos, 2013; Tsiotsou, 2012). From the anthropomorphic metaphor perspective, where human beings use human characteristics to describe non-human beings, researchers have designed measures to understand the symbolism associated with brands. Moreover, most of the frameworks proposed for the brand personality construct arise from the five-factor human personality scale, the Big Five.

However, the study of brand personality has a longer history. Before any scale was developed, many researchers had already approached the study of different brands' personality, for example in the tourism field (Gómez Aguilar, Yagüe Guillén, & Villaseñor Roman, 2016). For instance, Singapore was described as "cosmopolitan, youthful and vibrant, modern Asia, reliability and comfort" (Henderson, 2000, p.39); Portugal as "contemporary, modern, sophisticated, ever changing…" (Santos, 2004, p.128); and Crockett and Wood (2004, p.194) described Western Australia as "fresh, natural, free and spirited." These early studies focused for the first time on the symbolic dimension of destination brands. Unfortunately, the differences in their methodological approached and in the names they used to refer to the personality traits made it challenging to compare their results and to establish links between them in further research (Gómez Aguilar et al., 2016).

Thus, as mentioned earlier, Aaker (1997) was the first to explicitly connect the concept of brand personality to the anthropomorphism theory and to import a methodology from human psychology (Avis et al., 2012). Furthermore, the framework that she proposed, the Brand Personality Scale, became the most used scale in contemporary research (Eisend & Stokburger-Sauer, 2013; Geuens et al., 2009), establishing a methodological trend to measure personality based on scales.

The Brand Personality Scale is grounded in the Big Five human personality scale. Starting with a list of 114 traits of personality, Aaker's study concludes with a five-dimensional model for brand personality. It consists of the dimensions of sincerity, excitement, competence, sophistication, and ruggedness, the first three being directly related to the Big Five human

personality dimensions (Aaker, 1997; Geuens et al., 2009). In total, the scale comprises 42 items/characteristics aggregated to 15 different facets simultaneously related to the different personality dimensions.

Aaker's work inspired a huge amount of diverse research. The scale has been tested on different product categories. In this regard, it is interesting to highlight the amount of attention that brand personality in general and Aaker's framework in particular have garnered in the tourism field (Kumar & Nayak, 2014). Furthermore, different studies have also checked the model using different types of samples. Several investigations have used the scale to assess single brands' personalities (Farmaki, 2012; Gómez Aguilar et al., 2016; Kim & Lehto, 2012), as a measure to determine symbolic competitive position (Opoku, 2009; Rojas-Méndez & Hine, 2017), or even as the basis to develop new scales customized to adjust to different cultures (Pan et al., 2017),and fit specific product categories or non-commercial organizations, such as non-profits or football teams (Michaelidou et al., 2015; Tsiotsou, 2012).

In the tourism field, Hosany, Ekinci, and Uysal (2006) were the first to text the Brand Personality Scale with destination brands. In their study, they evaluated the personality of three different UK cities. Although only three of the dimensions of the Brand Personality Scale were found to be descriptive of these cities, the findings of the study support the validity of Aaker's approach for places (Hosany et al., 2006). As Caprara et al. (2001) argue, brands may not always be described by all personality dimensions, but just by some of them. The three salient dimensions identified in Hosany et al.'s (2006) study were sincerity, excitement, and conviviality, and this was enough to confirm the scale's applicability.

The Brand Personality Scale has also served as the fundamental framework to assess the brand personality construct using different methodological approaches and for different types of brands. However, as most of the fundamental theory that is still developing, Aaker's scale has some limitations and is criticized at different levels (Eisend & Stokburger-Sauer, 2013; Geuens et al., 2009).

In the first instance, the cross-cultural validity of the scale is questioned (Ekinci & Hosany, 2006). A study focused on Spanish and Japanese markets, led by Aaker, reached different conclusions. Only four of the five personality dimensions concurred with the ones in the first study (Aaker, Benet-Martínez, & Garolera, 2001), indicating difficulties in replicating the study cross-culturally.

Secondly, the scope of the definition of brand personality is another point of discussion. Some authors have criticized Aaker's definition for being too wide and not keeping to the psychological conceptualization of the construct. The Brand Personality Scale includes characteristics that go beyond strict personality traits, such as social class or gender, which are specifically excluded in the Big Five (Azoulay & Kapferer, 2003). However, Grohmann (2009) strongly supports the role of gender in the brand personality formation. A strict definition of any personality construct should keep to a "generalized and focalized neuropsychic system" (Azoulay & Kapferer 2003, p.147), or in other words, consider only traits of personality and exclude other human characteristics (Azoulay & Kapferer, 2003; Geuens et al., 2009).

Some authors question the generalizability of the model at a singular brand level; in other words, a lack of within-brand variance. As Austin, Siguaw, and Mattila (2003) point out, Aaker's framework is more suitable for investigations focused on aggregated data from different categories than for measuring individual brands or specific categories. Furthermore, critiques also have doubts about the basis of the construct. Many authors have examined the viability of the anthropomorphic metaphor between human and brand personalities, demonstrating some concerns about it (Avis et al., 2012).

However, Eisend and Stokburger-Sauer's (2013) meta-analysis of 74 empirical studies using the Brand Personality Scale yields interesting results supporting the transferability of the five-factor personality model to brands. Firstly, the authors identify the instability of the methods utilized in investigations using the scale. Their research suggests that differences in methodological approach could explain divergence among the results of different investigations: thus, the true origin of some problems that have been attributed to the scale.

In this regard, the investigation specifically highlights only minor variation across cultures (Hofstede, 2001; Eisend & Stokburger-Sauer 2013). As the authors point out, some culture variations might be explained by the different methodologies and the alternating use of traits or facets of personality in the analysis.

Furthermore, the study's results also prove the non-dependency of the scale on data aggregation across brands; in other words, "the BP scale does not vary due to data aggregation across brands or respondents" (Eisend & Stokburger-Sauer, 2013, p.957). This finding refutes the critique about the generalizability of the model for individual brands or specific categories (Austin et al., 2003).

Finally, the Brand Personality Scale is also questioned for its broad conception of the personality construct. As mentioned earlier, some authors criticize the scale for including other symbolic characteristics than those strictly related to the psychological construct (Azoulay & Kapferer, 2003). This is related to the dual foundation of the personality construct. As Avis et al. (2012) point out, there are two ways to understand brand personality: humanlike and metaphoric foundations. The former explains brand personality as if "consumers ordinarily go about their daily lives thinking of brands as humanlike entities that have personalities like humans" (p.314). In this case, the need for a strict personality scale following the psychological basis seems reasonable.

However, the present study is rooted in the second foundation: "it is not that consumers have real perceptions of brands as humanlike entities but that theorists are using metaphors of personalities and relationships to help them (the researchers) understand the way that consumers perceive the world" (Avis et al., 2012, p.315). It is crucial to clarify the perspective taken in this thesis, since from this perspective "researchers would need to identify the consumer's use of metaphorical discourse" (Avis et al., 2012, p.316). Therefore, a personality scale to examine the symbolic attributions that are homologous to personality should go beyond the strict psychological construct. Hence, a more flexible scale is not considered to be an issue in this study.

To conclude, while there is still work to do in the marketing psychology field to develop a globally accepted brand personality measure, the Brand Personality Scale remains a reliable and suitable measure for a comparative brand personality study (Eisend & Stokburger-Sauer, 2013; Ekinci & Hosany, 2006; Kim & Lehto, 2012). Therefore, conscious of the scale's limitations and of the non-existence of a stable and generally accepted brand personality measurement, this study uses the Brand Personality Scale as the framework to analyze destinations' personality.

3.3. EXPERTS ON BRAND IMAGE AND PERSONALITY

Finally, this last section of the state of the art focuses on professionals' knowledge about brand image and personality. As mentioned earlier, the opinions of experts in the communication and branding fields have historically inspired and guided academic research (Avis et al., 2012;

Balmer, 2014; Freling & Forbes, 2005). Furthermore, ignoring the contributions of practitioners has been considered a limitation of academic research in this field (Cho & Fiore, 2015). Practitioners' daily contact with brand-related challenges gives them more insights into how brands behave in the market. For this reason, in this study a survey was distributed among practitioners to address some of the conflicts identified in the systematized literature review.

The primary goal of this phase of the study is to identify consultancy experts' and brand strategists' knowledge and conception of brand image and personality constructs. More specifically, this part of the study includes three different goals associated with different hypotheses. Figure 3.4 illustrates these goals and hypotheses.

1. To understand the professionals' perspective on the understanding of brand image and the personality construct.
   - Hypothesis 1. Experts have a clear notion of brand image, its composition, and its relevance.
   - Hypothesis 2. Experts consider brand personality as a key component of brands' positioning and success in the market.
2. To identify the type of relationship that professionals perceive between image and personality.
   - Hypothesis 3. Experts identify brand personality as a component of brand image.
3. To determine the level of agreement between the professionals' and academics' perspectives.
   - Hypothesis 4. Due to the professional field dynamics, experts can intuitively highlight the different components that can be part of brands' image.

Figure 3.4. **Goals and hypotheses related to the expert questionnaire**

Source: Author

110
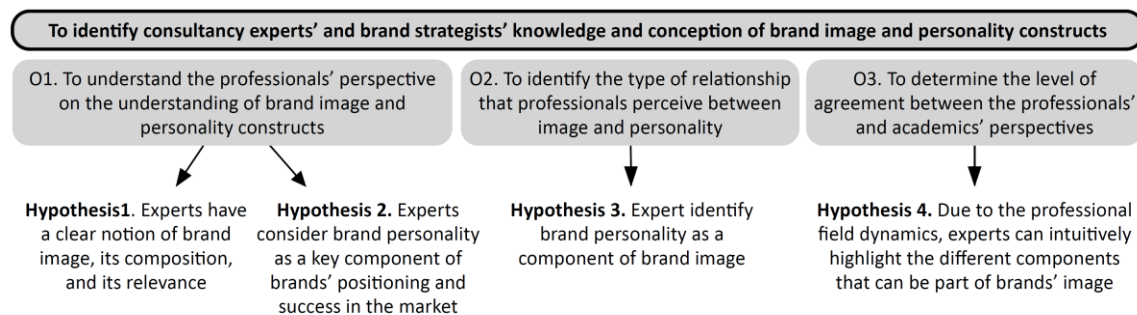
A questionnaire was prepared with closed- and open-ended questions regarding different issues related to image and personality. In total, the survey comprised 18 questions related to three major themes:

1. The understanding of the brand image construct
2. Knowledge about the brand personality construct
3. Relationships between both constructs

The answers to the closed-ended questions were statistically analyzed, whereas NVIVO11 software was used to analyze those to the open-ended ones as support for the qualitative analysis. This software is specifically designed for ethnographic analysis and facilitates the analysis of the answers by, among other options, categorizing the text by frequencies. Further details about the procedure are addressed in methodology chapter.

3.3.1. The concept of brand image

This section first presents the results regarding the description and importance of brand image in branding efforts. Four questions specifically asked for information about this construct: an open definition, two closed-ended questions regarding Keller's contributions[12], and another closed-ended question about useful methodologies for obtaining information about the construct.

The main interest in the answers concerning the brand image definitions lies in the identification of a common denominator among them. To this end, a frequency test was performed using the NVivo software[13], resulting in a list of the most used concepts in the definitions. This list, once clean from empty-meaning words, served as a starting point for an in-depth analysis of the relationship between concepts. The words/synonymous expressions and the closeness between concepts were taken into account. Table 3.5 illustrates the commonalities of the various definitions.

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[12] The question did not specify that these contributions were Keller's (1993) so as to not condition a response.

[13] The frequency test was performed using the similar word search option.

Table 3.5. **Frequency of keywords present in brand image definitions**[14]

| Concepts | Frequency | | Original similar words (in Spanish) |
	N. Words	Definitions	
Perception	12	12	percepción, percepciones, perciben, percibida, percibidos
Target	11	9	consumidor, target, públicos, stakeholders
Process of construction	6	6	construir, construida, proyectada proyectamos, exposición, expresarnos
Identity	5	5	identidad
Unit	12	9	conjunto, varios, gama, diversidad, diferentes (dimensiones, recursos, elementos, asociaciones, significados y atributos), otros.

Source: Author

The analysis highlighted five relevant and recurring units of meaning. Two major concepts dominated in the definitions and represented their main core: perception and target. The first was proposed in 92.31% of the cases in the same way, including derivatives of the same concept. Regarding target, the results were slightly more dispersed but grouped together, and present in 69.23% of the responses. It is necessary here to differentiate between those that specifically identified the "consumers", 30.77%; and those that referred to "target" (broader concept) or directly identified different audiences, 38.46%. It should be noted that although it not explicitly mentioned, the existence of a target perceiver was implicitly understood in three of the remaining definitions, 23.08%.

Another unit of meaning that was found to be relevant among definitions was the process of construction, projection, exposure, or expression by which the brand creates the perception of itself; 38.46% of the responses highlighted this process and, with it, the concept of "identity" also emerged in 30.77% of definitions. Identity was proposed as the source of the perception of the brand.

Finally, the fifth identified element was not a concept, but instead highlighted the nature of the components of perceptions of the brand, or in other words distinguished associations of a different nature. Three definitions identified and differentiated between associations and/or attributes of a rational-tangible and emotional-intangible nature, corresponding to 23.08% of the sample. One of them specifically highlighted the concept of "brand personality". In addition, 61.54% of the answers identified the existence of a diverse associations, meanings,

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[14] This table has been translated. The original study was conducted in Spanish.

and perceptions. This visualizes the brand image as a "system of" rather than as a unique perception. Figure 3.5 illustrates the skeleton of the brand image construct understood in the professional field.

Only one expert related the concept of brand image to its visual identity and the associated graphic universe.

Figure 3.5. **Common frame in brand image definitions**
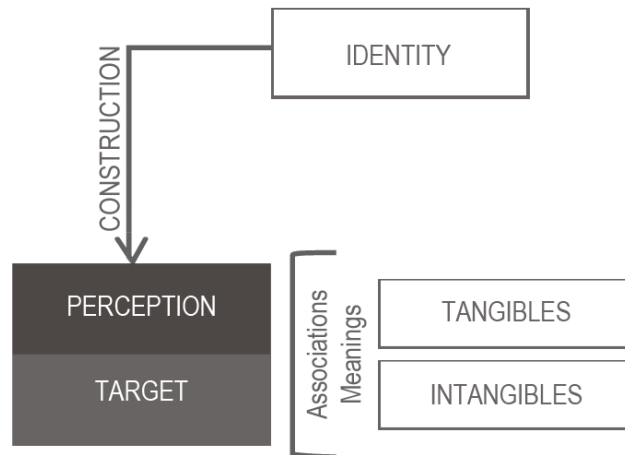
Source: Author

To complement the proposed definitions, a question was included with regard to this great theme to determine experts' level of agreement with (Keller, 1993, p.3) definition of brand image: "the perceptions about a brand stored in the memory of the Consumers that are reflected by associations linked to that brand." This question examined both the generic definition of the construct and the identification of the different components of the image proposed by Keller.[15] In case of disagreement, the experts could propose improvements and/or observations. Figure 3.6 shows the results.

Broadly, 69.2% accepted Keller's definition. In contrast, the list of components that are part of the brand image was not so widely accepted, with 46.2%. At the qualitative level, among the comments made by the respondents who answered negatively and those who, even if they answered affirmatively, added observations, three contributions can be found:

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[15] The question included all the components highlighted by Keller (1993) and added the "logo" component.

Figure 3.6. **Agreement of the experts with Keller's (1993) definition of brand image**
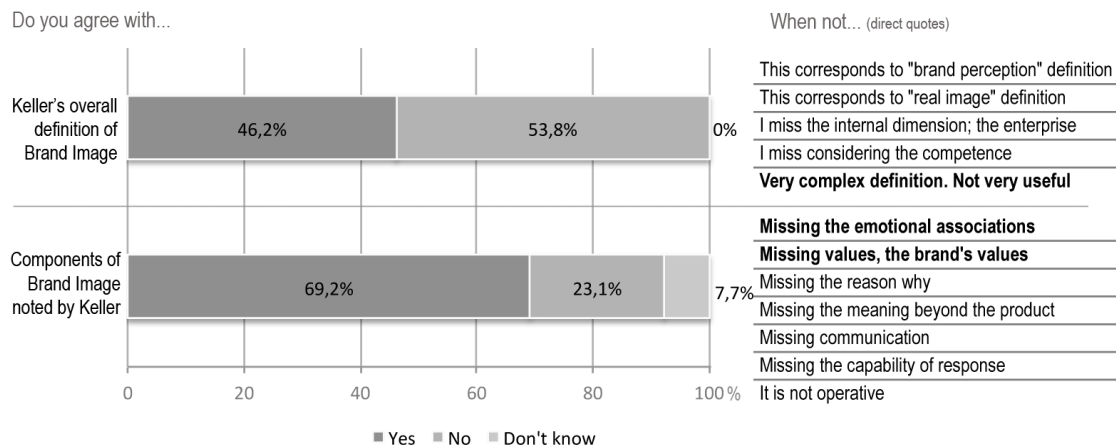
Source: Author

▪ The complexity of the academic definition was criticized. Respondents pointed out the need to simplify it to make it useful and manageable at a practical level. This was highlighted by two different experts. This criticism was repeated in the question concerning the components of brand image.

▪ Regarding the specific components that make up brand image, several experts noted the lack of some components that are also part of this construct. One element on which two experts agreed was the lack of "emotional aspects" as part of the image. Furthermore, three experts emphasized the need to add value or value proposition to the brand image construct, which is also related to the symbolic and emotional dimension of the brand.

▪ Brand personality was not proposed as a component of brand image at all.

To complete the experts' conception of brand image, they were asked about the most useful methodologies to obtain information about a certain brand image. Figure 3.7 illustrates the ability to collect information using the different proposed methodologies. Responses were assessed on a five-point Likert scale from insufficient (1) to excellent (5).

Considering average score, the method considered to have the greatest capacity to gather information about brand image was in-depth interviews, with a score of 3.46, followed by the focus group, with 3.31, always with consumers/targets. In contrast, the survey/questionnaire method received the lowest score, a score of 9.92 if it was aimed at the target, and 2.15 when aimed at those responsible for the brand. The evaluation of the consumer survey method is especially interesting since the answers varied greatly, with the same number of experts giving the maximum and minimum score – two individuals in each case.

Figure 3.7. **Most useful research methods in the collection of information about brand image**

To analyze the content of brands' official communication (i.e. Spots TV, web, etc.) — 3,08
To ask brand managers using a questionnaire with closed-questions — 2,15
To interview brand managers — 3,08
To interview consumers — 3,46
To conduct focus groups with consumers — 3,31
To analyze consumers' online comments and feedback — 3,08
To ask consumers using a questionnaire with closed-questions — 2,92

0 Poor — 5 Excellent

Source: Author

Finally, the respondents gave an average score of 3.08 to in-depth interviews with brand managers and to content analysis of both the brand's official communications and the comments and opinions of online consumers.

3.3.2. The concept of brand personality

The second topic that the experts were asked about was the concept of brand personality. A closed-ended question determined their level of familiarity with the concept before asking for its definition, since it is a more specific concept than the previous one. Specifically, the participants were asked if they had ever worked on the concept of brand personality.

Figure 3.8 shows how familiar the experts were with the concept. A clear majority worked with the brand personality construct consistently, 61.54%, or often, 23.08%. Only 15.39%, two experts, worked with the concept only sporadically. Even clearer were the answers regarding the importance of personality in the construction of brand image. On a scale of 1 to 5,

Figure 3.8. **Frequency with which respondents worked with the concept of brand personality**

Participants — Very frequently: 8, Frequently: 3, Occasionally: 2, Never: 0

Source: Author

where 1 is highly unimportant and 5 highly important, 69% of the sample, nine individuals, gave it the maximum score, while the remaining 31%, four individuals, chose a score of 4.

As in the previous section, one of the most interesting questions regarding brand personality was the request for a personal definition of the concept. To process and qualitatively analyze the responses, the same procedure was followed as in the previous case: using a frequency test performed with the Nvivo software, the resulting list was cleaned, and the relationships and proximity between the different recurring concepts were analyzed. Table 3.6 illustrates the shared points among the various definitions.

Although the differentiating role of brand personality was initially greatly present in the results by frequency, the crossing with its presence in different definitions revealed a much lower importance: it was only present in two definitions, although with a high repetition in one of them. However, there was a significant parallel between people or human qualities and this concept: a total of 53.85% highlighted the human behavior of brands.

Table 3.6. **Frequency of keywords present in the brand personality definitions**[16]

| Concepts | Frequency | | Original similar words (in Spanish) |
	N. Words	Definitions	
Different	5	2	diferenciales, diferente, distintivas, singular, única
Person	9	7	persona, personas, humanas, humanizada, humanizar, humanos
Behave	4	4	comporta, comportarse, actuar
Express	6	5	expresa, expresadas, expresarse, proyectar, habla, hablar
Connect	3	2	relaciona, relacionarnos
Character	5	5	carácter
Tone	3	3	tono, tono de voz
Values	2	2	valores
Beliefs	2	2	creencias
Attributes	3	3	atributos

Source: Author

In a similar vein, although some of the answers did not specifically include the terms "human" or "person", all definitions contained terms that traditionally refer to human qualities. In this regard, the results were more disparate in terms of the highlighted concepts, but they still

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[16] This table has been translated. The original study was conducted in Spanish.

showed two large groups of elements that characterize the brand personality: capacities and qualities. On the one hand, 46.15% identified brand personality using its capacity to behave (23.08%), express (23.08%), and relate (15.39%), or also act, talk, and project. All of these capabilities can highlight the importance of the brand's ability to communicate with the target, although this term did not appear explicitly in the definitions.

On the other hand, 61.54% of the definitions highlighted the following personality-determining characteristics of a brand: character (38.46%), tone of voice (23.08%), values (23.08%), and beliefs (15.39 %). Surprisingly, 23.08% of the definitions included the concept of attributes, which has traditionally been associated with more tangible and/or rational qualities. In addition, benefits were also accepted as part of brand personality on one occasion.

Interestingly, the two experts who less frequently worked with the concept of brand personality did not include characteristics, capacities, or attributes in their definitions. They limited themselves to highlighting the parallel with the human component.

3.3.3. Relationship between the concepts of brand image and brand personality

Finally, the last and most important major issue investigated in the questionnaire was the relationship between brand image and personality. In this vein, four questions were included: two closed-ended and two open-ended questions. The experts agreed on the close interdependence between the two constructs: 92.3% affirmed the existence of this relationship, while one expert rejected the premise.

Moreover, two open-ended questions asked the experts to freely define this relationship according to their opinions and experience. The questions specifically referred to how brand image and personality are related, and asked for a global definition integrating communication, consumers, image, and brand personality.

Figure 3.9 graphically illustrates the three relationship models highlighted by the experts in the first question. The majority, 46.15%, described personality as part of a larger construct: brand image. Another 30.77% of the sample defined the constructs as coexisting in parallel. Finally, the remaining 23.08% identified a causal relationship in which brand image is defined and conditioned from the construct of brand personality.

Figure 3.9. **Models of relationship between the concepts of brand personality and brand image**

46.15%   30.77%   23.08%

Source: Author

In the answers to the second question, the dependent relationship between personality and image, in which the former has a significant influence on the construction (or overall perception) of the second, gained visibility: 61.54% of the sample highlighted this effect. The four experts, 30.77%, who initially described the relationship as two parallel constructs this time emphasized the influence of personality on image. Moreover, two of the experts who described brand personality as part of brand image also highlighted this relationship.

Finally, this second block of responses included the concepts of communication and consumers. Here, the experts agreed on highlighting communication as the channel and consumers as the perceivers. Regarding communication, it should be noted that the majority of experts, 69.23%, defined it as a channel through which to convey brand image and personality, but three of the experts highlighted only its role in the transmission of brand personality. In addition, it is important to indicate that 53.85% of the sample specifically indicated that communication is not the only way to transmit these constructs, and that personality and image can also be built from a brand's other behaviors and practices.

3.3.4. Conclusions of experts' knowledge

First, it should be noted that, as expected from hypothesis 1, the consultancy and brand strategy professionals had a clear idea of brand image. The similarities between the definitions proposed for this concept point to its maturity, understood as a dimension beyond what is tangible and/or graphic. The results clearly identify the "perception by the target" as a basic node for the definition of the brand image construct. Such nodes are also identified Keller's

(1993) definition. Only one respondent considered the concept of brand image as the visual part of a brand, i.e. the logo and its graphic universe.

Furthermore, most experts also highlighted the complexity of brand image composition, indicating the existence of several elements that comprise it. Even so, most of the definitions did not designate and specify a possible composition. Moreover, few experts recognized the dual nature of associations, i.e., functional and symbolic. Therefore, even though the concept and what it implies is clear, the results seem to indicate the need to further advance its definition.

The results also verify the importance of the brand personality in the construction of brand image and its positioning. Not only did the closed-ended question show that 100% of the experts considered it to be important or very important, but the answers to the open-ended questions suggested the same result. A clear majority of experts highlighted the power of this component's influence and its ability to condition the overall perception of the brand, i.e. the brand image. Therefore, hypothesis 2 is also accepted.

However, regarding the initial question about the components of brand image, no expert proposed included brand personality in the list. This question was asked in the first part of the questionnaire, before introducing the concept of brand personality. This information may indicate a slight contradiction or lack of consideration of this concept in the *top of mind* since later on, most experts did emphasize personality as a part of image.

Focusing on the results obtained regarding the relationship between the two constructs, the third hypothesis can be partially accepted. Most experts conceived of brand personality as part of brand image. However, others identified the two as parallel constructs. Furthermore, it is illuminating that 92.3% of the experts perceived an interdependent relationship between the constructs. Yet, at the same time, it is curious that while agreeing on the previous question, an interdependent relationship was not indicated in any of the open-ended questions. The experts were only clear about the great influence of brand personality on the formation of brand image, with 61.54% indicating this, while they never highlighted a possible effect of brand image, or some of its components, on the creation of a particular brand personality. These results also indicate the need to investigate the possible bidirectional relationship between the two elements.

Finally, the definitions of brand image and brand personality indicate many similarities between the knowledge of the concepts in the professional field and in the academic one. The relevance of "target perception" for the definition of image, and "human character" for the definition of personality, coincide with the main academic contributions that form the basis of the present study (Aaker, 1997; Keller, 1993).

However, there are also points of disagreement between the professional and academic fields. In the construction of brand image, the concept of identity is of significant importance in the professional sector, whereas it is not visible in the literature on the evaluation of brand image analyzed in the review of the literature. Some experts even highlighted the relationship between identity and brand personality. In addition, the presence of the concepts of "attributes" and even "benefits" in describing brand personality, the symbolic dimension of brands, also points to a possible confusion between the personality and image constructs. Given this evidence and the answers to the question about the components of brand image, hypothesis 4 is refuted.

In conclusion, as in the academic field, the results of this study indicate the need to investigate and clarify the specific composition of brand image and the role of brand personality therein.

CHAPTER 4: SAMPLE

4. UNIVERSE AND SAMPLE OF STUDY

Considering one of the two main goals of this study, the identification of the outstanding characteristics of European destinations' image projected in their official website communication, all European cities with hotel infrastructure that participate in tourism activities would constitute the universe of study. This would be an immense universe of study and, though it could be considered as a finite one, the difficulties in delimitating and quantifying cities with touristic activity would lead to **considering it to be an infinite universe** (Ruiz Olabuénaga et al., 1998).

Thus, to continue and to ensure the viability of the investigation, a limitation of the corpus of study was needed. To this end, a smaller sample of urban destinations was defined. Furthermore, working with a smaller sample reduced the study's costs, enabled greater accuracy in the data collection, and facilitated a deeper analysis of the findings (Berganza Conde & Ruiz San Román, 2005; Ruiz Olabuénaga et al., 1998).

4.1. SAMPLE OF DESTINATIONS

Since this study aims to identify patterns and useful practices that may help DMOs of European cities to improve their own brand images, a statistically representative sample of the entire universe is not needed. As Gretzel, Fesenmaier, Formica, and O'Leary (2006) argue, the exchange of different DMOs' knowledge and practices is already highly valuable to overcome the challenges faced by tourism organizations in the current context. Therefore, the universe of study was reduced based on a non-probability and purposive sample (Ruiz Olabuénaga et al., 1998):

- Non-probability sample → as noted before, the aim of this study is not to thoroughly analyze the European urban destinations' communication, but to focus on specific cases of reference and success.
- Purposive sample → for the same reason, the study aims to analyze a smaller sample comprising the most popular destinations of the moment.

Thus, it is a matter of major importance to identify the most appealing and popular urban destinations in Europe, those receiving more tourists and that are well known around the

world. To this end, different statistics available from private and public sources were explored to gather useful information in this regard.

Ostertag and Wöber (2010, p.31) distinguish three different types of statistics in the area of city tourism: statistics of human flows, which measure arrivals, trips, and tourist nights at the destination; statistics of monetary flows, which focus on the income and expenditure of the tourists; and statistics about visitors' profiles and trip characteristics. Taking into consideration one of the main purposes of this study, indicated above, the sample was selected to include human flows and monetary statistics. These two criteria cover the understanding of the tourism market from a macroeconomic perspective instead of using specific qualitative information about of each case. Therefore, the delimitation of the sample was based on macroeconomic criteria, utilizing a pre-existing index to evaluate the importance of the destinations: the Global Destination Cities Index [GDC] (Hedrick-Wong & Choong, 2015).

The GDC provides an "annual ranking of 132 of the most important destination cities in the world. It generates estimates of the total number of international visitors to each of these cities each year, their cross-border spending in these cities, and breakdown of their numbers by feeder cities." This is an annual monitoring report, active since 2011, that evaluates the cities' popularity among the international tourists (Hedrick-Wong, 2011, 2012, 2013, Hedrick-Wong & Choong, 2014, 2015).

The index provides an accurate estimation of overnight visitors: those who stay at the destinations for at least one night. The main sources of data are the National Statistics Boards of each country in Europe and their Tourism Board. If this information is not available, the data is sourced from foreign overnight arrivals by air to the city, foreign overnight arrivals to paid accommodations in the city, or an estimation obtained by the Airflow Model[17].

Thus, the GDC index provides a macroeconomic indicator that highlights the most popular destinations of the year. This index was used to identify the destinations to include in this study's sample. All the European cities in the Top 10 Destination Cities in Europe from 2011 to 2015 were included in the sample. The final sample comprises 12 destinations. Ten of these destinations are repeated in the ranking for each of the five examined years, while Madrid, Prague, Frankfurt, and Munich are only part of some years' Top 10, as seen in Table 4.1.

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[17] For some destinations, Mastercard provides an estimation based on weekly flight frequencies and the passenger capacity of the non-stop flights to the destination. See MasterCard report 2014.

Table 4.1. **Top 10 destination in Europe from 2011 to 2015**

Global Destination Cities Index

Year	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015
1	London	London	London	London	London
2	Paris	Paris	Paris	Paris	Paris
3	Madrid	Istanbul	Istanbul	Istanbul	Istanbul
4	Istanbul	Madrid	Barcelona	Barcelona	Barcelona
5	Frankfurt	Frankfurt	Milan	Amsterdam	Amsterdam
6	Rome	Rome	Rome	Milan	Rome
7	Amsterdam	Barcelona	Amsterdam	Rome	Milan
8	Milan	Milan	Vienna	Vienna	Vienna
9	Barcelona	Amsterdam	Madrid	Prague	Prague
10	Vienna	Vienna	Prague	Munich	Munich

Source: Hedrick-Wong (2011, 2012, 2013) and Hedrick-Wong and Choong (2014, 2015).

It was not enough to identify the destination brands in the sample, however: the corpus of study needed to be delimited too. Which websites will be analyzed? As was argued in Chapter 2, the study of official website communication was found useful to analyze the destinations' projected image.

4.2. OFFICIAL DESTINATIONS' WEBSITES

One of the focuses of this study is the comprehension and evaluation of projected destination image in the online ecosystem. Official websites are one of the main tools that give destinations a voice on the Internet. Although social media is growing in importance in destinations' communication strategy, this part of the study will focus on website communication, and specifically official websites. DMOs tend to build websites with underlying strategic brand messages (Choi, Lehto, & Oleary, 2007).

The website has emerged as the main representative of destinations, exhibiting all the features of the offer and the brand itself (Law et al., 2010; Lepp et al., 2014; Park & Gretzel, 2007). According to Wilcox et al. (2012), in terms of corporate communication, websites allow brands to establish constant and controlled messages consistent with their strategic and positioning

needs. In short, the official website is expected to be a reflection of what tourists can find at the destination; it serves as ambassador of the brand (Luna-Nevarez & Hyman, 2012). Therefore, each destination's official website was identified in this study. In those cases where more than one official website was available, only the one targeting the final tourist was considered. Table 4.2. provides the websites' URLs.

Table 4.2. **Official websites in the sample**

	Destination	Official Website
1	London	http://www.visitlondon.com/
2	Paris	http://www.parisinfo.com/
3	Istanbul	http://howtoistanbul.com/
4	Barcelona	http://www.barcelonaturisme.com
5	Amsterdam	http://www.iamsterdam.com/es/
6	Milan	http://www.tourism.milan.it/
7	Rome	http://www.turismoroma.it/?lang=en
8	Vienna	http://www.wien.info/en
9	Prague	http://www.prague.eu/en
10	Munich	http://www.muenchen.de/int/en
11	Madrid	http://www.esmadrid.com
12	Frankfurt	http://www.frankfurt-tourismus.de/en/

Source: Author

Even though the different methodologies used in the analysis required different procedures, as will be argued in Chapter 5, not all website pages were analyzed with NVivo for the analysis of projected image. The magnitude of most of the websites made it unfeasible and unnecessary to conduct a detailed analysis of all the pages to obtain accurate results regarding projected image. To ensure a sufficient amount of content, usually provided by informational pages (Morville & Rosenfeld, 2006), the home page plus all the child pages at the first two levels of the hierarchy were downloaded in PDF format to be analyzed in NVivo. These criteria were selected following previous work that had proved the validity of the two first levels in gathering significant data on brand image (Kim & Lehto, 2012). The samples were collected during the high season, between 15th July and 15th August 2016. Altogether, a total of 779 useful pages were downloaded.

CHAPTER 5: METHODOLOGY

5. METHODOLOGY

The present chapter describes the different methodologies and procedures used in this study (Igartua Perosanz, 2006). Various methods were selected to analyze the different types of data and to achieve the previously defined goals (see Chapter 1). Combining different methods is also a way to ensure the reliability of the results obtained using different procedures (Berganza Conde & Ruiz San Román, 2005, p.34). Furthermore, the methodological triangulation defined here combines qualitative and quantitative techniques to enrich the obtained data and to make it possible to contrast different types of data, thereby improving the results.

More specifically, the thesis is based on three major methods: a literature review questionnaires, and a content analysis. The first two methods allowed the researcher to identify a starting point for the posterior research, and to define a complete and exhaustive chapter on the state of the art. On the other hand, content analysis is a method located between qualitative and quantitative analysis that aims to examine and interpret any kind of discourse (Ruiz Olabuénaga et al., 1998). This was the main method used in the empirical study, though it must be noted that different content analysis techniques were used to ensure an exhaustive analysis.

5.1. LITERATURE REVIEW

Ruiz Olabuénaga et al. (1998) state that no research project can begin without first analyzing the previous research and the present state of the literature on the topic. This process is generically referred to as a literature review. However, recent investigations of this methodology highlight the importance of distinguishing between different types of review. Grant and Booth (2009) identify 14 different types of literature review that differ in terms of, among others, scope exhaustiveness, goals, and generalization at four different levels: search, appraisal, synthesis, and analysis. On this basis, two different types of literature review were conducted in the present study.

First, a common literature review was conducted to define the theoretical framework of this thesis. Following Grant and Booth (2009), the term literature review describes a less systemic and non-exhaustive review that may include the author's bias when intentionally selecting

existing work. Nevertheless, it can cover a broad range of topics in its scope. In addition, it usually considers more fundamental theories, more permanent and solid research, and identifies what has already been accomplished in the field on a theoretical level.

Second, a more critical review was also conducted to design a novel, interesting, and useful study aiming to contribute to both the theoretical and the practical level. This review determined the state of the art regarding the specific topic of study. As Lluís Codina (2015) suggests, it is appropriate and more accurate to carry out a systematized review to lay the foundations of a doctoral thesis.

Therefore, besides the initial theoretical contextualization, Chapter 3 presented the state of the art based on a systematized review of the latest literature on the two main constructs analyzed in this study: brand image and personality assessment. Grant and Booth (2009, p.103) explain that the authors of a systematized review "search one or more databases and then code and analyze all retrieved results in a systematic manner." Although this technique is not as exhaustive as a systemic literature review, it has shown a high performance in setting the basis for dissertations or more extensive investigations (Grant & Booth, 2009).

To define a systematized review of the literature on brand image assessment, the first sections of the state of the art, a careful selection was made of a corpus of investigations pursuing similar objectives as the present study. Specifically, this part of the literature review had three main objectives that led to the analysis (see Chapter 3):

1. To identify the most recently written papers with a main focus on assessing the brand image construct.
2. To explore the advances in the definition and the understanding of the brand image concept composition. In this regard, two additional research questions complemented the objective: Is it possible that brand personality traits emerge among brand associations? And are researchers aware of the presence of brand personality traits?
3. To identify and analyze the most used methodologies for the evaluation of brand image.

Considering these goals, all papers published in social sciences between 2006 and 2015 focusing on the evaluation of brand image were collected. This was done through a search in the bibliographic database SCOPUS. In this case, only full papers in top academic journals were considered, since this format ensures full investigations, relevant topics, and a relatively brief period of publication. Other formats, such as conference procedures, may include partial data,

and books usually take longer to be published and do not always incorporate empirical research.

Therefore, the search included the keywords "brand image" and "assessment". It was important to restrict the search to those articles that included both terms in their keywords to ensure their relevance in the investigation. In addition, to extend the range of the search, the Oxford American Thesaurus was used to identify synonyms for the keyword assessment. The search was repeated for each of the synonyms identified, as well as for brand image. The final list included assessment, evaluation, rating, estimation, appraisal, analysis, valuation, and estimation. This process resulted in a total of 32 highly relevant papers.

Table 5.1. **Characteristics and variables analyzed in the systematized review**

Variable	Indicators
Paper Identification	Author/s, year of publication, journal, keywords
Scope of Study	Industry of reference, study object (case study or number of brands), its main focus
Theoretical basis	Does the article refer to a clear theoretical framework for Brand Image and Brand Personality? Yes/No
Nature of the study	Qualitative vss. Quantitative
Primary data collection	Survey, Focus Group, Content Analysis, Experiment, Interviews…
Sample	Sample type and size
Statistical Analysis	Index and statistics used to describe the data collected, software utilized when offered
Nature of the hypothesis	Relational or descriptive
Dependent Variable	When relational, which dependent variable was adopted?
Independent Variable	When relational, which independent variable was adopted?
Main results	Where the objectives confirmed or refuted?

Source: Author

To conduct a systematic examination of the articles, analysis criteria were defined. These are summarized in the list of items in Table 5.1. These criteria can be grouped into three different blocks: [1] identifying formal characteristics of the paper (paper identification); [2] exploring the advances to the definition and understanding of the brand image construct (theoretical basis, nature of hypothesis, variables, and results); and [3] delving into the methodological approaches (scope, sample, primary data collection, and statistical analysis).

To address the research questions, an additional analysis was conducted on those studies that concluded with a list of brand associations as indicators of brand image. In these cases, all brand associations highlighted by the authors were copied in a separate document to further analyze them. Specifically, the analysis consisted of investigating the presence of personality traits among these associations.

To this end, a dictionary of synonyms of the original brand personality traits (Aaker, 1997) was created following the method established in previous research (Opoku, 2009; Pereira et al., 2014; Pitt et al., 2007). Using the Oxford American Thesaurus, a total of 566 synonyms of the 51 original personality treats were identified. Finally, the presence of these personality traits (or synonyms) among the associations was evaluated. In addition, this process served as a pilot for the subsequent content analysis, which is explained in section 5.3.3.

Furthermore, a review of the literature on brand personality assessment was also included in the state of the art to complement the knowledge in this regard. The previous systematized review emphasized brand personality assessment to a lesser degree. Since the methodological approach to assess projected personality was one of the main concerns of this study, this section collected an additional accidental sample of study of 8 articles on this topic. These date from 2007 to 2017 and are published in eight different journals.

Even though the sample collection does not correspond to a systematized review, the analysis of the literature was, in fact, examined systematically. The criteria for analysis were summarized in the list of items in Table 5.2, following the main question of this analysis: how do researchers analyze brands' projected personality? Therefore, besides the papers' identification information, the analysis focused on five additional indicators related to their methodological approach.

Table 5.2. **Indicators guiding the analysis of brand personality assessment literature**

Variable	Indicators
Paper Identification	Author(s), year of publication, journal, keywords
Scope of Study	Industry of reference, brands of the sample (case study / number of brands)
Study object	Corpus of study
Primary data collection	Survey, Content Analysis, Experiment, Interviews, etc.
Statistical Analysis	Index and statistics used to describe the data collected, and software used
Dimensions of personality	Dimensions analyzed or obtained after the analysis

Source: Author

5.2. EXPERT QUESTIONNAIRES

Although the state of the art is traditionally understood as a theoretical literature review that sets the context and starting point of the research, the present study also investigated the opinions of expert professionals. As was explained in Chapter 3, by doing this, the aim was to complement the state of the art. Moreover, the purpose was to explore the level of alignment between the professional practices and the theory and perhaps obtain further insights from the field to better understand the topic.

With this purpose, a self-administered online questionnaire was distributed among branding consultants. Specifically, this questionnaire aimed to assess their knowledge about brand image and personality. As a general rule, questionnaires measuring knowledge should never be self-administered, but those assessing experts or key informants' knowledge are an exception (Sudman & Bradburn, 1989). In these cases, it is appropriate to propose an online questionnaire that gives respondents the opportunity to ask parallel questions to colleagues or seek further information. Instead of being inconvenient, this practice enriches responses (Sudman & Bradburn, 1989).

The questionnaire design combined open and closed questions. Closed questions are easier to process since the researcher has already defined the possible answers. This establishes relationships between respondents and makes it easier to code and interpret answers (Berganza Conde & Ruiz San Román, 2005; Fowler, 2009). In contrast, open questions give respondents the chance to freely express their opinions. On the one hand, the researcher aims to explore the experts' opinions on different matters identified during the theoretical review, and is thus not in the position to define the answers in advance. On the other hand, respondents positively perceive the chance to express their own point of view (Sudman & Bradburn, 1989). Therefore, open questions focus on gathering new insights, ideas, concepts, or explanations that have not been identified in the literature review.

Another noteworthy aspect about the questionnaire design is that the questions were ordered from more general to more specific. This was done to prevent respondents from anticipating concepts appearing in some questions that would be important in subsequent questions. Hence, questions referring to branding and positioning were located in the first part of the

questionnaire, followed by those about brand image and personality, and ending with those about the relationship between these two constructs.

One the questionnaire design was finished, a pilot test was conducted to ensure that all the questions were comprehensible. To this end, two experts were surveyed. Based on their responses, some questions were reformulated to make them easier to understand, and one additional question was found to be necessary to gather all the data needed for this phase of the research. All in all, the final questionnaire comprised 18 questions referring to three main areas of knowledge: the understanding of the brand image concept, the understanding of the brand personality concept, and the knowledge about the relationship between those concepts. The final version of the questionnaire is included in the Annexes.

5.3. CONTENT ANALYSIS

Content analysis was used in this study to assess the official tourism websites' communication and destinations' projected image. The official website is a source that DMOs use to communicate all touristic information and showcase the desired destination image. Furthermore, it is a place where tourists should be able to find all information about the destination and its attractions to plan their trip (Luna-Nevarez & Hyman, 2012).

According to Bardin (1986), content analysis is a research methodology or a group of techniques that is highly popular among the different social sciences. It is located at the borderline between quantitative and qualitative methodologies (Bardin, 1986; Berganza Conde & Ruiz San Román, 2005; Ruiz Olabuénaga et al., 1998), and it offers great flexibility to adjust to different research types. Moreover, it is a useful method to analyze communication messages and obtain insightful data, making it possible to evaluate not just meaning but also the formal features of the language (Igartua Perosanz, 2006). It can be defined as any systematic procedure that aims to examine the content of any previously collected information or source to describe and interpret specific data (Berelson, 1952; Igartua Perosanz, 2006; Ruiz Olabuénaga et al., 1998). It has also been described as a methodology that enables the transformation of qualitative information into numeric variables and items to conduct a quantitative analysis (Halliburton & Ziegfeld, 2009).

It is important to highlight that not all kinds of content have the same characteristics. Hence, the object of study may not be a uniform type of content: it may include words, meanings, pictures, symbols, ideas, themes, audiovisual material, websites, or any other format that can be communicated (Neuman, 2014). Furthermore, as Herring (2010) notes, the traditional way to understand content analysis may not be equally effective nowadays, with new information sources and formats increasing exponentially. Websites, for example, are much more complex systems than mere textual content. Therefore, the nature and format of the source are crucial for the method design.

Content analysis has been proven to be a reliable and valid approach for the study of websites (from a branding perspective) (Choi, Lehto, & Oleary, Joseph, 2007; Collis & Hussey, 2009; Halliburton & Ziegfeld, 2009; Kim & Lehto, 2012). However, although a considerable amount of previous research has used this methodology to analyze the destination image and personality communicated via websites, the specific scope of the present study required an ad hoc methodological approach: a combination of specific techniques.

On this basis, content analysis allowed for a systematized examination of the website content, equal for each destination in the sample, to enable posterior comparisons between the cases and the collected data. This entailed a qualitative-quantitative analysis, or what Bardin (1986, p.22) calls "administration of the prove function." To accomplish the objectives set out in this thesis, the content analysis was split into three different phases. Three different content analysis techniques were used to conduct an exhaustive and insightful analysis of the websites:

1. The assessment of the overall quality of the official websites' communication. Websites are complex communication messages that need to be understood from a multidisciplinary perspective (Ip et al., 2010). To this end, the CODETUR project's assessment methodology was used. This is a multidisciplinary methodological approach specifically designed to evaluate the overall quality of tourism websites (Fernández-Cavia et al., 2013; Fernández-Cavia et al., 2014).

2. The analysis of European destinations' projected image. The second phase of the content analysis aimed to examine the core product-related associations projected via the websites. Functional attributes have been proven to be descriptive of brand image and tightly related to competitiveness (Enright & Newton, 2005; Wong & Teoh, 2015). The analysis was based on the categorization of content units and frequency counts using the qualitative analysis software NVivo.

3. The symbolic dimension of the destinations' communication was analyzed using the brand personality construct, given its relevance in the academic literature (Kumar & Nayak, 2014) and its ability to more efficiently attract potential tourists/consumers (Stokburger-Sauer, 2011). As in the second phase, NVivo was used to examine the websites' discourse to identify personality traits based on the use of vocabulary.

The following sections explain the specific content analysis techniques used in each phase of analysis. Though the three phases pursued the same overall goal, different methodological approaches were needed. The study of each construct explored from the textual content of the website, as well as the study of the overall quality of the website, to ensure the representativeness of the textual analysis, must be addressed differently.

5.3.1. CODETUR assessment methodology

As previously discussed, websites are complex information sources consisting of many different kinds of content. Therefore, the assessment methodology developed by Fernández-Cavia, Rovira, Díaz-Luque, and Cavaller (2014) was chosen due to its thoroughness in analyzing the different dimensions influencing the overall quality of a website. It is a multidisciplinary methodology that has been specifically designed to fit the touristic communication specificities. Like many other investigations of touristic website communication (Law et al., 2010), this assessment system allows websites to be analyzed through an indicators checklist: a combined method that entails a mix of counting, user judgment, and numerical computation methods. All in all, it has a final quantitative purpose, and not only sets a systematized procedure but also defines measure variables (Busquets, Medina, & Sort, 2006). Regarding CODETUR's methodology, the checklist and the weighted scores were defined based on experts' judgment (Choi, Lehto, & Morrison, 2007; Fernández-Cavia et al., 2013; Fernández-Cavia et al., 2014; Pedraza-Jimenez, Codina, & Guallar, 2016).

More precisely, the authors propose a system that analyzes websites based on four different dimensions: the persuasive, communicative, relational, and technical dimensions. As shown in Table 5.3, the method uses a total of 127 indicators[18] distributed across 12 categories (three for each dimension) to analyze overall website quality.

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[18] Two indicators were actualized from the original template; see Annexes.

Table 5.3. **Parameters and indicators of the assessment methodology**

Dimensions	Parameters	Indicators	Dimensions	Parameters	Indicators
Technical aspects	Information architecture	11	Relational aspects	Interactivity	12
	Website positioning	6		Social web	8
	User-friendliness & accessibility	19		Mobile communication	5
Communicative aspects	Home page	14	Persuasive aspects	Discourse analysis	8
	Languages	6		Brand handling	13
	Content quality and amount	17		Distribution and marketing	8

Source: WQI template (Annexes)

First, technical parameters assess the construction of the website as a user-friendly platform in terms of usability and architecture. Further, positioning is another fundamental parameter in the technical dimension; it assesses the easy of finding the website through search engines. Several previous studies have investigated the relevance of technical factors for website communication success, as Park and Gretzel (2007) indicate in their meta-analysis. An inadequate technical construction of websites may turn into a negative user experience and, thus, a non-favorable attitude towards the website communication.

Not only technical parameters are key components of website communication success, however. It is also important to consider communicative aspects; in other words, to offer all the information that users expect. Destination websites must offer accurate and complete information regarding their offer characteristics (Choi, Lehto, & Morrison, 2007; Xu Li & Wang, 2010); the information must be accessible in several different languages; and the home page must summarize the most relevant information to guide users through the website (Fernández-Cavia et al., 2014).

Third, relational aspects are also assessed in the proposed method. With the popularization of the term web 2.0, the importance of messages' co-creation has increased. As O'Rielly (2005) notes, the success of web 2.0 relies upon harnessing collective intelligence, users' contributions to messages, and interactive possibilities. Web 2.0 has also had a huge impact in the tourism field (Pedraza-Jimenez et al., 2016). As Huertas, Rovira, and Fernández-Cavia (2011, p.132) state, "interactivity is a key factor in maximizing the visibility of city websites." For these reasons, the assessment methodology analyzes the relationship between website and the social web, the mobile communication possibilities, and the interactivity of the site at three different levels: consumer-message, consumer-marketer, and consumer-consumer interactivity (Cho & Cheon, 2005).

Finally, the persuasive dimension of the website communication is evaluated from the discourse, the brand representation, and distribution and marketing possibilities. This dimension is a highly relevant facet of commercial communication. A destination's official website aims not only to inform users, but also to persuade potential tourists to visit the destination (Fernández-Cavia et al., 2014). Furthermore, some websites offer the possibility to transform this interest in the destination into a final purchase, transaction, ticket booking, browsing for services, etc. (Buhalis, 2000; Xu Li & Wang, 2010). This is also assessed in this methodology. However, in the present study, the most interesting part of this approach is the parameters evaluating the discourse and visual identity.

The subsequent phases of analysis of the projected image are based on the analysis of the textual content of the website. This is a limitation (see sections 5.3.2 and 5.3.3). Textual content is only a part of the overall content, as image and text integration is a key factor of persuasive destination websites (Lee & Gretzel, 2012). Thus, to conduct a valid and useful study, it was necessary in this study to consider audiovisual content as well.

In this regard, the assessment methodology selected in this phase was useful, since discursive analysis and brand handling parameters analyze the quality and expressiveness of the overall discourse considering both text and images, and even audiovisual content. Thus, **positive results for these parameters would support the inference of the results obtained from textual data to the overall website content.** Altogether, these parameters ensure a multidisciplinary and exhaustive analysis of the website content.

Furthermore, all these indicators are linked to a statistical weighting, assigning a value to each indicator based on a relevance criterion, as mentioned before. Thus, this technique simultaneously allows for the analysis of the overall quality of the website using a numerical index, the so-called Website Quality Index [WQI], and the identification of the website quality for each parameter separately.

All in all, the 127 indicators are analyzed for each of the websites in the sample, obtaining qualitative information about each item on the checklist and also a quantitative and comparable measure. This also allows the researcher to identify conflicting items common to different websites, and to identify useful practices that some websites might exhibit. In addition, these indicators are linked to a numerical value that, combined and weighted, gives a

single score reflecting the overall quality of the website. The template of analysis containing all the indicators is included in the Annexes.

Some limitations of content analysis should be addressed here before proceeding to the analysis. One of the main issues for which content analysis is criticized is the influence of the coders' personal judgment and criteria when processing the data. This can seriously affect the reliability of a study (Berganza Conde & Ruiz San Román, 2005; Krippendorff, 2013). Meanings, contexts, and symbolic interpretations of the data can differ from one coder to another. Thus, this problem should be addressed to ensure the scientific validity of any study.

To this end, researchers should pay particular attention to the methodology design; consider the possibility of conducting the analysis using a boarder team of coders; and follow strict and clear instructions to avoid the possible bias in the coding process (Collis & Hussey, 2009; Halliburton & Ziegfeld, 2009; Krippendorff, 2013). In the present study, the coder, in this case the author of this thesis, participated in several training courses conducted by the experts who developed the methodology.

Since this is a multidisciplinary methodology, the coder had to be trained in several topics related to it: technical aspects of the website, discursive analysis, social media integrations, etc. Furthermore, the present author also participated in previous studies using the same methodology approach as part of a research project funded by the Spanish government. Part of this work has already been published (Fernández-Cavia, Vinyals-Mirabent, & López, 2013).

As a final consideration, the assessment of the overall quality of the websites is related objectives 1.1 and 2 (see Chapter 1), but it is also a relevant variable for subsequent analysis. For this investigation, it is important to consider the overall quality of the website communication as a variable that may affect the final projection of the destination image. Although the destinations in the sample are the most popular among tourists and they are expected to be those with more resources, it could be possible that one or more do not invest resources in the official website communication. This phenomenon could considerably affect the results of the deeper analysis of the projected destination image. Therefore, it is a variable that must be considered.

5.3.2. Destination image – Functional dimension

The understanding of destinations' brand image is the core objective of this research. Therefore, even though the above assessment methodology (WQI) includes a parameter called "brand handling", further analysis is needed. The WQI offers a quantitative evaluation of the website quality in terms of visual brand identity and logo presence. However, this thesis aims to further analyze brand image as a living system full of interconnected meanings and symbols (Kapferer, 2012).

Therefore, the second phase of content analysis delved into the image projected via the website. It aimed to identify the most prevalent associations on the website by categorizing and measuring the amount of content regarding different functional attributes and symbolic associations. On the one hand, the symbolic dimension was studied via brand personality, and the methodological approach for this analysis is explained in section 5.3.3. On the other hand, regarding the functional dimension, Keller (1993) describes brand image as a construct comprising attributes, benefits, and attitudes. Since this study focused on projected image, it was not possible to assess benefits and attitudes held in consumers' minds, as these are outcomes of an overall evaluation of the brand (Kapferer, 2012; Keller, 1993; Schmitt, 2012).

Instead, attributes have been the focus of several investigations regarding projected image. Thus, this phase of the research focused on the projection of core attributes, which are tangible associations projected on the website. Keller's (1993) framework proposes two kinds of attributes: product-related and non-product-related. The main interest of this study was in the analysis of product-related associations, but non-product-related associations were also considered.

Thus, the investigation was designed to identify functional attributes related to the destinations' offer, as a kind of associations considered to be relevant components of the projected brand image. According to Echtner and Ritchie (1993), destination image can be described using functional/psychological attributes. Brands usually start projecting functional associations and then, with time, move towards more symbolic ones, such as personality (Kapferer, 2012). Furthermore, functional attributes have been shown to be relevant brand image associations that are linked to brands' competitiveness (Enright & Newton, 2005; Wong & Teoh, 2015) and to consumers' overall brand image perception (Torres & Bijmolt, 2009; Zenker & Beckmann, 2013).

All in all, this phase of the analysis aimed to uncover the most prevalent attributes in the official website content through frequency counts, patterns, and search for words. The research followed a similar methodological approach to previous investigations (Campbell et al., 2010; Pitt et al., 2007; Tsiotsou, 2012; Youn Kim & Yoon, 2013): an analysis of the websites' textual content based on frequency counts that enable the most prevalent topics on the web to be highlighted.

At this point, it is necessary to consider the importance of working with content units and not with overall word counts. As mentioned in the theoretical background chapter, users' behavior on websites is not linear: they do not read each page on the website from beginning to end before continuing; instead, they navigate (Morville & Rosenfeld, 2006). While casuistry about how users navigate on a website is highly diverse, it is generally accepted that they inspect several pages of the website until they reach the expected content and either their informational needs are satisfied or they abandon their search (Radinsky et al., 2013).

Since the main goal of the present study is to assess destinations' image projected through overall website content, the focus was on users' exposure to different topics on the pages, and not on the volume of content regarding one topic on a single page. In other words, the approach was to analyze the visibility given by DMOs to each category, and thus users' exposure to specific attributes when navigating on the website.

Furthermore, there is a significant amount of academic literature on content analysis addressing the importance of defining a unit of content. While authors define content units in many different terms, the present author understands them as independent propositions representing a single idea (Strijbos, Martens, Prins, & Jochems, 2006). As Neuendorf (2017, p.226) notes, "it is up to the researcher to decide which units are appropriate for answering particular hypotheses and research questions of interest." Therefore, considering that content units within interactive media are not clearly typified (Neuendorf, 2017; Strijbos et al., 2006), in the present study each content unit was distinguished by its single communicative purpose and by its specific graphic design identifying it as a unit.

Finally, although the analysis aimed to identify the different brands' associations, the focus was not on individual descriptions of each destination in the sample. Instead, the aim was to identify similarities and differences between the urban European destinations' images. Hence, this study was not concerned with proper names, since they do not enable comparisons.

Instead, broader categories that may include similar attributes common to different destinations were crucial to identifying common points across destinations' official communication.

5.3.2.1. Category definitions

Classifying the associations into broader categories was essential to compare the different destinations in the sample. Thus, the correct definition and delimitation of categories was a key phase of this research. Krippendorff (2013) highlights that categories must group together content units with the same meaning, and at the same time be clearly different from other categories.

In this regard, despite the wide range of literature analyzing tourism offer, there is no universal set of attributes relevant to describing destinations' functional image (Enright & Newton, 2005). Different literature reviews on the subject have identified a considerable diversity of items and labels to describe destinations' offers (Enright & Newton, 2005; Hong-bumm, 1998). Therefore, academic articles that propose a list of destinations' attributes were thoroughly examined to define a broad categorization useful for the purpose of this study.

In this process, the present author identified several studies proposing a listing of the main functional attributes associated with destinations. This was achieved in three different steps. Firstly, some articles were identified while conducting the literature reviews in Chapters 2 and 3. Secondly, an additional search was conducted using the academic database SCOPUS using the keywords "destination branding" and "attributes". Finally, the author also considered references within the identified papers pointing to studies matching the criteria: a snowball compilation. After a first inspection, only those articles explicitly providing a list of attributes were selected. A total of nine studies, shown in Table 5.4, were found useful in forming the basis of the attributes' categorization.

As shown in Table 5.4, these studies differ in different aspects: different case studies, different methodologies, and different numbers of identified attribute categories. Therefore, all the attributes and categories of attributes were analyzed and regrouped into broader categories common to all studies. This process of synthesizing and regrouping considered the following characteristics of the previous lists:

Table 5.4. **Previous investigations offering a set of functional attributes associated with destinations**[19]

Ref	Reference			Scope		Methodology	Nº attributes
[1]	Echtner & Ritchie	1993	Journal of Travel Research	Country	Theoretical Case study: Jamaica	Lit. review Focus group Questionnaire	16
[2]	Beerli & Martín	2004	Annals of Tourism Research	Theoretical		Lit. review	9
[3]	Enright & Newton	2005	Journal of Travel Research	Urban dest.	Multiple cases: Asia Pacific cities	Lit. review Survey	15
[4]	Prayag	2007	Tourism	Urban dest.	Multiple cases: South Africa cities	Lit. review Interviews	10
[5]	Choi, Lehto & Morrison	2007	Tourism Management	Urban dest.	Case study: Macau	Content analysis & categorization	11
[6]	Tang, Choi, Morrison & Lehto	2009	Journal of Vacation Marketing	Urban dest.	Case study: Macau	Content analysis & categorization	9
[7]	Mazanec & Wöber	2010	Book: SpringerWienNewYork	Urban dest.	Case study: Vienna	Survey	23
[8]	Wong & Teoh	2015	Journal of Destination Marketing & Management	Urban dest.	Multiple cases: Malaysian cities	Lit. review	32
[9]	Echtner & Ritchie	2003	Journal of Tourism Studies	Theoretical		Lit. review	34

Source: Author

- Label diversity. Different investigations use different names to identify the same attribute. For example, landscape, sightseeing, visual appeal, scenery, and bird's eye are different labels used to designate the landscape and natural environment category of attributes. All of them are considered to be part of a single category: in this case, "landscape & natural resources".

- Different approaches to the same attributes. Some studies highlight the same attribute more than once with a different qualitative approach. For example, Mazanec and Wöber (2010) identify booking accommodation as a relevant attribute up to four times: in terms of overall quality of accommodation, comfort and cleanliness of accommodation, low-priced accommodation, and low-priced package with transport and accommodation. In the present study, all were reduced to a single category, called "accommodation", corresponding to the functional attribute and omitting the qualitative approach. At this stage, the interest was in the subjects of destinations' discourse, the core attributes, and not in how they described those attributes.

- Different study, same list. Three of the sample studies are related. Firstly, Echtner and Ritchie's studies from 1993 and 2003 are part of the same ongoing research. The 2003 publication is a reprint of an article published in 1991, where the authors propose an initial

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[19] Echtner and Ritchie's (1993) study highlights 35 different items counting both symbolic and functional attributes. Only 16 of them are closer to the functional dimension.

list of attributes. In the 1993 publication, the authors propose a final list after testing it in the analysis of the Jamaican case. Secondly, Wong and Teoh (2015) use the same list proposed by Echtner and Ritchie (2003), and only slightly adjust it to their study. Given these facts, Echtner and Ritchie's (2003) list of attributes is not considered in the analysis to avoid biasing the categories' unification, since the same scale is used in Wong and Teoh (2015).

- Cross-case attributes. Most of the analyzed articles focus on case studies. Therefore, to obtain an overall categories list that would be useful for more than a single case, only the attributes highlighted by more than two studies were considered significant and valid across cases.

- New categories. Since the sample of the present study differs from those of previous investigations, there was the possibility of identifying new attributes. Hence, the present author did not want to narrow the study to only already identified categories. For this reason, during the analysis, a category called "others" was included for those content units that did not match previous categories. This was subsequently explored and some interesting data was found.

Taking into account the above considerations, the analysis of the literature resulted in 17 different categories common to different studies: landscape and natural resources; tourism attractions and activities; architecture and heritage; local culture and history; events, fairs, and festivals; food and drink; shopping; nightlife; sports; social life and locals; infrastructure and transportation; accommodation; tourist products and packages; climate; service; political and economic factors; and safety. This list served as the starting point of the analysis of product-related attributes associated with urban destinations.

Before concluding, it is necessary to note that two additional categories were included in the project after the pilot study, also represented in Figure 5.1 in grey. After the pilot, the category "others" was explored and, together, coders identified interesting data worth including in the final analysis. On the one hand, some references to spas, relaxation, or massages emerged from the content. These topics were grouped in a "wellness" category to complete the categories' representativeness of the offer. Therefore, the final analysis assessed the relevance of this category in destinations' communication.

Figure 5.1. **Resulting product-related categories**

Landscape & natural resources

[1][8] National parks / wilderness activities

[1][8] Beaches

[1][8] Scenary, natural attractions

[2] Natural environment

[2] Natural resources

[3] Visual appeal

[3] Well-known landmarks

[4] Variety of tourists attractions and natural scenery

[5] Parks and gardens (places for relaxing from city life)

[5] Bird's eye or natural views

[6] Sightseeing

[7] Landscape, nature

Events, fairs & festivals

[1][8] Fairs, exhibits, festivals

[3] Special events

[3]Interesting festivals

[3] Music and performances

[5] Entertainment and gaming

[5]Cultural events and facilities (museums, art centers, concerts, etc)

[7] Fairs and exhibitions

Shopping

[1][8] Shopping facilities

[5][6] Shopping

Cultural attractions & activities

[1][8] Tourist sites / activities

[1] Historic sites/ museums

[2] Tourist leisure and recreation

[3] Dedicated tourism attractions

[3] Museums and galleries

[4] Variety of activities

[5] Cultural events and facilities (museums, art centers, concerts, etc)

[6] Entertainment

[7] Culture, art & entertainment event

[7] Quality of hiking and walking paths

Leisure attractions & activities

Food & drink

[1][8] Accommodation, restaurants

[3] Cuisine

[5] Local cuisine and dinning

[6] Food

[7] Quality of food & beverages

[8] Different cuisine, food and drink

Nightlife

[1][4][8] Nightlife and entertainment

[3] Nightlife

Social life & locals

[1][8] Hospitality/ friendliness/ receptiveness

[1][8] Atmosphere

[2] Social environment

[2] Atmosphere of the place

[3] Local way of life

[4] Friendly people

[5] People and local residents

[7] Social life

[7] Friendlyiness of the local population

[7] Communication with locals

Architecture & heritage

[1][8] Architecture, buildings

[3] Interesting architecture

[5] Historic, buildings and heritage

[7] City architecture

Local culture & history

[1][8] Customs/culture

[2] Culture, history and art

[3] Different culture

[3] Notable history

[4] Culture

[6] Description

[6] History

Infrastructure & transportation

[1][8]Local infrastructure/ transportation

[2] General infrasestructure

[4] Transport and infraestructure facilities

[5] Tourism facilities and infraestructure

[6] Transportation

[7] Reachability of the region

[7] Low-priced transport

[8] Accessibility

Accommodation

[1][8] Accommodation, restaurants

[4] Variety of accommodation

[5] Tourism facilities and infrastructure

[6] Accomodation

[7] Overall quality of accommodation

[7] Confort & cleanliness of accommodation

[7] Low priced accomodation

[7] Low-priced package with transport & accommodation

Sports

[1] Sports facilities/ activities

[5] Sports/recreation activities & festivals

[7] Sports facilities

Tourist information & packages

[1][8] Facilities for information and tours

[2]Tourist information

[5] Others (maps, flags, and other images)

[6] Tourism

[7] All inclusive package

Climate

[1][3][8] Climate

[4] Good weather

[7] Weather, climate

[7] Bad weather facilities

Service

[1][8] Quality of service

[4] Service level

[7]Friendly service staff

Political & economic factors

[1][8] Economic developement, affluence

[1][8] Political Stability

[2] Political and economic factors

Safety

[1][8] Personal safety

[3][4] Safety

Wellness

Added/modified after the pilot study

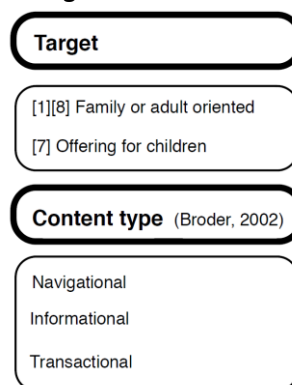Source: Author
Database: see Table 5.4

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On the other hand, the coders also agreed on the division of the original "tourist attractions and activities" into two differentiated categories: "cultural and leisure attractions" and "activities". Coders stressed the difference between content related to casinos, theme parks, swimming pools in summer, etc., and content related to theaters, museums, cultural events, etc., which were originally part of the same category. Considering that one of the goals of this study was to explore the relationship between personality and product-related associations, coders hypothesized that the difference between these two types of offer might have an effect. Therefore, in the final study, this content was considered as two separate categories even though previous research handled it as one.

The **19 resulting categories are highlighted in Figure 5.1 in bold**. Below each category, the figure displays the attributes extracted from the literature that the present author considered to be part of the same attribute category. Each of these attributes is identified with a corresponding reference to the original study, matching the numeration in Table 5.4. For example, the attribute "[3] cuisine" is highlighted in [3] Enright and Newton's (2005) research and included in the "food & drink" category.

Once all the product-related categories were correctly defined, two additional groups of categories were added, as seen in Figure 5.2. Firstly, given the importance of personalization in website communication, one non-product-related attribute was also considered: target. A group of categories related to tourist profiles (user imagery) was included in the study.

This decision is also supported by some of the studies in Table 5.4. Some attributes analyzed in the literature review included "family" or "for children", which are types of annotations that are related to user imagery attributes. In these cases, the messages were directed to a specific tourist profile. For these reasons, the category "target" was also included, referring not only to family but also to any other content that specified characteristics of the tourist and his or her style of travel (i.e. couple, with kids, gay, luxury, young, disabled…).

Figure 5.2. **Complementary categories**

Target

[1][8] Family or adult oriented

[7] Offering for children

Content type (Broder, 2002)

Navigational

Informational

Transactional

Source: Author

Secondly, it was also useful to incorporate additional categories describing the typology of each content unit. As noted in the previous section, this study analyzed the prevalence of content units and not overall words counts; however, not all content units have the same

characteristics. Even though previous literature supports this decision to assess the visibility of different product-related categories within a website's discourse, it does mean that information about content units' characteristics can be missed. For instance, some units might contain a higher volume of content than others.

For this reason, a categorization was included to distinguish different types of content units: informational, navigational, and transactional. This taxonomy was adopted from the one proposed by Broder (2002) for web search. While the original research explored search engine queries, it is also applicable to describe the different content unit characteristics within a single website. For the present study, the three categories are described as follows.

- Informational units are the main content units, usually occupying the main body text, and usually located on the top left side of the screen (Miller, 2005). These offer a greater amount of information about a precise topic and are usually confined to a single page, even though they can present some links within the discourse. As Broder (2002) highlights, this is static information (Broder, 2002). In other words, more information about a single topic is included on a single page; the discourse starts and ends on the same page.

- Navigational units work as a bridge between the introduction to a certain topic and the related informational content page. Certainly, these units show a lower volume of content, but they grant more visibility to the topic throughout the website: these content units are usually located on different pages to guide more users towards the topic. Navigational units are characterized by a lower amount of content, and they aim to engage users to keep exploring specific topics on other pages that often contain informational content.

- Transactional units, in contrast, promote further interaction between users and content with additional operations. In this case, these units refer mainly to the commercialization of services and products, such as booking services, tickets reservations and purchases, online shopping, etc.

This final categorization provides some additional information about the characteristics of the coded content units. By looking at this information, the specific purpose of the content and the volume of content expected to be contained in this unit can be inferred in each reference.

Target and content type categories are considered complementary to product-related attributes. In other words, all content units are coded exclusively in one product-related category, but they must also be associated with one content type node and can also be coded

at one target node, if necessary. Each website's pages were coded by associating all content units to at least two attribute categories, product-related and content type, and, optionally, at an additional target node. Subsequently, counting the number of content units linked to each node allowed for the assessment of their prevalence on different pages of the website. All in all, counting the amount of content units dedicated to each category is a relevant indicator of the intentionality of the DMOs, and a significant sign of the projected image (Stepchenkova & Zhan, 2013).

Nevertheless, some limitations of this phase of content analysis must be noted:

- Firstly, this study only analyzed manifest content. This raises the ongoing discussion about the importance of analyzing manifest and latent content in textual information analysis (Bos & Tarnai, 1999; Krippendorff, 2013; Malterud, 2001). However, considering that this investigation focused on a more quantitative content analysis perspective, the manifest content analysis approach was judged to be suitable to achieve the research goals. In addition, previous research supports this decision (Berganza Conde & Ruiz San Román, 2005; Li & Stepchenkova, 2011; Stepchenkova, Kirilenko, & Morrison, 2008; Stepchenkova & Zhan, 2013).

- Secondly, similar to in the WQI analysis phase, the influence of personal judgment on the coding process must be minimized (Krippendorff, 2013). To this end, two measures were adopted: analysis software was used to minimize human errors, and a coding pilot was carried out by two coders to unify criteria. The team of coders was compound by the author of the present thesis and another coder with a superior degree in communication sciences.

5.3.2.2. Computer-assisted content analysis

To address some of the limitations of content analysis, the use of NVivo software was found to be useful. Computer-assisted content analysis has been recognized as a more reliable way to conduct a content analysis than human coding, and it also enables the analysis of larger quantities of data (Govers et al., 2007; Kim & Lehto, 2012; Krippendorff, 2013).

As Weitzman and Miles (1995) point out, it is difficult to determine the best software for computer-assisted content analysis. There are many useful instruments on the market, and

corporations are constantly updating them and developing new ones. Thus, the selection of the specific software depends exclusively on the specificities of the research.

Some of the criteria that should be taken into consideration when selecting the software are different sources, the structure of the data, inductive or deductive procedures, type of coding, whether the data is qualitative only or includes numbers, and type of data (Weitzman & Miles, 1995). On this basis, the software was selected to handle a large amount of data from different sources. The software availability and accessibility to the author was also considered. Furthermore, considering that each website in the sample has a different structure and hierarchy, the software should offer a flexible workspace, which would also be useful to analyze unstructured data.

It is known that interactive media includes a variety of interlinked content types (Neuendorf, 2017; Strijbos et al., 2006). Thus, each content unit was expected to comprise text, images, links, etc., which combined would contribute to a single message. In this regard, it was crucial for the software of analysis to allow the user to work with documents that respect pages' layouts, as pdfs do, since the coders would have to assess what was part of the same content unit.

For all these reasons, the Nvivo software, version 10, was chosen to conduct the analysis. Nvivo is a highly flexible qualitative data analysis software that is useful to manage, shape, and examine any kind of multimedia content (Bazeley & Jackson, 2013). The QSR International (2015) Nvivo Team (22/07/2015) defines the software as a "platform for analyzing all forms of unstructured data. Quickly interrogate data using powerful search, query and visualization tools." The team also notes that the software "provides a workspace and tools to enable you to easily work through your information." Furthermore, version 10 (for Windows) has been improved specifically to adjust to world-wide, digital, and social media content, besides other upgrades (Bazeley & Jackson, 2013). It was found to be intuitive and easy-to-use software that fit the project requirements and made it possible to analyze a large amount of data, a factor that would increase the reliability of the study.

Nvivo software allowed coding errors to be minimized, but the coding of product-related categories was still a manual process; therefore, human decisions, judgment, and criteria might bias the results (Krippendorff, 2013). As mentioned earlier, each website in the sample had different characteristics: different types of content, different organization, different

grouping criteria, etc. This might confuse coders. Hence, to further minimize human error, two coders instead of one completed the coding process.

5.3.2.3. Two coders, a pilot study, and a reliability test

Following the literature on content analysis limitations (Bos & Tarnai, 1999; Krippendorff, 2013; Neuendorf, 2017), three main measures were used to reduce human error. Firstly, a coding book was provided to both coders to unify their coding criteria. This document contained guidelines regarding what was considered a content unit, as well as a description of each category. Secondly, the two coders conducted a pilot study and discussed the results. Finally, an inter-coder reliability test was conducted.

Regarding the first measure, the main researcher created a "directions for coders" document detailing the characteristics of the coding process. These instructions detailed the following matters (the complete document can be found in the Annexes):

- Layout area. Only the area between the main horizontal menu (excluding the menu) and the footer (not including site maps or other links in the footer) was coded. In the case of Milan's website, the area was limited by the header (top banner) and the footer, excluding the vertical menu on the left side.
- Content excluded. Within the delimited area, the following content was not coded:
  - Advertising banners or content indicated as paid content, such as native advertising.
  - Any content that was not translated into English.
  - Secondary menus that may appear after users start navigating. The main menu of some websites may expand once one starts to navigate (e.g. www.prague.eu).
- Main content categories. All product-related categories were described and a list was provided of specific attributes included in each category. Some examples were also added to orientate the coders. All content units had to be linked to one product-related category.
- Type of content. Similarly, each piece of content also had to be coded at a content type node. Coders had to indicate whether the content had an informational, navigational or transactional purpose.
- Target category. As mentioned before, the coders might have to assign some content units to a secondary node. This was only coded when the content explicitly referred to a tourist profile. Every time a new tourist profile appeared, an ad hoc node had to be created.

Figure 5.3. **Example website layout analysis**

Source: Author

To ensure that all the instructions were understood, some examples were initially discussed between the two coders. As Figure 5.3 illustrates with an example, together the coders identified all the instructions in some practical examples.

As a second measure to reduce human error, a coding pilot was conducted by both raters simultaneously. A sub-sample of pages was selected for this purpose, consisting of all home pages plus the three first pages from their first level and the first six pages from their second level: a total of 120 pages. However, only 112 were eventually used in the pilot study, 14.4% of the total sample, for two main reasons: downloading issues and non-existent pages. On the one hand, defectively downloaded pages were downloaded again using the copy made in HTTrack[20]. On the other hand, some websites' architecture offered less than three pages from the first level.

After obtaining the firsts results, the coders' agreement was assessed in a qualitative manner. After coding the first 10 pages of the sample, corresponding to pages of Amsterdam's website, the two coders met to address remaining doubts. To this end, content coded with Nvivo was examined.

Figure 5.4. **NVivo layout; comparison of different coders' work**
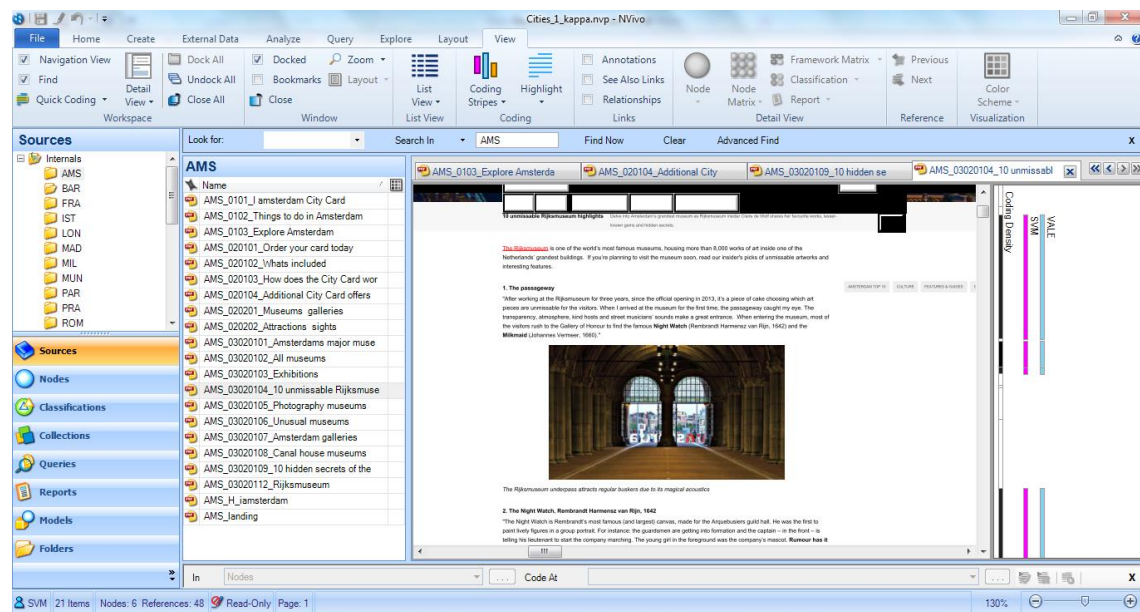
Source: Author

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[20] HTTrack downloads website pages to store all the information that a website showcases at a specific moment – in this case, during the analysis period.

Nvivo 10 includes the possibility to track different coders' behavior and later compare their coding (Bazeley & Jackson, 2013). Thus, the first phase of the pilot concluded with a qualitative assessment of each person's codification. As seen in Figure 5.4, Nvivo identifies the content identified by different coders with different color stripes; in this case, the pink (author) and blue (support coder) stripes match perfectly, indicating agreement between the coders. All blocks of content that were not equally coded by both raters were identified and discussed to address doubts and clarify the criteria. Subsequently, the coders proceeded to code all pages of the sub-sample.

Finally, once all the pilot pages were coded by both coders separately, their projects were merged into one and an inter-coder reliability test was conducted. As Neuendorf (2017) states, without reliability, content analysis has no value. NVivo allows the user to calculate both the percentage of agreement between coders and the Kappa coefficient per analyzed page. This coefficient is well accepted in quantitative research in social sciences (Krippendorff, 2013; Neuendorf, 2017) because it takes into account probabilities; it indicates the level of agreement with a number from 0 (no agreement at all) to 1 (maximum agreement). In this specific case, the average Kappa coefficient of all analyzed pages indicated a **0.93 agreement**.

5.3.3. Destination image – Symbolic dimension

The final stage of content analysis focused on the brand personality assessment. Similar to the study of functional attributes, the study of the symbolic dimension of destination image, which is destination personality was based on a methodological approach proposed in previous studies (Campbell et al., 2010; Pitt et al., 2007; Tsiotsou, 2012; Youn Kim & Yoon, 2013) and used NVivo 10 to conduct the analysis.

The following describes the process of developing a thesaurus of brand personality traits. This part of the study followed previous work on destination personality assessment based on a textual content analysis, proposed for the first time by Pitt et al. (2007). The proposed methodological approach's baseline can be summarized as the possibility of assessing a brand's personality by identifying synonyms of personality traits within a content unit – in other words, identifying the particular words that have been selected to "talk" about the brand and that are related to a specific personality dimension. Other researchers have also

applied content analysis to the study of brand personality following this method (De Moya & Jain, 2013; Kim & Lehto, 2012; Opoku, 2009; Pereira et al., 2014).

Specifically, the methodological approach consisted of the creation of a thesaurus of Aaker's (1997) proposed personality traits. Put differently, for each trait of brand personality identified in the original study, synonyms were chosen that expressed the same idea in different words. The goal was to identify a broad register of diverse and creative synonyms that might be used in a specific text and context to express the same idea. Aaker's (1997) five-dimensional scale, associated with 42 personality characteristics as shown in section 2, in Table 2.1, served as the starting point of the thesaurus.

In this investigation, the list of synonyms was created using the large lexical database for English, WordNet 3.1. Although previous studies have built their thesaurus utilizing the Encyclopedia Britannica's thesaurus function (Pitt et al., 2007), WordNet was found to be more suitable here. The software offers a large lexical database of English developed and supported by Princeton University. While it resembles a thesaurus, grouping nouns, verbs, adjectives, and adverbs based on their meanings, it is significantly different: it also takes into account the conceptual-semantic relations among words (www.wordnet.princeton.edu). The precision with which synonyms are offered, grouped into sets of cognitive synonyms called synsets, enables more precision in choosing the most suitable words. In addition, WordNet is an open access tool available online.

Once the thesaurus was created, an exhaustive search was conducted of the vocabulary within the content to analyze. In previous studies this process has been automatically completed by software; however, in the present case, NVivo 10 was used to conduct a semi-automatic analysis. Once the software had identified all the vocabulary related to personality traits, the author manually checked the most repeated words in their context to ensure that there were no interferences with other acceptations. In other words, the content units containing the most prevalent personality-related terms were manually assessed to confirm the sense of the term or, otherwise, manually exclude certain words from the results.

5.3.3.1. Thesaurus compilation

To build the personality trait thesaurus, different phases of coding and testing were followed. The goal of this process was to build five independent lists or entries, one for each personality dimension, comprising synonyms for all the related personality traits.

In a first step, two different researchers familiar with the topic of brand personality selected the most suitable synonyms [phase 1]. Then, in a second phase, both lists were compared and merged into a single list [phase 2]. In a third phase, the list was then reduced by eliminating those words identified in the same stemming group [phase 3]. Finally, the lists for the five dimensions were cross-checked and duplications were eliminated (polysemy was disambiguated) [phase 4].

Figure 5.5. **Wordnet online browser and the information it gives**

Source: Author - Screenshot from http://wordnetweb.princeton.edu/perl/webwn

Phase 1

To compile the most suitable synonyms for each dimension, two researchers simultaneously searched for the maximum number of synonyms for the 42 personality traits plus the label of the five personality dimensions: sincerity, excitement, competence, sophistication, and

ruggedness. Thus, a search was conducted for synonyms of 47 words/lemmas. For each lemma searched, Wordnet identifies different semantic contexts linked to the word or, as they are referred to in the software, different synsets. Simultaneously, each synset is also tied to a group of other lemmas sharing the same semantic context or, commonly speaking, synonyms (see Figure 5.5).

The first step in the synonym selection was to consider the suitability of each synset definition in the specific context of this study. The researchers evaluated the appropriateness of these definitions as proofs of personality traits in a specific context. Those synsets and their related synonyms that were found significant for the research purpose were included in the list.

In addition, Wordnet highlights other related synsets that are not directly linked to the word under scope but are semantically close to it (in Figure 5.5, this corresponds to the section "see also"). These synsets and their related lemmas were also considered in the compilation. All in all, the first phase concluded with two separate lists of synonyms for each dimension, as seen in Table 5.5.

Table 5.5. **Number of synonyms for each dimension**

Dimension	Coder 1	Coder 2
Sincerity	342	335
Excitement	395	375
Competence	260	262
Sophistication	148	192
Ruggedness	192	172

Source: Author

Phase 2

The resulting lists were compared and merged into a single one for each dimension. Only the words proposed by both researchers were automatically included in the final list. Those words included only by one researcher were directly excluded or further discussed by both researchers, and finally accepted or rejected. The coders agreed on 94.38% of words. This second phase concluded with a thesaurus comprising 1,181 words including nouns, verbs, and adjectives.

Phase 3

NVivo software allows the user to execute search queries to identify the presence of given words or expressions within a specific amount of content. An interesting and relevant option for this study was the possibility of executing a search query to identify words with the same root: the stemming words option. Given a single word, this would make it possible to identify words beyond verb tenses, number limitations, etc.

To use this option, the list of synonyms had to be further synthesized. Using NVivo stemming function, each personality dimension's group of words was tested separately to identify duplications. The words identified by the software as part of the same root were eliminated. The example in Table 5.6 illustrates how this process works. This step prevented possible duplications from occurring during the succeeding analysis.

Table 5.6. **Before and after synthesizing – example**

| Excitation Excite Excitement Exciting | → | Exciting |
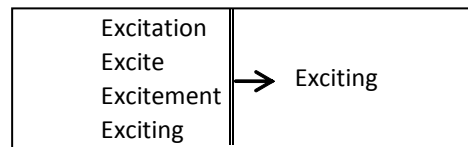
Source: Author

The process highlighted numerous matches between words, reducing the list to 1,003 in total. Furthermore, a final examination of the duplications across the dimensions' groups of words underlined several overlaps across dimensions. Polysemy is a major issue that is considered is several fields, mainly in linguistics, and also carefully addressed in computerized natural language processing. Likewise, to successfully conduct the subsequent computerized analysis in this study, this issue had to be addressed.

Phase 4

Like in any automatic text analysis for large amounts of content, assigning words to a single dimension or category entails a bias in the analysis due to word polysemy. To minimize the effect of this limitation, a similarity test was useful. Similarity identifies the semantic distance between two given words. While WordNet itself recommends Ted Pedersen's algorithm extension to identify the semantic relatedness between words based on the WordNet database, it is only valid for nouns and verbs. Since the majority of overlaps in the personality thesaurus corresponded to adjectives, a different algorithm was needed.

Therefore, the Word Embedding technique was used for the word disambiguation. It is a distributional semantics technique that uses vector representation to map words in space (Mikolov, Chen, Corrado, & Dean, 2013). In this representation, semantically similar words are located near each other. By analyzing a large corpus of website content, the algorithm identifies words appearing in the same sources and in similar contexts. Accordingly, based on their location in space, it concludes with a numerical value from -1 to 1 to measure the semantic distance, similar to Ted Pedersen's algorithm, where -1 is not similar and 1 is the maximum similarity.

Besides its easy-to-interpret results, Word Embedding also has another interesting advantage: it is an algorithm based on contextual similarity. The algorithm is built from the hypothesis that words that appear in the same context share semantic meaning. As Jaron Collins (2016) notes, this "contextual similarity is a more expressive representation."

Thus, to disambiguate the words and identify their most probable meaning, the similarity of each polysemic word was tested for each personality trait in dispute. To obtain a more reliable value, the similarity test was calculated not only for the original personality trait but also for its previously identified synonyms. Afterwards, the average score was calculated. To make this clearer, Figure 5.6 proposes an example of the process.

The word "graceful" was identified as synonym of the personality trait "cheerful", included in the sincerity dimension, and as synonym of "charming", included in the sophistication dimension. Thus, to include it in a single list, the process aimed to identify its most probable sense. The semantic similarity was calculated for each of the words included as synonyms for cheerful (i.e. beaming, glad, smiling, etc.) and for charming (i.e. enamor, pleasing, delightful, etc.), resulting in a similarity score for each (*n* in Figure 5.6). Finally, the average score revealed the similarity degree. In this case, the word "graceful" was more closely related to "charming" with a score of 0.126, and it was therefore included in the list of sophistication synonyms. The similarity between "graceful" and "cheerful" was 0.124.

Figure 5.6. **Polysemy disambiguation process**
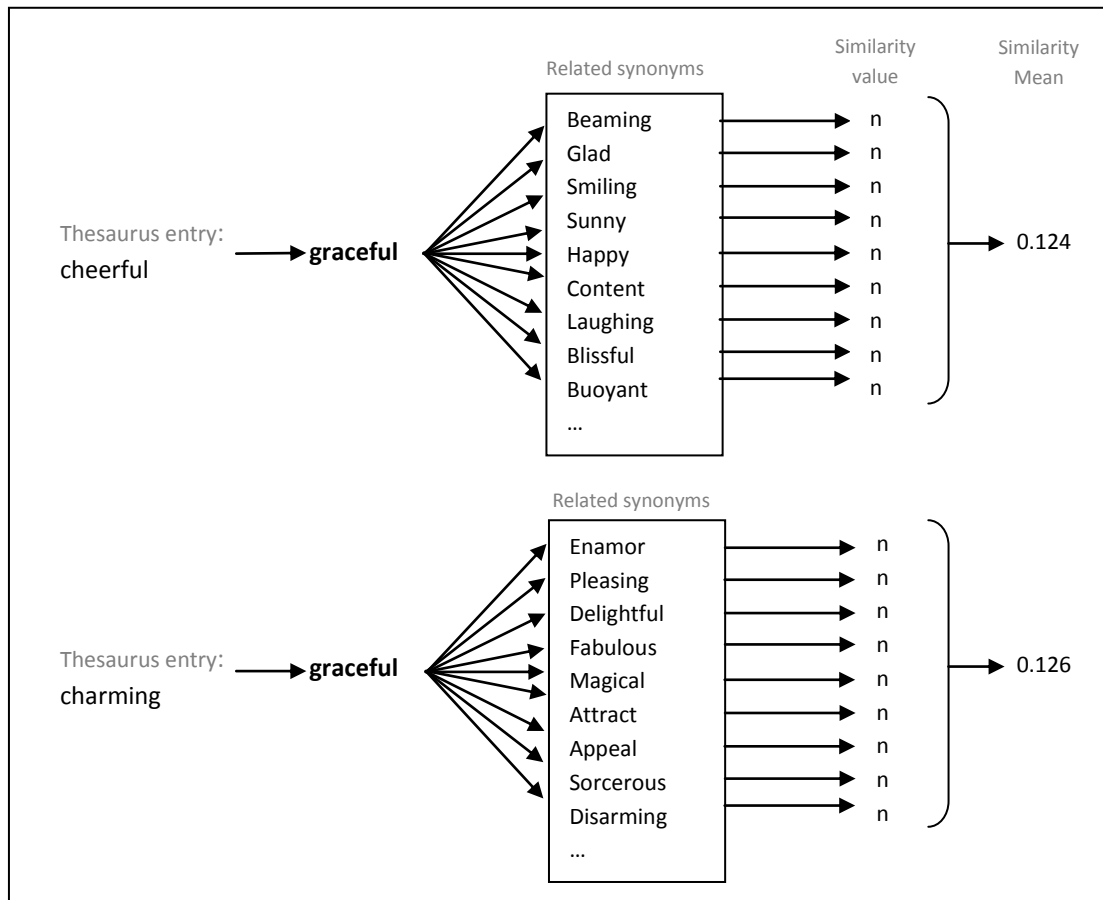
Source: Author

All in all, this process identified **928 suitable synonyms included in the thesaurus** and distributed across the five personality dimensions. Specifically, the dimensions of sincerity, excitement, and competence were each linked to 21% of the synonyms, while sophistication and ruggedness were related to the remaining 36%, 18% each dimension. The lists were transformed into a text file and uploaded to NVivo software for further analysis.

CHAPTER 6: RESULTS

6. RESULTS

The present doctoral thesis divides the results of the empirical research and analysis into three different sub-chapters: overall, descriptive, and relational results. The first focuses on the general descriptive data obtained directly from the different methodological techniques. It summarizes early results obtained from content analysis, meaning the findings from the coding process and overall average scores.

Next, the second results section showcases the most relevant outcomes obtained from the analysis as a portrayal of the different brands' image and their websites' communication. This section contains the results gathered for each city in the sample as the first step to map the most dominant European urban destinations in a competitive context. It was found to be imperative to understand the communication of each destination separately before continuing with further comparative analysis.

Finally, the third section crosses the most relevant variables and cases to better comprehend the overall state of European urban destinations' communication. Thus, the section compares the results of the different websites of the sample to identify their similarities and differences. Destinations are mapped in a competitive context and the relationship between brand associations and personality is explored.

6.1. OVERALL RESULTS

This section first presents the overall results of the process of analysis. On the one hand, it contains the average scores gathered from the Website Quality Index [WQI] analysis to identify the overall quality of the websites of the European destinations in the sample. On the other hand, it summarizes the early findings obtained from the coding process in NVivo. While details about each destination's projected image are presented in the next section, some interesting general findings and average scores are explained here.

6.1.1. Website communication quality: WQI

The WQI assessment methodology was used to identify the overall quality of websites' communication. Websites are complex communication sources, so their multidisciplinary evaluation was necessary before proceeding with textual analysis. While this study is mainly concerned with brand image embedded within the website discourse, analyzing only this discourse without taking into account other variables that affect website communication would result in misleading conclusions.

Hence, this stage allowed the researcher to assess how websites perform across disciplines to control for different dimensions of website communication that could cause certain results. By weighting the results obtained for each parameter, the analysis concluded with an average score indicating the overall quality of the official websites. More specifically, this single score summarizes the results obtained at 123 different indicators related to the 12 different parameters. Figure 6.1 below illustrates the WQI for the destinations of the sample together with the average score, indicated with a yellow line.

Figure 6.1. **WQI for the most popular European urban destinations**
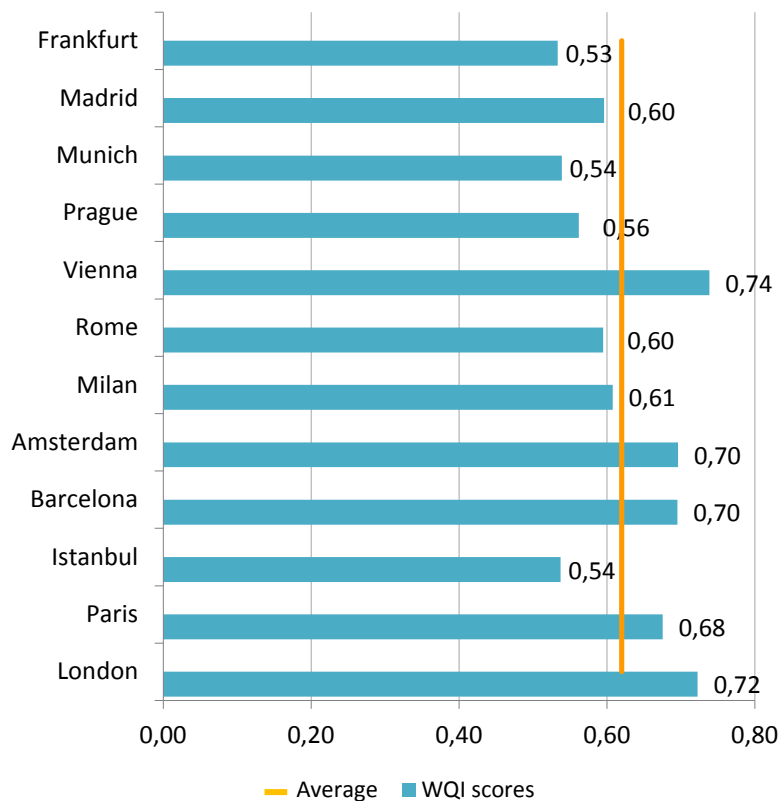
Source: Author

As can be seen in Figure 6.1, Vienna's official website shows the highest score in the sample, 0.74 points out of a maximum of 1, while Frankfurt achieves the lowest score, 0.53. However, all are considered good results. Indeed, the first interesting finding to highlight is the lack of scores below 0.5 points. The original designers of the methodology indicate that 0.5 is the boundary score that separates poor results from good results with room for improvement (Fernández-Cavia et al., 2013). Thus, in contrast to the previous study conducted by the designers, all destinations in the sample obtain good results, and the average score of 0.62 points also stands out. Again, previous research using the same methodology on a Spanish website sample obtained a much lower average score.

However, there are certainly differences among the scores obtained by the websites. In general terms, fewer destinations score above average, at a greater distance to it, while more destinations score below it, but closer to it. In other words, only five destinations show results above average, and seven below it. As mentioned, Vienna obtains the highest score of 0.74, followed by London with 0.72, and Amsterdam and Barcelona, both with 0.70. Also above average, Paris achieves 0.68 points.

On the other hand, closer to the average but slightly below it, Milan obtains a score of 0.61, followed by Madrid and Rome with 0.60 each. At a greater distance, four additional destinations also score below average: Prague's website obtains a WQI of 0.56, and Munich and Istanbul both score 0.54 points. As mentioned earlier, Frankfurt's official website shows the lowest score. All in all, these results support the hypothesis pointing to the existence of strong official websites among the leading European destinations.

To be precise in the interpretation of this WQI, the analysis separately assessed the different components of the website, obtaining a number from 0 to 1 for each parameter. Thus, the strengths and weaknesses of every single website can be identified, as well as the average results. Furthermore, to make it easier to interpret the findings, the 12 different assessed parameters are grouped into four broader dimensions, as illustrated in Figure 6.2: technical, communicative, relational, and persuasive aspects.

Figure 6.2. **Mean scores obtained at each parameter**
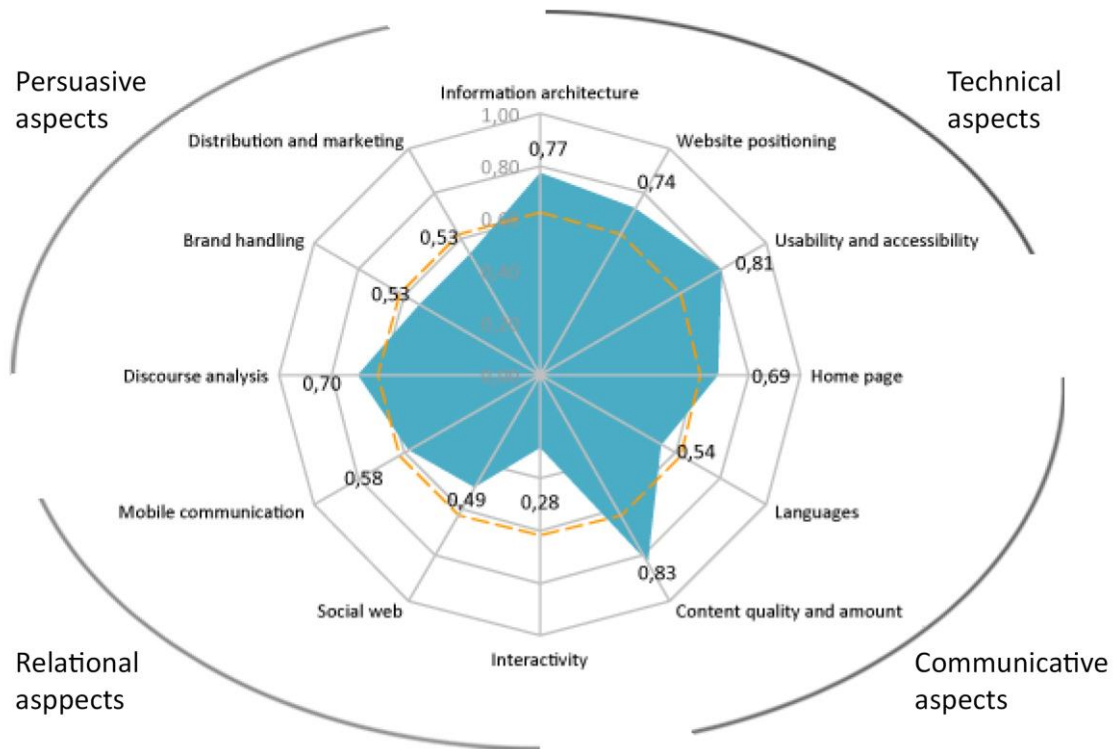
Source: Author

At first sight, the positive results obtained for all technical parameters stand out. These three parameters have some of the highest scores, all above the mean WQI, indicated by the yellow dashed line. In contrast, all relational parameters, those assessing interaction possibilities, also in terms of social media and mobile, score below average. The social web and interactivity parameters obtain the lowest scores, both below 0.5.

On the one hand, the score of 0.49 points indicates a weak relationship between the official websites and different social networks. They could be much better integrated, even establishing a dialogue between the different platforms. On the other hand, the score of 0.28 obtained for the interactivity parameter evinces the lack of attention to this matter. No destination in the sample reaches a score of 0.5 for this parameter. In general, official websites continue to act as windows to showcase their offer, instead of as spaces for dialogue or interrelation. Thus, greater efforts should be made in this regard.

Closer to technical parameters' scores, results regarding the homepage and the content quality and amount parameters are also above average, with 0.69 and 0.83 points respectively, the latter being the highest score obtained for any parameter. In general, the European

destinations' websites offer all the information that users can expect, and with a high level of quality. In contrast, however, they score lower regarding the languages parameter, also included in the communicative dimension, with 0.54 points. Some websites are not available in a great variety of languages, and not all content is always completely translated.

Similarly, regarding persuasive aspects, the discourse parameter achieves a high score of 0.70, above average, while brand handling and distribution and marketing obtain results below this. However, it is important to note that scores for distribution and marketing are highly dependent on strategic decisions about commercialization possibilities. Even though the parameter does not exclusively consider commercializing products and services on the website, meaning converting persuasion into purchases, many indicators do point to this. Thus, a low score for this parameter could partially be a consequence of a strategic decision to not commercialize products and services on the official website.

However, the dispersion of the results for each parameter is essential information to better comprehend the average scores. From the data summarized in Figure 6.3, the reader can understand the homogeneity or the disparity of the results of the sample. In other words, it assesses the distance between the higher and the lowest scores obtained by each website.

Figure 6.3. **Disparity of scores for each parameter**
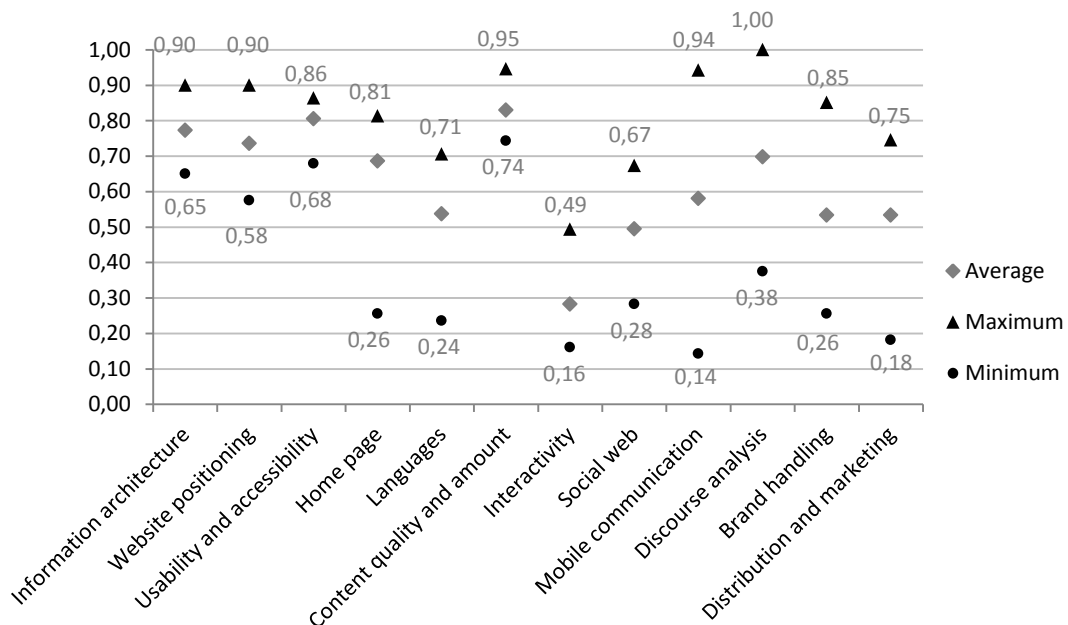
Source: Author

In line with the positive results mentioned earlier, the technical parameters also present a greater homogeneity of scores, each showing less than 0.32 points between the highest and the lowest destination score. The destinations have more balanced scores for the usability and accessibility parameters, with a minimum difference of 0.18 points. Similarly, all the websites achieve positive scores for content quality and amount, with a small difference of 0.21 points between the highest and the lowest scores. Moreover, the interactivity and social web parameters also show less disparity of weighting, below 0.40 points, even though in this case the results are not considered to be good.

On the other hand, six parameters show a greater disparity in scores between the different websites. Firstly, the disparity shown for the home page and languages parameters is explained by the existence of few cases scoring differently than the general tendency, in this case a low score. The position of the average score being significantly closer to the highest score indicates the existence of fewer cases below it, but also more differentiated scores. To be precise, only one destination scores lower than 0.5 for the home page, with 0.26 points, which strongly affects the average score. Likewise, two scores for the languages parameter strongly distort the average score – 0.24 and 0.35 – since they are at a greater distance from the other results.

However, the remaining four parameters show a higher disparity of results with an average score halfway between the highest and the lowest scores. The higher disparity of scores for the discourse analysis and mobile communication is surprising, with a difference of more than 0.6 points. The first parameter is interesting because it is the one for which a destination has the maximum score of any parameter, in contrast with other, lower scores. Regarding the mobile communication parameter, the disparity of results increases significantly: there is a 0.8 point difference between the highest and the lowest scores obtained by the different websites. This parameter focuses mainly on the existence of apps and other mobile resources to download from the official website. Similar to the distribution and marketing parameter, it might be a strategic decision of destinations to invest in developing apps and to pay attention to this aspect, since they all score well for the indicator regarding the official website adaptation for mobile devices, or in other words "mobile responsive website". Thus, the author attributes this polarization of scores to a strategic decision of the destination.

6.1.2. Projected image

Once the overall quality of the website communication was assessed, the textual content analysis was conducted to identify the most prominent characteristics of brand image within the discourse. As mentioned in Chapter 5, a different content analysis technique based on categorization, word search, and frequency counts was used at this stage. On this basis, the second phase of content analysis highlighted the most relevant product-related categories and the presence of traits of personality within the websites' content.

On the one hand, the analysis identified a total 10,172 content units across the websites in the sample. Of these units, 9,286 are linked to product-related associations related to the categories previously identified. On the other hand, within the coded content, 6,906 personality trait synonyms were identified. Furthermore, the analysis also determined the presence of content linked to specific tourist profiles.

However, the investigation went further. Since the analysis of functional and symbolic dimensions needed different content analysis processes, this chapter divides the explanation of the results to improve precision. In particular, the chapter emphasizes the following five topics to contextualize and offer an overall picture of the findings:

- Overall codification process: number of sources and coded references.
- Generic category: content units referring to the overall brand.
- Product-related categories: average scores and most prevalent categories.
- Different tourist profiles commonly identified across websites.
- Personality traits: most dominant dimensions and overall pattern.

6.1.2.1. Number of sources and coded references

First, it is necessary to clarify the terminology used by the software NVivo to name different content characteristics. The following explains the meaning of source, reference, and node. On the one hand, every page of the website, captured in a separate pdf, is considered to be one *source*. In the present study, 779 different pages were counted. An important factor to successfully work with NVivo in this project was to properly organize the sources so that they could later be easily identified as a part of a single website, allowing the analysis of separate cases.

In contrast, every piece of content that is selected and coded at one node is considered a *reference*. Thus, main content boxes, navigational banners, and other differentiated units of content within the same page constitute different references. Finally, the term *node* is used to designate the different categories proposed by the author that will be used to identify, distinguish, and classify the different content units.

Returning to the specific research results, a total of 779 sources from all websites were separately analyzed and coded, shown in Table 6.1. Even though each website was downloaded based on the same criteria (homepage plus two levels deep in the hierarchy), the number of sources for each website differs. As seen in Table 6.1, each website comprises a different number of pages with the same length. Furthermore, the process of coding all the sources became more complex than expected and concluded with a higher number of identified content units.

Table 6.1. **Number of coded sources, references, and words**

	Pages	References	Inf.	Nav.	Trans.	Words
Amsterdam	76	638	186	446	6	35909
Barcelona	31	326	84	229	13	9700
Frankfurt	32	252	58	194	0	4857
Istanbul	64	537	130	372	35	24644
London	92	1851	394	1293	164	41690
Madrid	33	460	44	416	0	9734
Milan	52	430	91	339	0	6833
Munich	100	822	150	672	0	25423
Paris	124	1554	262	1216	76	47913
Prague	74	1452	276	1175	1	33321
Rome	46	537	97	440	0	21255
Vienna	55	1313	71	1238	4	32630
Total:	779	10.172	1.843	8.030	299	293.909

Source: Author

Websites are complex communication sources that can display a variety of different content simultaneously and even interlink pages to each other. Interactive media is known to contain a wide variety of content unit types (Neuendorf, 2017; Strijbos et al., 2006). Thus, not all the content within a website page is linked to a single node; on the contrary, in this study all coded sources presented more than one reference about different topics. This became a major difficulty during the coding process.

While one could expect that each page of a website would focus on a single topic, this is not the case. For example, the page http://en.parisinfo.com/shopping should only contain information about shopping in Paris. However, within the same page, content units were identified about different ways of shopping, tourism for disabled people, buying theater tickets, where to eat, and climate, among others.

Therefore, the coders explored, analyzed, and coded each source's specificities separately. This process resulted in a total of 10,172 identified references, representing almost 13 different content units per source on average. However, significant differences between cases were identified in terms of number of references, as seen in Table 6.1. For this reason, all average results and comparisons were calculated based on relative percentages and not absolute numbers. The percentages of references were calculated considering the total number of content units identified in each case.

In this regard, two additional complications encountered during the coding process must be considered: the variety of website designs and how information was restructured in the downloaded pdfs.

- On the one hand, the coders discussed the variety of architectonic models, design solutions, and different layout hierarchies found on different websites. The criteria to delimitate a different unit of content and thus a different reference were precisely described and agreed after a pilot analysis (see Chapter 5).

- On the other hand, downloading pages in pdf format was the most suitable way to capture the website content in a readable format for NVivo. In addition, doing so respected most of the layout design needed to identify different blocks of content. However, not all pdf downloads were optimal, as some divided long website pages into several consecutive DIN A 4 (or similar format). Consequently, in some cases unexpected splits of content units occurred, causing later difficulties in coding them as single references. This became an unsolvable issue, so coders were asked to code the split parts separately even though they were part of the same content unit. The number of such cases was low and common to all websites, so the effect of a possible bias is minimal.

Furthermore, to conduct a more precise analysis, every piece of content within each website page was coded based on three different criteria: product-related category, content type, and non-product-related attributes (tourist profile). Even though the main interest was product-

related associations, it was interesting to keep track of each type of content unit: informational, navigational, or transactional, as seen in Table 6.1. These three types of content units usually present different characteristics (see Chapter 5); hence, it can be inferred from the data in Table 6.1 that the 1,843 informational references represent a higher volume of content than the 8.030 navigational ones.

All in all, the coding process identified 10,172 different references across the content; all of them were linked to one product-related category and one content type node, both of which are mandatory. From these, 79% of the references were distinguished as navigational content, 3% as transactional content, and 18% as informational content. Furthermore, some of these references were also linked to tourist profile nodes, which were complementary and optional categories. Not all content units referred to a specific target: only a total of 994 references were also coded at the non-product-related node.

6.1.2.2. Generic category

It is not surprising in content analysis, and more specifically in categorizing content, for some pieces of content not to match any of the initial categories (Krippendorff, 2013). However, this problem must be solved. According to Graneheim and Lundman (2004, p.107), "no data related to the purpose should be excluded due to the lack of a suitable category." Thus, all content units should pertain to one, but only one, of the product-related categories. In other words, because categories are mutually exclusive, all content should be able to fit one single category, and the existence of content that does not fit one indicates a missing category.

To address this difficulty the initial pilot study counted on a category named *others,* where coders included all those blocks of content that did not match a category in the initial list. After the pilot, the content linked to that node was explored and some interesting findings regarding the offer characteristics were identified and recorded in the study. As discussed in Chapter 5, the presence of a wellness category and the distinction between cultural and leisure activities were considered for the final analysis.

Furthermore, upon a closer inspection of the pilot's results, a third interesting finding also emerged. A considerable amount of content was found that does not point to a specific offer trait but does concern the destination and its offer in a generic and global way. This content does not explain a specific offer trait, but instead focuses on generally characterizing the

destination. In the example in Figure 6.4, the reference presents a general description of the destination, mixing several offer traits to support the promise of the destination being suitable for disabled people. Moreover, another content unit on the Paris website, concerning "romantic Paris", provides a description that is full of adjectives and rhetoric but devoid of product-related associations: "with cinematic decors and eternal charm, Paris attracts lovebirds…"

Figure 6.4. **Example of generic content**
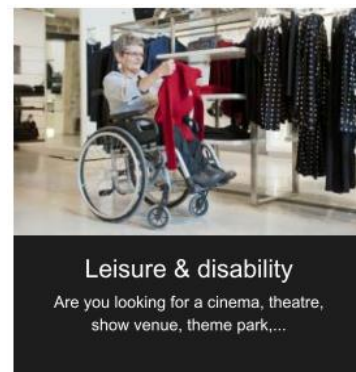
Source: Screenshot from www.parisinfo.com

This change in the discourse structure is related to the following research question about the characteristics of official websites' content: does the content of destination websites only itemize and explain the components of the destination, or does it continue to allude to the brand as an additional attribute representative of the overall destination? To address this question, the researcher included a node labeled "generic" as an alternative to identifying general content units focusing on the destination more than on a single element of the offer.

At this point, it is important to clarify the difference between the nodes *others*, also maintained in the final analysis, and *generic*. The same instructions were also given to both coders.

- Others → content pointing to characteristics of the offer that do not match any category, i.e. tour operators' information, press trips, universities at the destination, etc. It is content related to a specific topic about the offer but that is not included in any category. This could be explained as offer attributes that are not relevant enough in the destination communication to have an ad hoc category (at least not one that has already been proven[21]).

- Generic → content that does not point to a specific part or characteristic of the offer but gives some kind of general view of the destination. Although it is a broad definition and different types of content units could suit this category, in light of the pilot results, the author found it interesting to first introduce the category and later explore the

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[21] No presence in previous literature or across the empirical data obtained from the 12 official websites, at least after the pilot study.

characteristics of the results. Some examples that could fit this node are: top things about the destination, the destination in summer, the destination for young people, etc.

Regarding the generic node, the final analysis coded a total of 574 references across the websites. All of these references were then further analyzed to identify more common structures and topics. This further exploration focused on the discourse characteristics.

Before continuing with the results, it must be noted that some transactional references from this second analysis were discarded, since these only present labels of different offer items, and not discourse to analyze. This issue was mainly encountered on the www.parisinfo.com website, where almost every page includes a transactional unit summarizing different activities and products.

As seen in Figure 6.5, the Paris website displays a transactional banner that offers users the possibility to buy tickets for several attractions. This unit is not related to a single theme or type of attraction, such as hotel booking only, but instead mixes different offer items, representing a general approach to the destination's offer. For this reason, the coders linked it to the generic node. However, the aim of transactional content considerably differs from that of informational and navigational content, because it focuses on conducting an economic operation, and not on giving information or helping users to reach the main information block. Furthermore, even if it is a single content unit, it is present on several pages of the website, resulting in a greater number of references: 94 to be precise. For

Figure 6.5. **Transactional banner at www.parisinfo.com**

Source: Screenshot from www.parisinfo.com

these reasons, all references corresponding to this content unit were excluded from the analysis. Only informational and navigational content units at the *generic* node were analyzed, for a total of 486 references.

Despite the high quantity of content units, a reduced number of patterns were identified. Specifically, all references can be grouped into three different types of discourse structure or arguments. As shown in Table 6.2, these three patterns are distinguished based on their main goal: welcoming users to the destination or, in this case, the destination's website; suggesting

a summary of the most outstanding characteristics of the destination; and presenting different facets of the destination.

Table 6.2. **Discourse patterns in generic references**

Pattern	Goal	Example
Welcome ------------------ Introduction or motto	Welcome user to the website and introduce the destination	*Welcome to Visit London , your official city guide to London, England. Find things to do in London, days out in London, London attractions and sightseeing, what's on, London events, theatre, tours, restaurants and hotels in London. Plan your trip to London with useful traveller information.*
DMO suggestions ---------- Mixture of offer items	Support the credibility of the city as destination highlighting the most outstanding characteristics.	**Madrid Top 10** From one of the largest Royal Palace in Europe to Real Madrid's stadium, discover the city's most popular sights and attractions.
Destination's facets -------- Different realities at the same destination	Introduce the destination as an option for different tourism realities.	**Sustainable Vienna** If you're looking to have a healthy and sustainable holiday, then Vienna is the place to come. Everything can be had here, from ecological body care to …

Source: Author

1. <u>Welcome</u>. While these references are only present in four websites, this content structure (*e.g.*, "welcome to the website" and "mottos") is linked to the generic node. In these cases, the website itself briefly introduces its purpose and indicates which kinds of information users can find there. Here, offer items are combined in the explanation, as seen in the example in Table 6.2.

2. <u>DMO suggestions</u>. Secondly, some content also displays a selection of characteristics and offer items based on the DMO criteria. This includes sections such as "what to see", "top 10 attractions", "what's on", etc. Based on the names of these content units, these sections seem to point to sights, attractions, and events, respectively, but their subsequent explanations mix different offer items, such as museums, events, restaurants, etc. in all cases, making it impossible to classify them in a single offer node. In the example in Table 6.2, the Madrid website summarizes heritage, sports, sights, and attractions in a single content unit. Similarly, content entitled "reasons to come" or similar is built based on the most relevant offer attributes of the destination.

    Slightly different but part of the same category, titles such as "before leaving home" and "recommendations" simultaneously combine different elements of the offer, but from a practical perspective. All in all, all the websites in the sample include content units that

follow the same goal: to summarize the reason why the city is competent as a destination to travel to. A total of 223 references were identified here.

3. <u>Destination's facets.</u> The last category focuses on different facets of the destination, which refer to the credibility of a destination to fit a specific tourism context. In other words, a destination might want to be seen as a good option for vacations in general, but also as a suitable option for trips with special characteristics. As seen in the example in Table 6.2, besides a general trip to Vienna, people concerned about sustainability might also consider it. With this reference, Vienna aims to show its competence in this specific tourism experience.

A closer examination of this content pattern shows four kinds of situations in which destinations aim to be competent. First, destinations aim to fit specific economic situations such as "budget London" or "luxury destination", for example. They also adjust to certain tourist profiles, such as "Madrid for families" or "gay destination"; or show themselves as competent during a specific time period: for instance "summer in Vienna". Lastly, generic content units were also identified as strengthening a symbolic characteristic of the destination: for example, "romantic Paris" or "Modern Frankfurt".

Figure 6.6. **Number of references coded at the generic node**
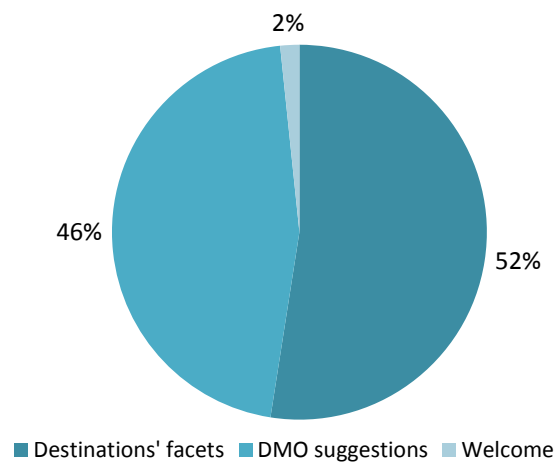
Source: Author

Figure 6.6 separates the references coded at the "generic" node by type of structure that they present. As can be seen, the content types with more presence across websites are those related to DMOs' suggestions and the ones presenting different facets of the destination. At a greater distance, introductory or **welcome units of content** are also found. However, these

units are only present in seven different sources across four websites: only the Amsterdam (two sources), London (three sources), Munich (one source), and Paris (one source) websites contain introductory texts about what they contain or mottos introducing the destination.

In contrast, all destination websites provide content about **suggestions and top attractions**, with 223 references in total. This selection prepared ad hoc by the DMO saves time for users so that they do not need to navigate throughout the entire website to find the most important information; instead, they have a summary of what the destination itself promotes as the best attractions. Based on the number of sources where it is present, this type of content is widely visible on the websites: the 223 references are spread across 131 different sources. This indicates that this content is available on several different pages on each website and, consequently, users navigating these websites are more exposed to it and likelier to come across it.

Similarly, 11 websites in the sample exhibit content about the **different facets of the destination**. Only Munich's website does not include this type of discourse in its official communication. Again, many sources display this kind of content. However, while there are more references corresponding to this content type than the previous one, 255 references, these ones are only visible in 119 sources, which is less than for suggestions and top attractions. The smaller the presence of the content across pages, the lower the chances are that users will encounter it. However, the difference between sources showcasing DMOs' suggestions and destination facets are not highly significant.

What is the most surprising regarding this content type is the huge amount of references presenting a destination as suitable for a specific tourist profile. Crossing different nodes' results using NVivo revealed that almost half are linked to a specific target profile: 121 references in 72 sources. This result supports the relevance of certain tourist profiles for some destinations and the importance of presenting a suitable brand for them; this can be understood as niche communication.

In addition, price also emerges as a considerably present facet of destinations. There are 45 references spread across 32 sources that closely relate the destination to the price-related experience. Of these, 41 references in 29 sources describe the city as an affordable destination. Although the number of references is not outstanding, the similarity of this

content across destinations is interesting: five websites present the *cheap, free*, or *affordable* facet of the destination at some point.

The remaining generic references refer to specific characteristics of the brands, such as *Bohemian Paris* or *Imperial Vienna*, which are much more diverse results adjusted to each destination's characteristics. These characteristics also include destinations in a specific season, e.g. summer in London.

All in all, besides the topics regarding destinations' product-related associations, considered in the following section, the findings highlighted at the *generic* node are also interesting. The results show that the official websites' discourse not only informs users about the different offer attributes, splitting and describing them as different items, but also communicates at a brand level. This node highlights the importance of content that aims to show an overall brand image adjusted to the public's different specific demands and needs, beyond providing a mere itemization of the offer.

6.1.2.3. Product-related attributes

One of the main goals of this study is to identify the most prevalent product-related associations across European urban destinations. For this reason, this section investigates the destination websites' content to identify the most common topics among them. Since this is a comparative study, an exhaustive literature review and a pilot study allowed common categories related to product-related associations to be identified (see Chapter 5). It is important in this study to work with categories and not with individual associations to enable a comparison between similar destinations.

Hence, this section presents the results of the codification process. The 779 pages in the sample were coded and each content unit was assigned to one of the 19 previously identified categories. An additional category named *others* was also included to cover those content units did not fit any of the others. In contrast to the previous section, all references coded at the generic node are excluded here since they were already explored above. A total of 9,598 references from the 12 different websites were found to be linked to a product-related association, as shown in Figure 6.7.

Since each website has different characteristics, directly summing the total references would bias the results, as mentioned in section 6.1.2.1. By doing this, websites with a greater number of references would have a major impact, so this issue had to be addressed to obtain the average score. To this end, all the references were weighted considering their total number per website. Thus, the prevalence of categories was calculated based on their relative value, the percentage, so that they could later be compared as equal cases, regardless of website length. Figure 6.7 shows the average scores obtained for the 12 destinations.

Figure 6.7. **Prevalence of product-related categories**
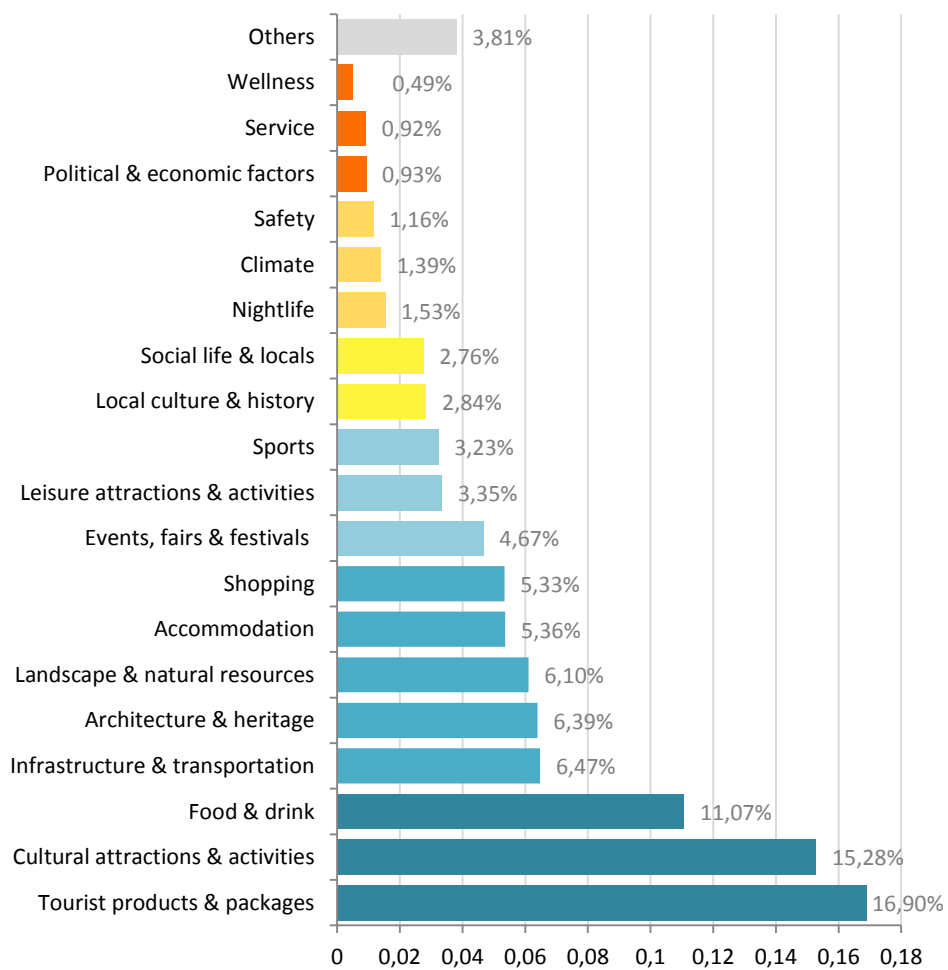
To facilitate the interpretation of the results, the most frequent topics for the image construction in the website are indicated in blue, and those that are less frequent are in yellow. After a preliminary exploration of the results, the author noticed that in all cases, only a few categories were enough to explain the majority of the identified content units. More

specifically, the sum of only those categories representing more than 3% of the references explain more than the 80% of the total content is explained, as will be seen in the descriptive results section. For this reason, the boundary between core associations and secondary associations was set at 3%. As shown in Figure 6.7, the average scores reveal 11 categories that are highly relevant in building European destinations' brands on their websites.

However, it is undeniable that there are significant differences between categories above 3%. Those categories that are more prevalent across the websites are indicated in stronger colors: from all the collected data, three categories stand out in terms of volume of content units. For Firstly, tourist products and packages appear to be the most prevalent topic in official websites communication: above 10%. Furthermore, as will be shown in section 6.2, this topic is present as a core category on all the destination websites in the sample. This result is not surprising considering that this is the only category related to the genuine tourism office activity, and not a characteristic of the place itself.

Similarly, cultural attractions and activities, and food and drink also represent more than 10% of the content units each. Thus, there are three highly relevant categories to construct urban destinations' image, as indicated in Figure 6.7. However, it must be noted that Milan offers very little content related to food and drink, and it is not highlighted as one of the most prevalent categories. On Milan's website, the category represents less than 3% of content units. In fact, these two are the only categories that also stand out in each website of the sample separately.

Furthermore, five additional categories also emerge. Representing between 5% and 10% of the identified content units, these categories are highly prevalent in the websites' content. Furthermore, most of the websites incorporate these categories in their core associations. Only one website does not show the categories of infrastructure and transportation, and landscape and natural resources among its core associations; and only two destinations do not build their image on architecture and heritage as main topics. In contrast, more websites do not significantly consider shopping and accommodation: the former does not emerge as a core association in four cases, while the latter only prevails on half of the websites.

Similar results are found regarding the remaining blue categories. While on average they represent more than 3% of the content units, the separate cases appear to be relevant for fewer websites. The leisure attractions and activities category appears to be relevant for half

of the destinations, while sports stands out only on five websites. The most surprising finding, however, is that despite the lower presence of events, fairs, and festivals in the average scores, most of the destinations show a high prevalence of this topic in their content: 10 out of 12 include it as a core association. This result is also coherent with the fact that it is the only category present on all the homepages in the sample, in at least in one content unit.

On the other hand, eight categories appear to have lower visibility in the official websites' communication. Regarding the average results, the topics of local culture and history, and social life and locals are slightly less prevalent within the content: they are found only in four different cases. Furthermore, the nightlife, climate, and safety categories do not seem to be crucial to build the destinations' image, since they are represented by only 1% of content units. Moreover, it is clear that destinations' official communication does not pay much attention to political and economic factors, services, or wellness topics; and when these are present, they generally appear to be anecdotal information.

Before concluding this section, the content units coded at the *others* node are further explored. A total of 312 references were ultimately coded here. This node allowed coders to identify those content units pointing to different offer items that were not represented in the previously identified categories. In this regard, the coding process progressed as the author expected: it identified a wide range of topics with little coincidence between destinations. However, some websites agree on some topics. As shown in Table 6.3, 12 additional topics are common to different websites; among them, content about study, universities, and language courses stands out.

In this vein, six destinations place importance on displaying some kind of content about the academic infrastructure and its offer. This component of the touristic offer is not highlighted in any previous work that was examined to elaborate the initial list of categories or the pilot study. This seems to be a highly specific offer item, only linked to a specific visitor profile, and not to the general tourist's interest.

Table 6.3. **Frequent topics coded at the *others* node**

Topics	Websites					
Destination partners:	MIL	PRA				
Newsletter:	FRA	PAR				
Photo/selfie spots:	AMS	LON				
Work and research at the destination:	LON	MUN				
About the post office:	IST	LON	PRA			
For business & research:	FRA	MUN	ROM			
Pictures about the destination section:	BAR	MIL	PAR			
Related to press and media:	FRA	MIL	MUN			
Support organizations and unions:	AMS	MUN	PAR			
Tour operators and travel agencies:	BAR	MIL	PAR			
Facts and FAQ:	BAR	PAR	PRA	VIE		
Movies, books & songs about the destination:	IST	MIL	MUN	PRA		
Study, universities and language courses:	IST	LON	MAD	MUN	PAR	VIE
destinations	1	2	3	4	5	6

Source: Author

Furthermore, four different websites in the sample include FAQ sections and information about movies, books, and songs about the destination. The first item refers to more practical information, with which destinations try to anticipate possible doubts that users might have. This is a very common section that can be found on almost all the websites (Razzaghi, Minaee, & Ghorbani, 2016). In contrast, information about movies, songs, and books about the destination is a very peculiar type of content, tightly related to the tourism industry and place branding domain. Prague, Munich, Milan, and Istanbul present these art treasures as tourist attractions. This finding is in line with previous work pointing to the important effect of movies and other pieces of art on potential tourists' intention to travel (Mitchell & Stewart, 2012). As for the remaining topics from Table 6.3, all of them have a lower presence across the websites, and some are only present on one website.

6.1.2.4. Targeted tourist profiles

To enrich the findings and obtain more interesting data in this category, the coders added several sub-nodes describing different profiles as evidence appeared during the coding process. In other words, different tourist profiles were uncovered in a deductive way, meaning that the content was not only coded under *target* but also assigned to a node detailing the

type of tourist profile it targets, such as *family and kids* or *students*. The different tourist profiles were discovered as the coding process progressed.

The coders revealed a total of 994 content units pointing to specific target profiles dispersed across 273 pages. From these units, several different tourist profiles were identified, some of them based on different segmentation criteria. This demonstrates the interest of destinations in diversifying their communication strategy depending on the type of tourist.

As seen in Table 6.4, nine tourist profiles were identified during the coding process meeting two different segmentation criteria: socio-demographic and behavioral. The majority of profiles were based on socio-demographic criteria (disabled, family and kids, couples, business, students, young, LGBT), but a couple of profiles were also identified based on consumption or, in this case, tourism behavior (luxury and sustainable).

Table 6.4. **Different tourist profiles identified during the coding process**

Profile type	Tourist profile	Websites	Sources	References
Socio-demographic	disable	9	79	177
	family & kids	12	115	355
	couples	9	32	55
	business	8	18	37
	students	10	27	73
	young	7	28	40
	LGBT	10	31	92
Tourist behavior	luxury	8	43	132
	sustainable	6	20	33

Source: Author

As explained in previous chapters, the results obtained from the codification process in NVivo provide information about the number of websites but also the number of pages displaying a specific content type and the number of content units related to it. Based on the number of sources and references alluding to a specific target, for example, one can see that two different profiles stand out from the others: family and kids, and disabled tourists. They are present in 355 and 177 content units, respectively, and are located in several different sources.

However, if the focus changes to the number of websites that explicitly consider a target profile at least once, no matter the volume of content that they display, the list of outstanding tourist profiles increases. Besides the previous profiles, students and LGBT tourists are also considered by 10 different websites each, and couples are taken into account by nine.

Nevertheless, with 115 sources and 355 references coded at this node, the family and kids profile appears to be an undeniably essential tourist profile for European urban destinations. All websites in the sample devote content to this profile on at least two different pages. Thus, it is without a doubt that all the websites consider it to be a differentiated target worth considering separately from general tourists. DMOs are dedicating more efforts to communicating straight to this target.

Following the same criteria, based on the amount of content linked to this node, disabled tourists also represent a crucial profile, with 177 references across 79 sources. A huge volume of references is dispersed through an important number of pages. However, not all destinations consider this tourist profile. Considering the number of destinations that identify specific tourist profiles on the websites, disabled tourists are ranked lower than students and LGBT tourists are. Amsterdam, Istanbul, and Prague do not provide content adjusted to disabled tourists, at least within the analyzed pages. All in all, despite the fact that three websites do not consider the disabled tourist profile at all, those that do it grant it superior attention. It is relevant for destinations to make this type of content accessible across their inner pages and thus improve its visibility.

In contrast, content targeting other tourist profiles is limited to fewer pages and references. For instance, students and LGBT tourists are considered by 10 destinations, but with fewer pages dedicated to this type of content unit, resulting in a total of 73 and 92 references, respectively. Tourism for couples is considered by nine websites. Moreover, it is interesting to highlight that even though there are only 55 references for this tourist profile, more pages showcase this content than for the two previously discussed profiles. This indicates that even though the latter two are considered tourist profiles, their visibility on the websites is lower than that of couples.

In contrast, while luxury tourists are only considered by eight websites, this profile has the third highest number of content units dedicated to it: 132, to be precise. This result points to the major visibility of this profile on those websites that consider it. In other words, those that are interested in this profile pay it major attention.

At the opposite end, tourists seeking a sustainable experience from a destination are less often considered. Only six different websites discuss sustainable tourism in 33 different references, which is the lowest score out of all tourist profiles. However, given the novelty of sustainability

in the tourism industry and the ongoing discussion of its importance in the field, this result is significant. The content units related to sustainable tourism evince an interest from the DMOs in promoting responsible and sustainable tourism practices, even though the extent and meaning of the sustainable concept should be further analyzed in each case, as the ongoing discussion suggests (Cohen, 2002; Saarinen & Jarkko, 2013).

All in all, these results support hypotheses 4 and 7: DMOs diversify the destination image based on different target profiles, and European destinations target similar tourist profiles. However, beyond describing the most prevalently targeted tourist profiles, this study also investigated which topics are more suitable for specific tourist profiles: in other words, whether some product-related attributes are more likely to be adjusted to a tourist profile than others. To this end, the results obtained for all product-related attributes were crossed with those at the target node. Figure 6.8 summarizes the importance of the different product-related categories in offering content prepared ad hoc for specific targets.

Once more, it was necessary to address the issue of the variety of the lengths of the different websites. A mere sum of the total references on each website would bias the results, since a larger website with more content units per se would be weighted higher. For this reason, the data was corrected. The relative importance of each reference was calculated based on the total number of references linked to a specific target in each case. For example, Vienna incorporates 194 content units related to a specific target; based on this number, the percentage of references related to each product-related category was obtained. Afterwards, the average scores represented in Figure 6.8 were calculated.

Figure 6.8. **The most relevant product-related categories linked to specific tourist profiles**
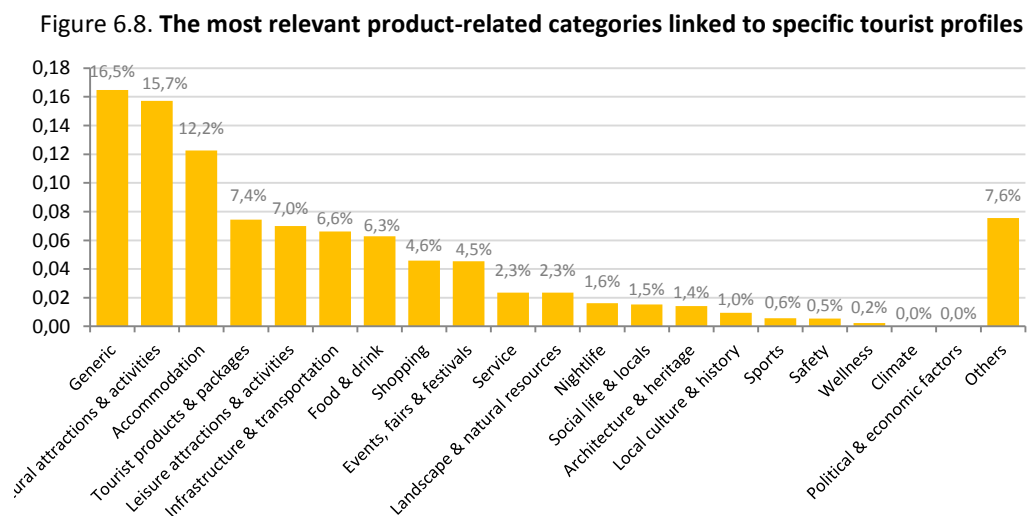
Source: Author

In interpreting the figure, one can immediately see that not all product-related attributes are equally related to specific tourist profiles: some of them emerge as more recurrently related to specific targets. Firstly, the most prevalent type of content corresponds to generic content units. It seems reasonable to think that destinations make an effort to present themselves as generally suitable for specific profiles before further describing specific attributes adjusted to those profiles. This is the presentation of the city as a competent destination to fulfill specific targets' experience.

Secondly, the bar chart shows that the categories of cultural attractions and activities, and accommodation present the higher amount of content adjusted to specific tourist profiles. More than 27% of references linked to specific targets are related to these two topics. A tentative conclusion at this point is that the special needs of families, couples, luxury tourists, etc. are more related to these two matters than they are to others. In other words, specific tourist profiles seem to behave differently than general tourists do with regard to these two categories, or at least this is how DMOs represent it on their websites. At a greater distance, six additional categories also emerge as recurrent topics in the transmission of content targeting specific profiles.

Meanwhile, climate, and political and economic factors maintain an unchanging message in this regard; these are not linked to specific tourists profiles. In addition, nine other categories also have very few references, and are interpreted here as marginal content units.

Finally, to further examine the relationship between each target profile and the different product-related attributes, the following section explores the results of each website separately. The aim is to clarify the descriptive results and allow for a further comparative analysis in the following stages of the study.

6.1.2.5. Symbolic dimension: personality

This last section of the overall results focuses on the symbolic dimension of brand image: brand personality. Together with the product-related associations, personality is one of the main constructs of interest in this study. While the descriptive results section provides details about each destination's personality and how is it represented in its website communication, some overall considerations must be noted here, including changes to the thesaurus during the analysis, average scores, and the richness of each website's vocabulary.

In the first instance, the analysis of destinations' personality was conducted based on the thesaurus developed by the author containing synonyms of the original personality traits, as explained in Chapter 5. However, some modifications were made to the original thesaurus after testing the tool in a pilot study. While the construction of the thesaurus strictly followed previous studies on this matter, a preliminary study of Barcelona's personality (see Annexes), highlighted a few words that interfered with specific tourism vocabulary due to their polysemy. Furthermore, some additional misleading words were also identified and corrected during the analysis.

A small margin of error is inevitable when using an automatic content analysis technique, as previous studies have proposed. To minimize this risk, NVivo software was used, which allows a manual double check of the results: a semi-automatic analysis. The manual inspection detected some words that were constantly mistaken for other meanings of the same word. For example, the term *plane*, which is a synonym of *even* and *smooth*, was confused repeatedly with *plane* meaning air transport vehicle. Since these terms are frequently used in the tourism field and thus common to all the cases, the synonyms listed in Table 6.5 were excluded from the analysis due to their constant interference with it.

Table 6.5. **Synonyms excluded due to their polysemy**

Original trait	Synonym	Misleading meaning
Soph. Smooth "free from obstruction"	**Free**	Most of the time was referring to "costing nothing" synset
Sinc. Original "not secondhand or by way of something intermediary"	**Capital**	Most of the cities are the capital of their countries, thus this term was confused with "a seat of government" meaning.
Soph. Smooth " free from roughness"	**Even**	Not a specific tourism term but was constantly being confused with the adverb.
Sinc. Original "preceding all others in time or being as first made or performed"	**First**	Mistaken with the adverb and first as "indicating the beginning unit in a series", for example stages of a trip.
Comp. Intelligent "having the capacity for thought"	**Natural**	There is many content referring to nature; "in accordance with nature" synset.
Soph. Smooth " free from roughness"	**Plane**	All websites refer to airplanes, "an aircraft that has a fixed wing and is powered by propellers or jets"
Comp. Leader "a person who rules or guides or inspires others"	**person**	The term was used in the websites to designate "a human being"
Rugg. Western "about life in the western United States during the period of exploration and development"	**horse opera**	A very specific term and constantly interfering with Opera.
Rugg. Western "lying in or toward the west"	**west**	Even though was the same meaning, it was used in coordinates and giving directions
Sinc. Honest "not disposed to cheat or defraud"	**Square**	Constantly mistaken by "an open area at the meeting of two or more streets"
Comp. Corporate "of or belonging to a corporation"	**House**	Many museums or attractions are names with the term house. i.e. Anne Frank House
Comp. Technical "of or relating to a practical subject that is organized according to scientific principles"	**Applied sciences**	Proper noun of several museums.

Source: Author

These final exclusions resulted in a thesaurus compound by 916 words. Besides the words in Table 6.5, the author also assessed the results of each case separately. Therefore, some additional words were also dismissed regarding specific websites analysis. These are noted in the corresponding descriptive results section. All in all, the analysis identified 6,369 terms that matched personality synonyms in the thesaurus.

Table 6.6. **Total words, personality synonyms, and their proportion**

	Total words in the website	Personality synonyms	%
Amsterdam	35.909	882	2,5%
Barcelona	9.700	226	2,3%
Frankfurt	4.857	99	2,0%
Istanbul	24.644	438	1,8%
London	41.690	825	2,0%
Madrid	9.734	167	1,7%
Milan	6.833	147	2,2%
Munich	25.423	724	2,8%
Paris	47.913	964	2,0%
Prague	33.321	807	2,4%
Rome	21.255	232	1,1%
Vienna	32.630	858	2,6%
Total/average:	293.909	6.369	2,1%

Source: Author

Table 6.6 summarizes the number of synonyms identified on each website, together with the total words found on the analyzed pages. In this way, the wealth of vocabulary related to personality traits on each website can be assessed, as it is represented in the percentage column. From the data in Table 6.6, it can be concluded that, on average, personality-related terms represent 2.1% of the total vocabulary of the websites (this one does not include stop words). Munich and Vienna stand out with their very rich vocabulary related to personality, both of them scoring more than 0.5 points above the average score. In contrast, however, the low amount of specific vocabulary identified on Rome's website is surprising: only 1.1% corresponds to personality traits, which is one point below average. Nevertheless, all websites presented enough evidence to conduct the study.

The first approach to identifying an overall tendency in the European urban destinations' personalities is presented in Figure 6.9. Based on each destination's personality results, this figure shows the average scores for the five different personality dimensions, calculated in

percentages. A rushed conclusion at this point would be that there is a general personality pattern led by excitement and followed by sincerity, sophistication, competence, and ruggedness, in that order. However, as will be shown in the descriptive results section, only three destinations fit this pattern: Amsterdam, Prague, and Vienna. Thus, further analysis is needed to confirm the existence of certain patterns.

Figure 6.9. **Overall tendency of European urban destinations' personalities**
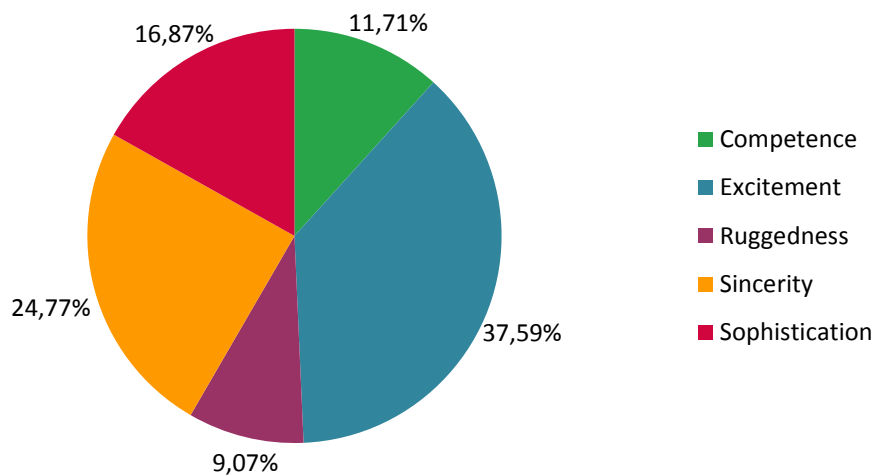
Source: Author

Upon closer inspection, three general tendencies can be inferred from the data in Figure 6.9. These are useful to understand the character of the European urban destinations and to guide further analysis.

- First, as mentioned above, excitement is the most predominant dimension, represented by 37.59% of the vocabulary. This tendency is followed by 10 different cases and, in most of them, excitement achieves over 10% more visibility than the second strongest dimension. Only Madrid and Istanbul differ in this pattern: they are projected more as sincere than they are exciting.

- A second trend is the lower presence of terms related to competence and ruggedness. In general, these are the two least dominant personality dimensions, with scores around 10%, and even lower for ruggedness. Competence only achieves a higher score than sophistication in London's case, becoming the third most prevalent personality dimension.

- Sincerity and sophistication are usually the second and third strongest personality dimensions. The three exceptional cases explained in the previous two points are again exceptions to this general tendency. Furthermore, the prevalence of one over the other cannot be confirmed, even though in general terms sincerity is more present.

In interpreting these findings, it is important to note that average scores do not indicate a unique overall pattern, but instead only point to general tendencies that must be further analyzed to identify real patterns or proximity between brands. Nevertheless, although exploratory, the findings show certain similarities between destinations' personalities, which are mainly dominated by the excitement dimension and show fewer traits related to ruggedness. This is in line with hypothesis 8: that destinations have a general tendency to project similar patterns of personality since they compete in the same market niche. To better explore this possibility, further statistical analysis is presented in the relational results chapter.

6.2. DESCRIPTIVE RESULTS

This section explores the characteristics of each website's communication. In particular, the focus is on how destinations build their image through their official website, what product-related associations stand out in their discourse, and what personality traits characterize each destination. To investigate this, the websites' textual content was analyzed. However, as mentioned previously, websites are complex sources of information. It is thus not enough to analyze textual discourse, since many other characteristics contribute to the website's overall performance which also need to be considered. On this basis, the following model of analysis is replicated for each website in the sample.

First, the overall quality of the website is assessed using the WQI assessment methodology. Besides the overall score obtained for each destination, this chapter summarizes and explains the results obtained for each parameter. In other words, not only numerical results are given, but also the most outstanding indicators related to these scores are explained to understand how each website performs regarding each parameter. In particular, the present author puts emphasis in four specific indicators related to the discourse characteristics and the integration of image and text.

Subsequently, the analysis goes further into the textual discourse and its relation to different brand associations. On the one hand, to assess the presence of product-related associations in a comparable way, all references are linked to the previously identified product-related categories. Since this study aims to identify the core associations and similarities between destinations, the most dominant categories are identified and commented on here. On the other hand, the results obtained from the personality analysis are also presented. The relevance of each personality dimension is determined, and different recurrent words are identified as key vocabulary related to the destination's personality.

6.2.1. The case of Amsterdam

Similar to the overall results, the first step of each destination analysis was the overall assessment of their official website. This stage aimed to control for certain variables that might have an effect on the overall communication. The author had a special interest in assessing the integration between image and text in the discourse. Since later stages of the analysis focused only on textual content, assessing the correspondence between image and text was crucial.

As a first step, the WQI of the website was obtained. In Amsterdam's case, 0.7 points out of a maximum score of 1 are achieved. Furthermore, the scores for each dimension of the analysis were also assessed separately. Figure 6.10 graphically summarizes the overall score achieved by www.iamsterdam.com and the results obtained for each parameter investigated in the study. In yellow, the dashed line indicates the average score of the destination, the WQI. In contrast, the area indicated in blue provides more detailed information about the outcomes of each parameter. In additional, a pink dashed line illustrates the average scores obtained by all European destinations' websites in the sample, as seen in the overall results. The combination of these three sets of results makes it possible to understand at first sight how the website performs compared to the average tendency.

Similar to the average scores, this website tends to perform significantly better on technical, communication, and discursive dimensions than it does on relational aspects. Even though it has a higher score than the European average for mobile communication, the areas of social media and interactivity achieve very low results. Regarding relational parameters, mobile communication stands out due to the complete offer of apps available containing useful information for tourists, including for different platforms (indicators L2 and L4 [i.L2 & i.L4]).

However, reinforcing its relation to social media could be beneficial for both platforms and contribute to intensifying user traffic both ways. For example, while the website shows good audiovisual material within the content layout, it lacks a direct link to its official YouTube channel (i.K6). Furthermore, the information credibility could be strengthened by linking the page to an external recommendation service, such as Trip Advisor, which can be useful to reinforce users' opinions (Marinakou, Giousmpasoglou, & Paliktzoglou, 2015; Willemsen, Neijens, Bronner, & de Ridder, 2011) (i.K8).

Figure 6.10. **Overall assessment of Amsterdam's website**
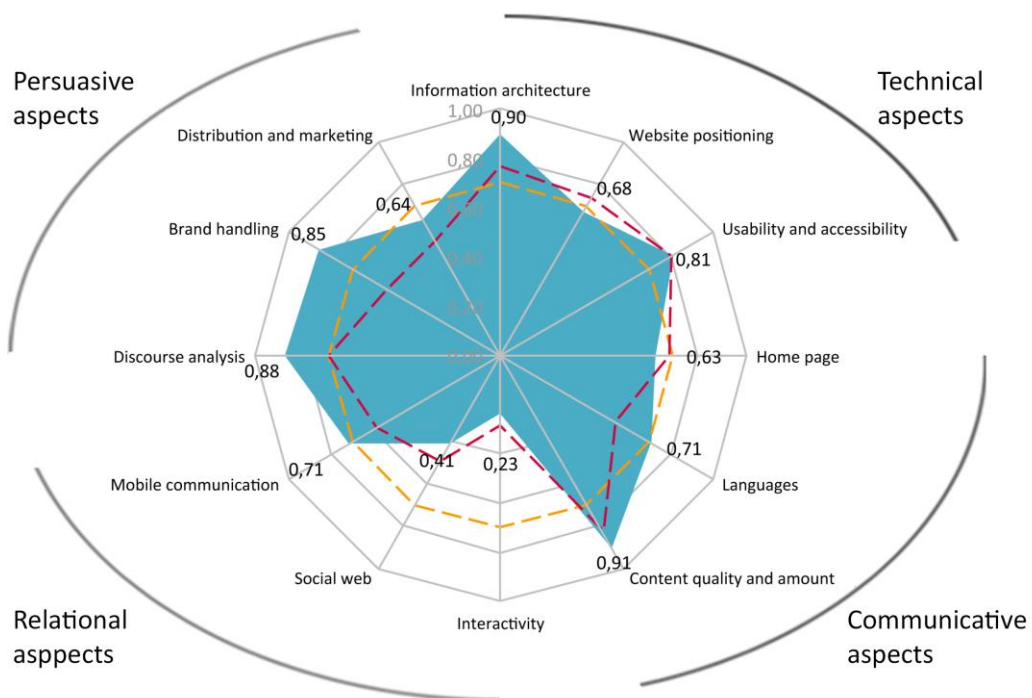
Source: Author

On the other hand, the website shows an outstanding strength on five different parameters: information architecture, usability and accessibility, content quality and amount, discourse, and brand handling. The website scores really high in all these areas, exceeding 0.8 points in every case. In particular, the results obtained for almost all the indicators related to information architecture are optimal, achieving the maximum score of 0.9 at this parameter. Furthermore, usability and accessibility show high scores, ensuring that users have a positive experience on a technical level.

Similarly, the brand handling parameter achieves the best score out of all the websites in the sample. The website shows great coherence with the visual identity of the brand: the layout

maintains the logo style and the related visual attributes such as colors, fonts, and other graphical traits of the brand. The absence of a brand slogan is the only indicator that scores low in this parameter (i.H1); however, this could be a decision related to the brand strategy.

In another vein, content quality and amount also achieve great results, with the website offering all essential content for tourists. The website stands out for offering highly exhaustive, well organized, and useful information about practical matters such as traveling to the destination and transport to move around (i.B2 & i.B3). Indicators related to this parameter only identify more room for improvement regarding the interactivity and provisioning of the destination map, and the availability of some general contacts of interest, such as police and emergency numbers. These improvements would further strengthen the website at the informational level.

Regarding the discourse parameter, it was important for this study to examine it closely. The discursive analysis was conducted from a semiotic perspective, analyzing the existence and the quality of possible worlds. While some other destinations are able to build complex worlds encompassing sub-worlds adjusted to specific tourist profiles, such as Vienna, Amsterdam's website builds a unique possible world, presenting the city as a competent destination (i.I1). It is credible, well structured, and uses a variety of arguments and information to sustain the destination proposal (i.I2). Furthermore, within this parameter, four crucial indicators are related to the superficial level of the discourse (how it looks), as shown in Table 6.7.

Table 6.7. **Amsterdam's scores for the h.10, i.3, i.4, and i.5 indicators**

h.10 At the homepage	**Are pictures (figures, pictures, videos…) distinctive of the territory?** Images can be unique for the brand or generic pictures that would suit different destinations.	Max. Score
i.3. Superficial level	**Is visual and verbal content using persuasive codes?** Existence of rhetorical figures	Max. Score
i.4. Embodiment	**Does the website combine different types of expressive resources?** It combines text, visual, and audiovisual in a balanced way or it opts for one of them exclusively?	Max. Score
i.5. Embodiment	**Are images well integrated and coherent with the text?** Are images aligned with the discourse conceptually, descriptively or in a complementary way?	Max. Score

Source: Author – WQI template (Annexes)

Since this study focuses mainly on textual content, these indicators regarding the relationship and interaction between image and text are determinant to assess transferability of the textual content results to the overall website content. Although in further stages only the text is analyzed, in those cases where these four indicators achieve the maximum score, it can be assumed that the visual content is aligned with the results obtained from textual information. In this case, Table 6.7 shows that www.iamsterdam.com obtains the maximum score for all four indicators, meaning that there is a good and aligned interaction between image and text.

Regarding the first two indicators, the analyst inspected several pages of the website to determine whether text and image were distinctive and added further expressive value. More specifically, rhetorical figures were identified that brought the discourse beyond a mere description towards persuasive content. Furthermore, indicators 4 and 5 assessed the interrelation between text and image. In this case, Amsterdam's official website combines text and image, and the two are aligned. The visual content follows the content of the text, and no neutral images, either selected from archives or pictures that would be suitable for any destination, were found during the analysis.

Finally, the four remaining parameters show good results, although distribution and marketing, home page, and website positioning score below the average of the European destinations. As mentioned in a previous chapter, commercializing products and services on a destination's official website is a strategic decision. Since the distribution and marketing parameter is mainly linked to the possibility of turning a visit into a final purchase, websites that do not have a commercializing goal score low on it.

Positioning also has a good score that could be improved. The website could be strengthened by making tourism-related words more present in the different pages' title, in the URLs, or in the metadata keywords (i.E2, i.E2 & i.E3). Similarly, the home page is distinctive of the destination: it makes a positive impression and it invites users to keep navigating. Nevertheless, some functional information that is useful for users, such as contact, site map, and FAQ, is missing (i.A11, i.A12 & i.A13). Furthermore, the assessment methodology positively values websites that exclusively serve tourism purposes, a differentiated URL, however, Amsterdam uses the same domain to inform to tourists, locals, the press, or business (i.A2). While this may be a strategic decision, the results regarding this indicator may slightly distort the results.

To conclude, despite some room for improvement, the overall quality of the website is high. Especially the language treatment in the discourse and the different expressive resources match brand expectations and achieve positive results with above-average scores.

6.2.1.1. Product-related categories

Once the overall quality of the website was assessed, the researcher proceeded to identify the core product-related categories associated with the brand. The homepage and first- and second-level pages of Amsterdam's official destination website provided 76 useful sources and 638 references. The majority of these references, 69.9%, correspond to navigational content units, meaning more presence of the different topics across the website pages but less textual content. This is complemented by 29.2% of references corresponding to informational content, the pages' main body text.

Further, the coders identified only 0.9% of the sample as corresponding to transactional content. Contrasting with the results obtained for the distribution and marketing parameter, shown in Figure 6.10, these results indicate that commercializing options have a lower visibility.

Table 6.8. **Amsterdam analysis information**

Source: Author

With regard to the most dominant categories, Figure 6.11 shows a clear prevalence of the categories of tourist products and packages, and cultural attractions and activities, with almost double the presence of the third most dominant product-related category: events, fairs, and festivals. Both of the first two categories are present in an important number of sources: 42 and 33, respectively. The products and packages category shows a constant presence throughout the website hierarchy: it is present on the homepage, on four of the five pages on the first level, and on several pages on the second level. Similarly, cultural activities and attractions also has a considerable presence on several pages of the website, but only on the first and second levels. This category is not introduced on the homepage, where no related content was identified.

Figure 6.11. **Amsterdam's most prevalent product-related categories**
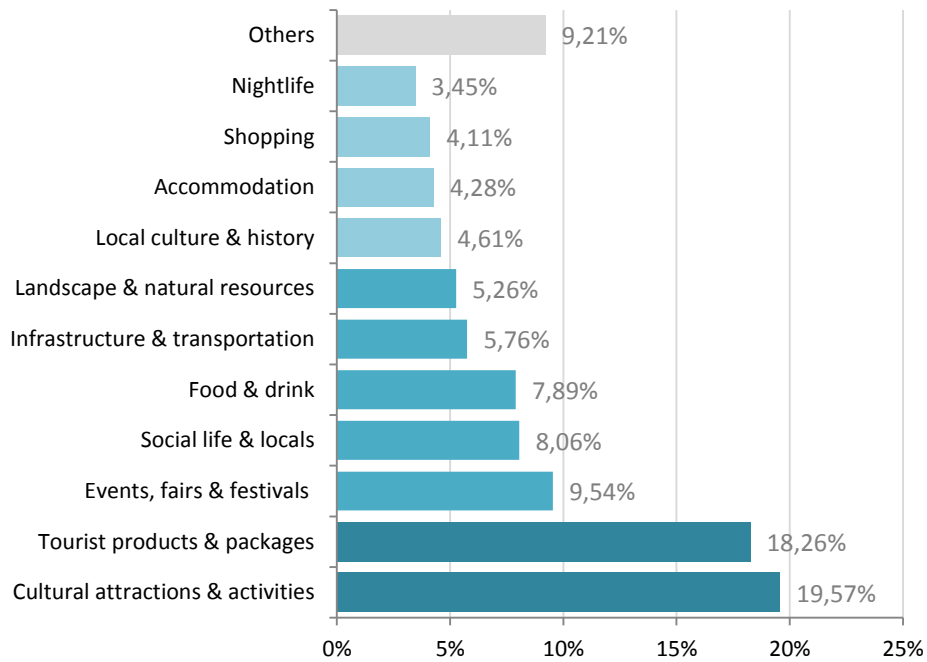
Source: Author

The results obtained for these two categories are aligned with average scores, although cultural attractions and activities is the most prevalent category in this case. In contrast, the remaining categories in Figure 6.11 differ from the average scores.

Besides the two most dominant categories, five other categories stand out: events, fairs, and festivals, with 9.09% of references dedicated to it; social life and locals, with 7.68% of references; food and drink, with another 7.52%; infrastructure and transportation, with 5.49%; and landscape and natural resources, with 5.26%. All are present in more than 5% of the references and, furthermore, all are present on the homepage. While the number of references to these categories is significantly lower than for the first two, their presence on the homepage indicates their relevant role in the brand characterization. It is interesting to emphasize the relevance of social life and locals in Amsterdam's image construction, since this category has a low average presence across all websites. Thus, it becomes a more distinguishing and unique category of the destination.

In addition, the homepage also contains information about nightlife at the destination, which is surprising considering the low visibility of this category throughout the rest of the website. As seen in Chapter 2, homepages should summarize the most important content of the

website. Therefore, these seven categories become the opening statement introducing Amsterdam as a destination.

At the opposite end, the results show several categories with very low scores. There is no content dedicated to political and economic factors, at least on the first two levels of the website hierarchy. In addition, little attention is paid to wellness, safety, services, and climate categories; less than 1% of the references are about these topics, and they are all excluded from Figure 6.11.

Finally, to continue the analysis, the data coded for product-related categories and target categories was crossed. It must be noted that information linked to the generic node was included. The analysis identified 57 different references coded simultaneously at both nodes. Specifically, these content units target seven different tourist profiles: business, couples, family and kids, LGBT, luxury, students, and sustainable, as shown in Figure 6.12.

Several conclusions may be drawn from the data in this figure. On the one hand, fairs and festival stands out as the category with more references adapted for specific targets, almost doubling the second category with more references linked to a specific target. However, only families and LGBT tourists appear to be interested in this type of content or, at least, this is what is suggested by the official website. Furthermore, these two tourist profiles also emerge as the most considered by the destination, and they are related to several other topics.

Figure 6.12. **Product-related categories and tourist profiles; the case of Amsterdam**

Source: Author

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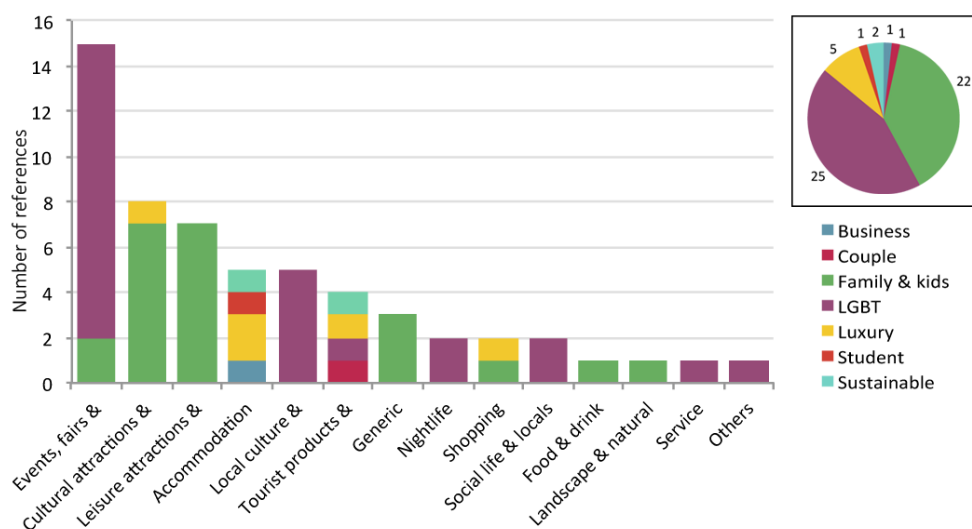
It is interesting to highlight that, despite the availability of information about events, the two aforementioned profiles appear to have opposite interests. The topics targeting LGBT tourists are radically different from the ones aimed at family travelers. The former topics mainly concern events, local culture, nightlife, and social life. In fact, this is one of the few cases where local culture and social life appear to be related to a specific profile. In contrast, the latter are more related to cultural and leisure attractions, and include more overall information about the familiar facet of the destination (generic node). The number of content units related to both events and families is slightly lower.

On the other hand, accommodation and tourism products and packages appear to be topics associated with a greater variety of tourist profiles. Amsterdam offers suitable accommodations for tourists seeking a luxurious experience, for business travelers, for students, and for tourists concerned with sustainability. Similarly, several tourist products are adjusted to couples, LGBT tourists, visitors seeking luxury, and tourists concerned with sustainable tourism. Furthermore, some additional references related to cultural attractions and shopping are also linked to the luxury experience.

6.2.1.2. Symbolic dimension: personality

With regard to the symbolic dimension of the brand, the analysis identified 882 words related to personality traits in all the analyzed website pages. The results point to the destination of Amsterdam as a brand strong in the excitement dimension, as can be seen in Figure 6.13: 39% of the total adjectives related to personality traits are linked to this dimension. This result is in line with the general tendency of European urban destinations to present themselves as exciting (see section 6.1).

In addition, the analysis also identified two additional dimensions with a greater presence on the website: sincerity and sophistication: 21.09% of words relate to the former, and another 19.95% relate to the latter. In contrast, the dimension of competence is only present in 12.59% of the words related to personality traits, and ruggedness is only represented by 7.37%.

Figure 6.13. **Composition of Amsterdam's projected personality**
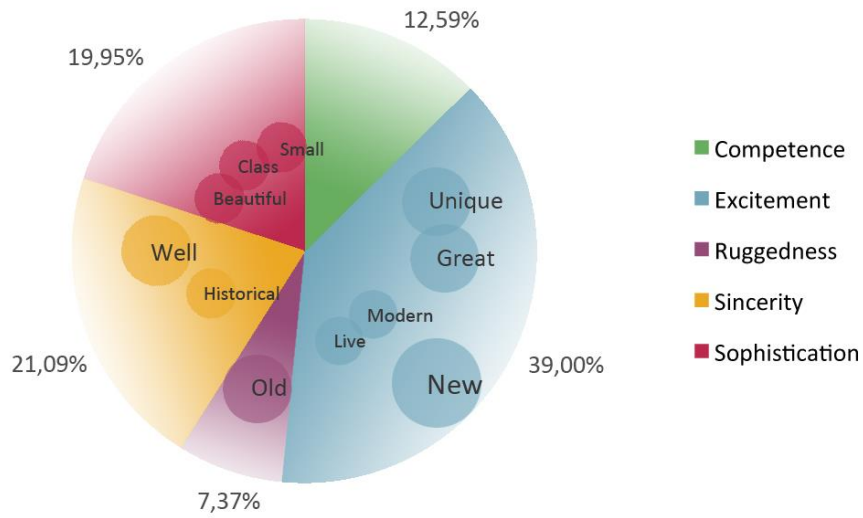
Upon closer inspection of how these traits are inferred from the text, some words related to personality emerge as dominant within the discourse: they have a greater presence in the content. For this reason, the author considered it to be interesting to highlight them in Figure 6.13 in colored circles. The different circle sizes are related to the number of times the words appear in the text and, thus, their relevance within the discourse. All those words representing 2% to 2.99% of the total words related to personality are considered to be slightly recurrent and are represented with small circles close to the center of the figure.

Furthermore, those that comprise 3% to 3.99% of the total words are indicated with medium circles, and located between large and small circles. At the edge of the figure, highly repeated words are placed in larger circles; these words represent more than the 4% of all personality-related synonyms. The overall purpose of this figure is to highlight the most relevant vocabulary used to describe the destination, thereby providing a more qualitative evaluation of its projected personality.

At first sight, it is logical that the most dominant dimension, excitement, is related to more recurrent words. In this case, the word *new* has a high presence, representing 5.90% of all words linked to personality traits. In contrast, even though competence is not the dimension with the smallest presence, there are no highlighted words related to this dimension. However, this is only the result of the use of a more diverse vocabulary linked to this dimension.

It is also interesting to highlight the relation of these words to specific facets within the personality dimension. As noted in Chapter 2, brand personalities are not flat, but constructs full of shades. To demonstrate some of these shades, in the following the most prevalent vocabulary is linked to the different facets of each dimension identified in Aaker's (1997) original study.

Regarding excitement dimension, the words *new, great,* and *live* are closer to a *spirited* facet of excitement; *unique* is related to the imaginative facet of excitement; and *modern* to an up-to date one. Similarly, the outstanding words related to sincerity point to two different facets: *historical,* a synonym of real, is linked to the honest side of the brand, while *well* is linked to its wholesome facet.

Similarly, the highlighted vocabulary in the sophistication dimension links it to two different facets: both *class* and *beautiful*, synonyms of good-looking, are connected to the upper-class facet of sophistication; while *small*, synonym of smooth, points to a more charming side of this personality dimension. It is interesting to note that, despite the low presence of ruggedness, only described by 11 synonyms, the term *old* is highly present within the discourse, representing more than 3% of the vocabulary. This term points to a more experienced and tough side of the destination.

All in all, Amsterdam's symbolic dimension, presented as a tourist destination on its official website, seems to be described by a highly exciting personality, together with a sincere character and a more sophisticated dimension. Amsterdam's projected personality shows a similar pattern as the average scores.

6.2.2. The case of Barcelona

Regarding Barcelona's official website communication, this analysis again starts with an overall assessment. Similar to Amsterdam, www.barcelonaturisme.com obtains a WQI of 0.7 points out of 1. However, the distribution of this scoring along the different parameters is not the same as in the previous case. As can be seen in Figure 6.14, the shape of the blue area, indicating Barcelona's results, is highly similar to the average scores of the sample (indicated by a pink dashed line). Again, the best results are obtained for the technical parameters, while social media and interactivity show the lowest scores.

The strongest and weakest parameters of the website can easily be identified by observing the difference between the yellow dashed line and the blue area. Eight parameters are above the overall WQI score, and only four below. Among them, content quality and amount again shows the best results, achieving almost the maximum score: 0.95 points. In addition, very close to this parameter, the website obtains excellent results for mobile communication, with a score of 0.94. For both parameters, Barcelona's official website achieves the best results out of all the sample websites, together with Vienna's website, which shows the same score for content quality and amount, and the second one for mobile communication with 0.89 points.

Figure 6.14. **Overall assessment of Barcelona's website**
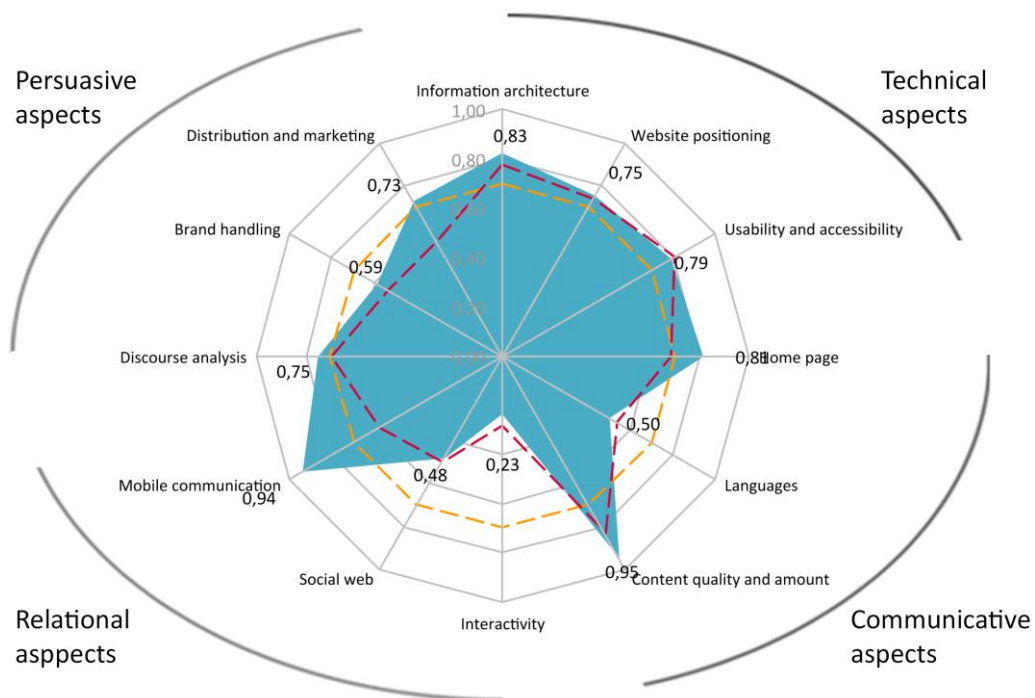
Source: Author

Barcelona's homepage and distribution and marketing are also above the European average score. The homepage parameter is positively valued for its automatic detection of language (i.A1), also done by Amsterdam's website, and the inclusion of some functional information, such as a site map and contact details (i.A12 & i.A13). On the other hand, as mentioned earlier, the parameter of distribution and marketing is strongly linked to commercialization. Thus, the score of 0.73 obtained for this parameter shows a strategic intention to commercialize tourist products. Among this parameter's indicators, the search and booking system for tickets integrated on the website (i.F5) stands out, a function that is also present on Paris' website.

However, Barcelona could improve its results by enhancing the option to purchase flight tickets towards the destination (i.F7) or improving its restaurant search engine (i.F6).

In contrast, social media and interactivity again obtain very low scores. Similar to Amsterdam's website, the presence of an external recommendation service, such as Trip Advisor, could strengthen the information credibility and users' opinions (Willemsen et al., 2011) (i.K8). In addition, there are no consumer-to-consumer interaction possibilities: there is no destination community, nor are other tourists' experiences shown on the website (i.J7 &i.J8).

Concerning the brand handling and discourse analysis, lower scores are observed than for the previous parameters, albeit still higher than the average score. The main cause of the low scores for the brand handling parameter is the inexistence of a destination logo (i.H2). Since this parameter focuses on the graphical identity of the brand, this also affects other indicators' results. While there is graphical coherence throughout the website and an image titled "visit Barcelona" is located in the place where logos are usually found, the author did not consider it to be one. An examination of the same image on different platforms, namely Facebook and Twitter, revealed that while they follow a similar graphic code, the images use different fonts, which does not happen with a logo.

Regarding the discourse parameter, Barcelona's website scores above average with 0.75 points. Similar to Amsterdam's website, barcelonaturisme.com builds a unique possible world for the destination (i.I1), which is credible and well structured (i.I2). As for the specific indicators of interest to the present study, this website also obtains optimal scores.

Table 6.9. **Barcelona's results for the h10, i.3, i.4, and i.5 indicators**

h.10 At the homepage	**Are pictures (figures, pictures, videos…) distinctive of the territory?** Images can be unique for the brand or generic pictures that would suit different destinations.	Max. Score
i.3. Superficial level	**Is visual and verbal content using persuasive codes?** Existence of rhetorical figures	Max. Score
i.4. Embodiment	**Does the website combine different types of expressive resources?** It combines text, visual, and audiovisual in a balanced way or it opts for one of them exclusively?	Max. Score
i.5. Embodiment	**Are images well integrated and coherent with the text?** Are images aligned with the discourse conceptually, descriptively or in a complementary way?	Max. Score

Source: Author – WQI template (Annexes)

As seen in Table 6.9, the website earns the maximum score for the four indicators. To some extent, this allows the researcher to infer that the same results would be obtained for the visual content as for the textual data. Nevertheless, at the end of this study, the author will consider the necessity to further explore this matter.

6.2.2.1. Product-related categories

With regard to the projected destination image analysis, it is first important to describe the sample of study for Barcelona's case. Since all the websites in the sample differ in size and characteristics, Table 6.10 summarizes the most relevant characteristics that need to be considered.

Table 6.10. **Barcelona analysis information**

Source: Author

The analysis of Barcelona's projected image identified 326 different references from 31 different sources. Furthermore, the coders identified 70.2% of the references as navigational content units, which are usually characterized by less amount of textual content. The references corresponding to informational content represent 25.8% of the total references, and transactional content corresponds to 4%. Although transactional content corresponds to fewer references, considering the average presence of this type of reference, its percentage is high.

Further examining the 326 coded references, 10 outstanding categories are identified, shown in Figure 6.15. Each of these categories represents more than the 3% of the content units identified on the website. Furthermore, these 10 categories alone account for 89.14% of the coded references. Among them, the major prevalence of tourist products and packages is undeniable in the content, but the food and drink category also appears to be highly relevant for Barcelona's image construction. These two categories alone represent more than 40% of the content units (28.12% and 16.29%, respectively). Furthermore, both are also present on the homepage.

Figure 6.15. **Barcelona's most prevalent product-related categories**

Category	Percentage
Others	10,86%
Architecture & heritage	3,83%
Nightlife	3,83%
Leisure attractions & activities	4,79%
Shopping	5,43%
Infrastructure & transportation	6,07%
Sports	6,39%
Cultural attractions & activities	6,71%
Landscape & natural resources	7,67%
Food & drink	16,29%
Tourist products & packages	28,12%
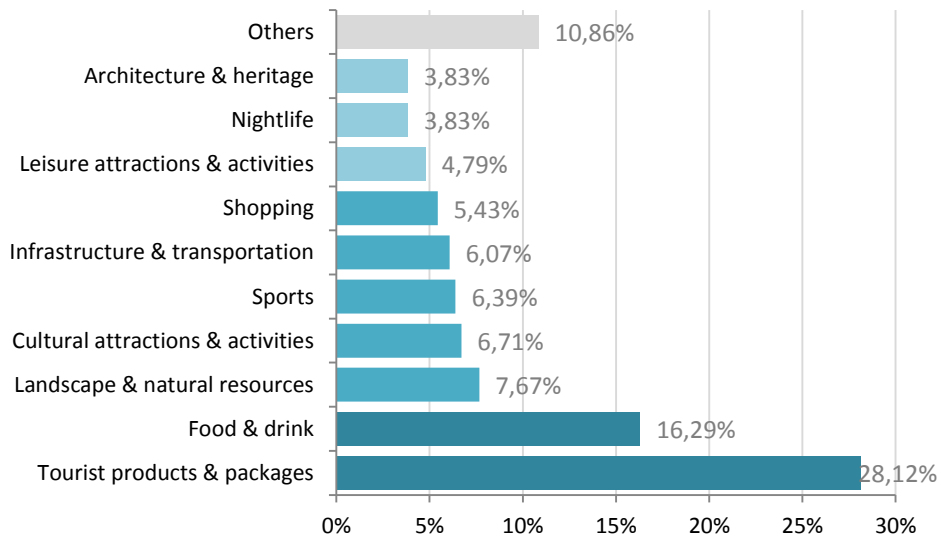
Source: Author

Furthermore, five other categories are also highly present on the website, each representing more than 5% of the content units, and two other, less visible categories are still significant at above 3%. On the one hand, landscape and natural resources, cultural attractions and activities, infrastructure and transportation, and architecture and heritage are highly common categories across destinations; almost all destinations grant this content type a significant presence. Hence, it is surprising to see the lower score achieved by cultural attractions and activities on Barcelona's website compared to average scores.

On the other hand, the importance given to sports, shopping, and nightlife is more distinguishing of the destination. Only seven other destinations include shopping as a dominant category, and only Amsterdam and Barcelona include nightlife in just under 4% of their content. Furthermore, it is interesting to highlight that only five websites give significant presence to the sports category, and it shows the highest prevalence in Barcelona's case, representing more than 7% of content units. Given this fact, the sports category can be assumed to have a more differentiating role for Barcelona than for other European destinations.

However, on Barcelona's homepage, which can be seen as the destination's letter of introduction and summary, some of the previously mentioned categories are not included. Only infrastructure and transportation, cultural activities, and nightlife are present on the homepage besides the two most dominant categories. Furthermore, it is interesting to

highlight the presence of events, fairs, and festivals content on the homepage despite the fact that deeper analysis revealed that this is not one of the website's core categories.

At this point, it is important to note that some of the remaining categories are also present on the website, despite their lower scores. Leisure attractions and activities, nightlife, and architecture and heritage represent more than 3% of the references each. Only four categories are clearly not relevant to building the destination image: wellness, service, safety, and political and economic factors are not present at all within the content.

Finally, the analysis of Barcelona's core associations also identified those references linked to a specific tourist profile. In this case, the amount of content dedicated to specific profiles is low. Only 19 references are simultaneously linked to a product-related category and to one of the following profiles: disabled tourists, families, LGBT, students, and tourists concerned with sustainability. This represents 5.8% of the total references identified on the website.

Figure 6.16. **Product-related categories and tourist profiles; the case of Barcelona**
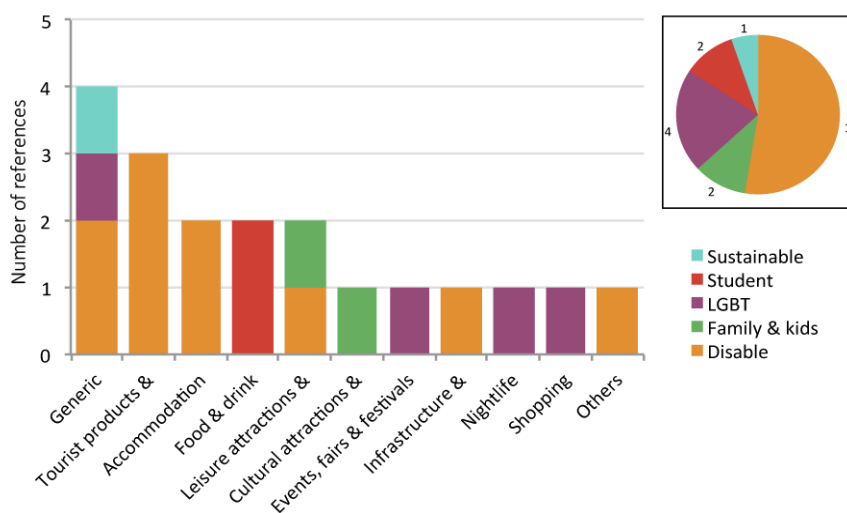
Source: Author

As seen in Figure 6.16, references linked to a tourist profile are spread across many product-related categories, making its interpretation more difficult from these categories' perspective. Only the generic and tourist products and packages categories seem to offer more content for specific profiles. In contrast, the remaining categories only make one or two references dedicated to specific tourists.

However, an interpretation from the tourist profile perspective seems to lead to much clearer conclusions. The most prevalent target is the disable tourist profile, with 10 different references from different categories linked to it. However, it is interesting to highlight that the

topics dedicated to LGBT tourist are highly similar to those on Amsterdam's website: events, nightlife, and shopping. Furthermore, topics targeting family tourism seem to focus on leisure and cultural attraction and activities, like in the case of Amsterdam.

All in all, although the disparity of references targeting specific tourists makes it more difficult to highlight dominant categories, those tourist profiles that are more relevant to the destination can clearly be identified. Specifically, tourists with disabilities are Barcelona's DMO primary target, followed by LGBT tourists. In addition, the interests of LGBT tourists and families are also aligned with those highlighted on Amsterdam's website.

6.2.2.2. The symbolic dimension: Barcelona's personality traits

In the symbolic dimension analysis, 226 words were found that were related to the different original personality traits (Aaker, 1997). Similar to the case of Amsterdam, excitement is the strongest dimension of Barcelona's personality, as seen in Figure 6.17. In this regard, 39.38% of the vocabulary related to personality traits is linked to this dimension; this makes it the third most exciting destination in the sample, at least based on its official communication.

Figure 6.17. **Composition of Barcelona's projected personality**
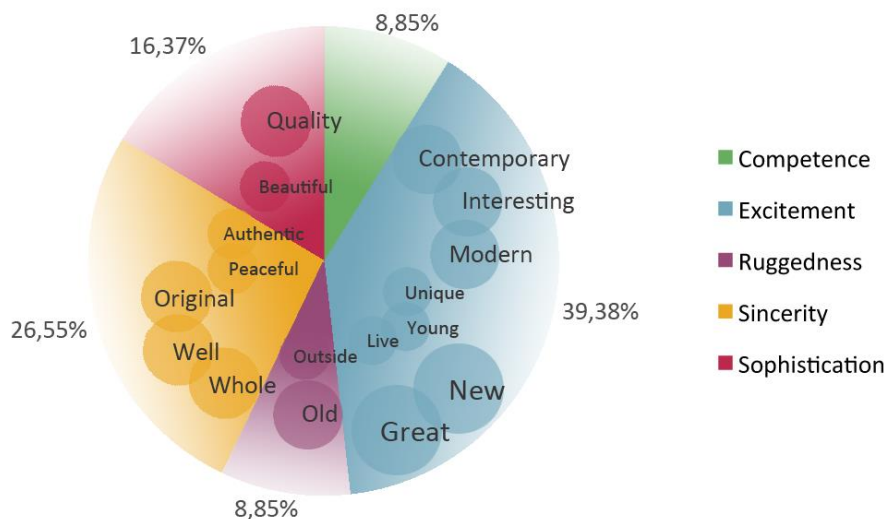
Source: Author

The analysis found 27 different words evoking this personality dimension. Furthermore, several outstanding words were identified, two of them representing more than 4% of the total words – *great* and *new* – and three with a presence above 3%: *modern*, *contemporary,*

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and *interesting*. It is interesting to note that three of these words are also highly present on Amsterdam's website and, as will be shown in further sections, the term *contemporary* is also highly present on many other websites. Only *interesting* seems to be more unique of Barcelona and its offer. Furthermore, three additional words each represent more than 2% of the personality traits: live, unique, and young.

It is worth highlighting that four of the most used words to represent excitement are related to the spirited facets of this trait: *young, new, great,* and *live*. In contrast, only two are linked to an up-to-date side of the brand: *modern* and *contemporary*. The remaining two are linked to daring and imaginative facets of the destination.

Also aligned with the general tendency of the sample, the excitement dimension is followed in second place by sincerity, accounting for 26.55% of words, and in third place by sophistication, representing 16.37% of them. While 19 different words are related to each dimension, more words are repeated for sincerity. Among them, the terms *original*, *well,* and *whole* represent more than 3% of the total words, and all three are related to the wholesome facet of the destination. Furthermore, with less presence, *authentic* and *peaceful* also support the sincerity dimension, showing a more honest and amicable side of the brand.

In contrast, the words related to sophistication are more diverse and only *quality* and *beautiful* stand out, representing more than 3% and 2% of the words, respectively. Both are closely related to the upper-class facet of sophistication, with one oriented more towards the value of the destination, and the other to its physical side.

However, unlike the general tendency, the fourth dominant trait of Barcelona personality's is shared by the remaining two dimensions: ruggedness and competence show the same presence on the website. However, the vocabulary related to the competence dimension is more diverse and there is barely any repetition, while there is a strong presence of the terms *old* and *outside* in relation to ruggedness.

Before concluding this section, it is important to note that one synonym related to the competence dimension was excluded from the analysis: the word *born* was confused with Born neighborhood, a characteristic of Barcelona's offer, thus biasing the results. For this reason, the author excluded it from the thesaurus during Barcelona's assessment.

6.2.3. The case of Frankfurt

Like the previous two cases, the analysis of Frankfurt's website communication starts with an overall assessment of the destination's official website. In this case, the WQI analysis resulted in an overall index of 0.53 points. While this is the lowest WQI score in the sample, it is still positive. The original methodology design sets 0.5 points as the line between good website communication with some areas for improvement, and websites with relevant needs for improvement. Furthermore, the comparison of this result with those obtained in previous studies using the same methodology also suggest that this score is positive (Fernández-Cavia et al., 2013).

To better assess Frankfurt's official website communication, however, a deeper analysis of the different parameters is needed. Firstly, it must be noted that in Figure 6,18, the blue area delimiting the www.frankurt-tourismus.de results shows a different pattern compared to the average scores. In this case, the asymmetry of the results increases. It is noticeable at first sight the difference between the high scores for the technical parameters and the results obtained for most of the other parameters.

Figure 6.18. **Overall assessment of Frankfurt's website**

Source: Author

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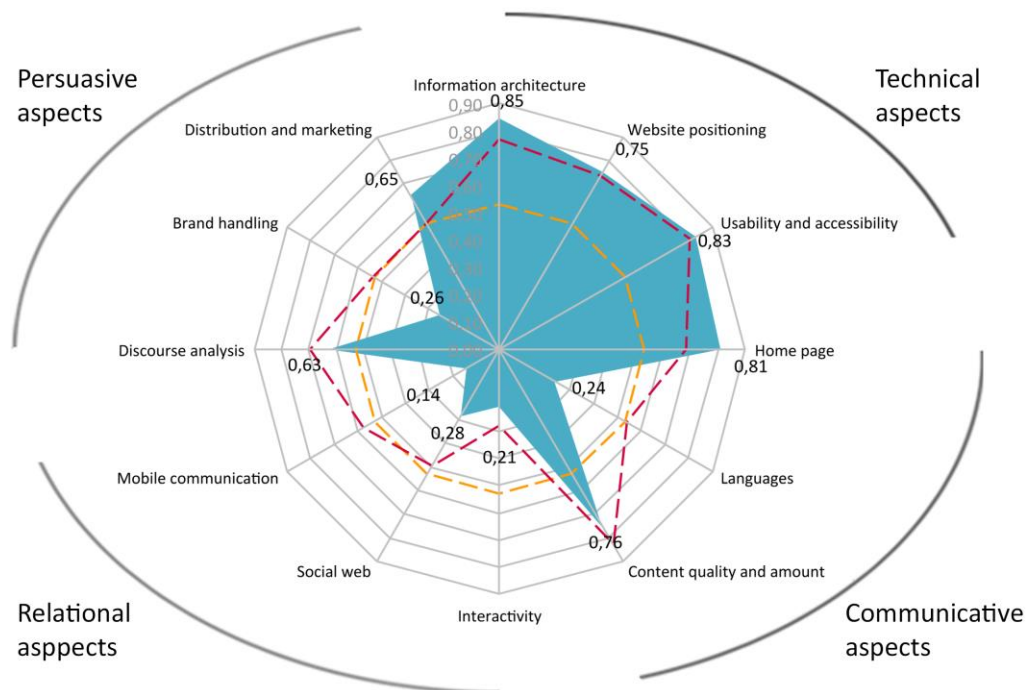
In stark contrast to the sample's average score of 0.58, the mobile communication parameter scores 0.14. However, other destinations achieving the same result: Madrid and Istanbul. In fact, this is the dimension with the highest variance between the highest and the lowest scores in the sample. As mentioned in the overall results section, these polarized results might be caused by a strategic decision by the destinations not to invest resources in apps, and instead to focus on making their official websites available on different devices. In this case, www.frankfurt-tourismus.de is mobile responsive (i.L1) but does not include any other information about useful official or third-party apps.

Similar to Barcelona's case, Frankfurt's official website does not include a destination logo (i.H2), which is the main reason for its low results for the brand handling parameter. In addition, the language parameter also shows an important distance to the average score for many reasons. For example, besides the country's language, German, the website is only available in one additional language (i.G1), English, and not all the content on the website is translated into it (i.G2).

On a positive note, the homepage shows the highest results among all sample websites. Together with the websites of Barcelona and Paris, the Frankfurt homepage scores 0.81 points for this parameter. It includes most of the essential information that is expected on a homepage; it fulfills the brand expectations on a graphic level; and it invites users to keep navigating. Furthermore, unlike most of the other websites, it clearly identifies different tourist profiles on the homepage, making it easier for tourists to find the most suitable information for themselves (i.A6). Families, business travelers, and groups have special sections with information tailored to their needs.

Finally, regarding the discursive parameter, although it is below average, the score of 0.63 is still a positive result. In line with the two previous cases, Frankfurt builds a single possible world through its website content (i.I1). In this case, however, there is still room to improve the structure and relationship between the different information nodes that are part of this overall destination world (i.I2). As for the four main indicators, Table 6.11 shows the scores obtained by the website.

Table 6.11. **Frankfurt's results for the h10, i.3, i.4, and i.5 indicators**

h.10 At the homepage	**Are pictures (figures, pictures, videos…) distinctive of the territory?** Images can be unique for the brand or generic pictures that would suit different destinations.	Max. Score
i.3. Superficial level	**Is visual and verbal content using persuasive codes?** Existence of rhetorical figures	Max. Score
i.4. Embodiment	**Does the website combine different types of expressive resources?** It combines text, visual, and audiovisual in a balanced way or it opts for one of them exclusively?	Max. Score
i.5. Embodiment	**Are images well integrated and coherent with the text?** Are images aligned with the discourse conceptually, descriptively or in a complementary way?	Max. Score

Source: Author – WQI template (Annexes)

Rhetorical figures are show throughout the website, also through the combination of text and image, and pictures are distinctive of the territory. Furthermore, all the visual material also appears to be aligned with the textual content, and no low-meaning pictures were found in the analysis. All in all, even though the overall results indicate some areas for improvement, the website's discourse obtains positive results, especially with regard to the four aforementioned main indicators.

6.2.3.1. Product-related categories

The starting point of Frankfurt's projected image analysis is the study of the functional dimension of the brand image, like in the previous cases. More specifically, this second stage focuses on the presence of different product-related categories on the official website, www.frankfurt-tourismus.de. To begin, Table 6.12 indicates the specificities of this case of study; the analysis was conducted on 32 different pages and concluded with 252 coded references. It is interesting to highlight that none of these references correspond to transactional content units, in contrast with the WQI results. However, this could be the result of the website's architectural characteristics: transactional units could be located at deeper levels of the hierarchy. Nevertheless, in this analysis all the references correspond to navigational and informational content units. Following the general trend,

Table 6.12. **Frankfurt analysis information**

Source: Author

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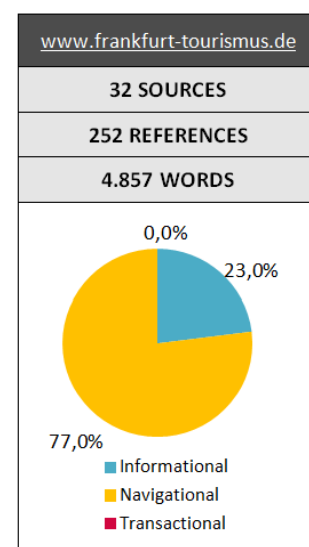
navigational content units predominate the coded content, representing 77% of the references, while 23% correspond to informational content.

From these references, the dominance of those related to tourist products and packages is evident. As seen in Figure 6.19, 26.94% of the references offer information in this regard. In addition, information about landscape and natural resources, and food and drink is also highly present, represented by more than 10% of references each. By highlighting only these three categories, more than half of the references are accounted for. Furthermore, together with six additional categories, totaling nine core categories, the author can explain 88.57% of the content and its topics.

Figure 6.19. **Frankfurt's most prevalent product-related categories**
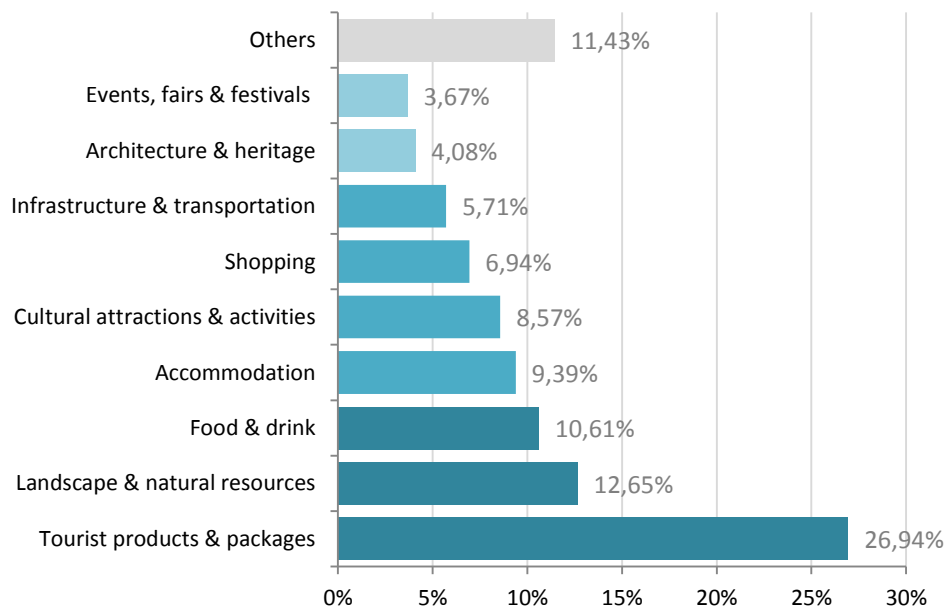
Less prevalent in the discourse but still significant, four categories represent more than 5% of the content each. At the tail, architecture and heritage, and events, fairs, and festivals also emerge as recurrent offer categories, represented by 4.08% and 3.67% of the references, respectively.

All in all, the core categories identified on Frankfurt's website are also highlighted by the sample's average scores as the most relevant topics. However, the relative importance of these nine categories differs from average. It is especially interesting to emphasize the importance of the high presence of the landscape category, which appears to be more

differentiated than the general tendency; as well as the lower presence of cultural activities, which is significantly below average scores.

Furthermore, in contrast with the previous case, all the topics introduced on Frankfurt's homepage also correspond to the most prevalent categories on the website. The first four most dominant categories as well as shopping and events, fairs, and festivals are all present on the front page, which serves as the introduction to the destination. However, it is surprising that cultural attractions and activities is not introduced on the homepage, even though it is the fifth most recurrent topic accounting for 8.57% of the content units. Moreover, infrastructure and transportation, and architecture and heritage prevail within the content but are not introduced on the homepage.

It must be noted that additional content units are linked to other categories, but due to their low presence, representing less that 3% of the references, they are not considered to be core categories. These are sports, landscape and natural resources, service, and local culture and history. It is also interesting to highlight that nightlife and climate are not represented at all on Frankfurt's official website, at least within the first levels of the hierarchy.

Figure 6.20. **Product-related categories and tourist profiles; the case of Frankfurt**
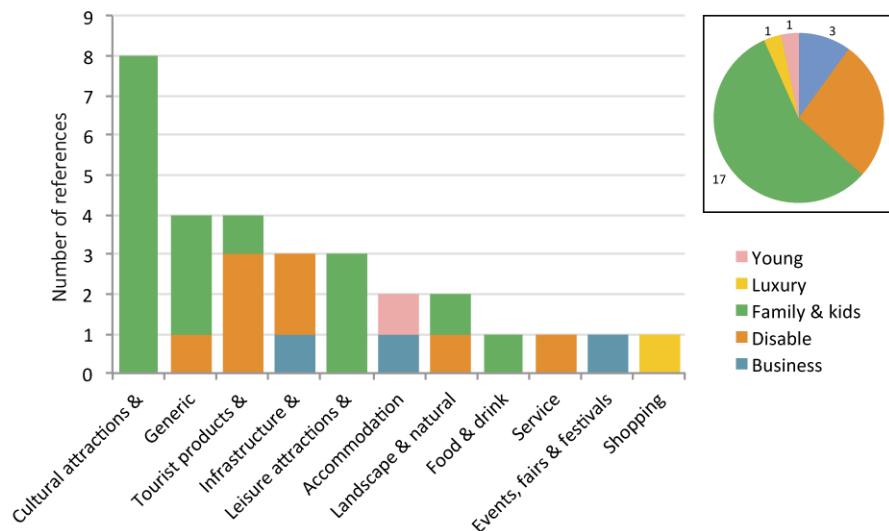
Source: Author

Finally, a closer inspection of the relationship between product-related categories and tourist profiles is represented in Figure 6.20. A total of 30 references are linked to specific tourist profiles. In particular, business, disabled tourists, families, luxury, and young tourists are the

profiles considered by Frankfurt's website. In this case, the cultural attractions category shows more content linked to specific tourist profiles, followed by generic content and tourist products and packages. It is interesting to highlight that all cultural attractions references are dedicated to the same tourist profile: families. Together with generic content and leisure activities, these appear to be the most interesting topics for this tourist profile, a result that is in line with those obtained in previous cases.

Tourists with disabilities also appear to be a priority for Frankfurt as a destination. With eight references linked to this target, the most prevalent topics for disabled tourists are tourist products and packages, and infrastructure and transportation. Finally, though only represented by a single reference, the luxury profile appears once more to be related to shopping activities. However, the little data in this regard makes this interpretation inconclusive.

6.2.3.2. Personality traits of Frankfurt projected on the website

Turning to the symbolic dimension of the brand, this section presents the results obtained from the personality trait search within the website's textual content. The analysis identified a total of 99 words related to personality traits, which is the lowest number of traits identified in any website in the sample. As seen in Figure 6.21, the most dominant personality dimension of Frankfurt's brand is excitement, with 36.36% of the vocabulary related to it, followed by sincerity, with 28.28%. The strength of these two dimensions follows the general tendency. However, Frankfurt's third dominant personality dimension is competence; in contrast to most destinations in the sample, Frankfurt scores higher in this trait than it does in ruggedness and sophistication. Furthermore, the sophistication dimension is the least present one in Frankfurt personality, with only 10.10% of words linked to it.

Upon closer inspection, 21 different words related to excitement dimension can be identified. Among them, three different adjectives appear with a higher frequency: once again, the word *new* emerges as one of the most repeated within the discourse, together with *individual* and *modern*. Furthermore, six more words achieve a frequency of 2%; differing slightly from the previous case, the most used words point to different facets of excitement: *daring*, *up-to-date*, and *spirited*. This points to a multifaceted excitement character.

Figure 6.21. **Composition of Frankfurt's projected personality**
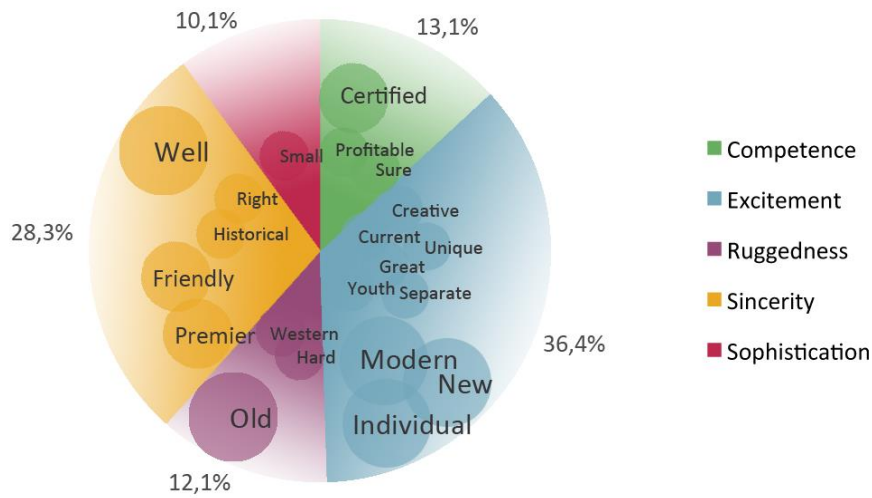
Similarly, the sincerity dimension is represented by 16 different words. Among them, one is highly repeated and also present in the previous cases: *well*, representing more than the 7% of the vocabulary. Moreover, the words *friendly*, evoking the cheerful facet of the brand, and *premier*, linked to its more wholesome side, stand out, accounting for 3% of the total words. In addition, the terms *right* and *historical* represent more than 2% of the words, as seen in Figure 6.21.

However, a surprising lack of diversity of words is used to represent competence on Frankfurt's website. Even though is the third most dominant dimension, only one word is frequently used: *certified*. This is the only term representing more than 3% of the personality vocabulary. However, many other terms also point to competence. Furthermore, the fourth dimension, ruggedness, is only represented by five words, one of them highly frequent. Again, the adjective *old* emerges as one of the dominant ones within this category, accounting for more than 6% of the identified traits.

Finally, Frankfurt's website content shows the lowest score on the sophistication dimension, represented by only 10.10% of the words identified in the analysis. In absolute numbers, the analysis identified the same number of different words as in competence dimension: nine different terms. However, in this case, no significantly repeated words can be highlighted as representative of the personality dimension in the discourse.

6.2.4. The case of Istanbul

Regarding the overall assessment, Istanbul's official website communication shows possibly the most differentiated results from the average scores. Similar to Frankfurt, it achieves one of the lowest WQI scores: 0.54 points, which is still a good result. What is most surprising about Istanbul's case is that the shape of the blue area indicating the results per parameter tends towards symmetry, contrasting with the previous case. Hence, the results obtained for the technical parameters are balanced with the ones obtained for the persuasive ones and, with slightly more differences, the communicative ones as well. Again, the relational parameters achieve the lower scores.

Figure 6.22. **Overall assessment of Istanbul's website**
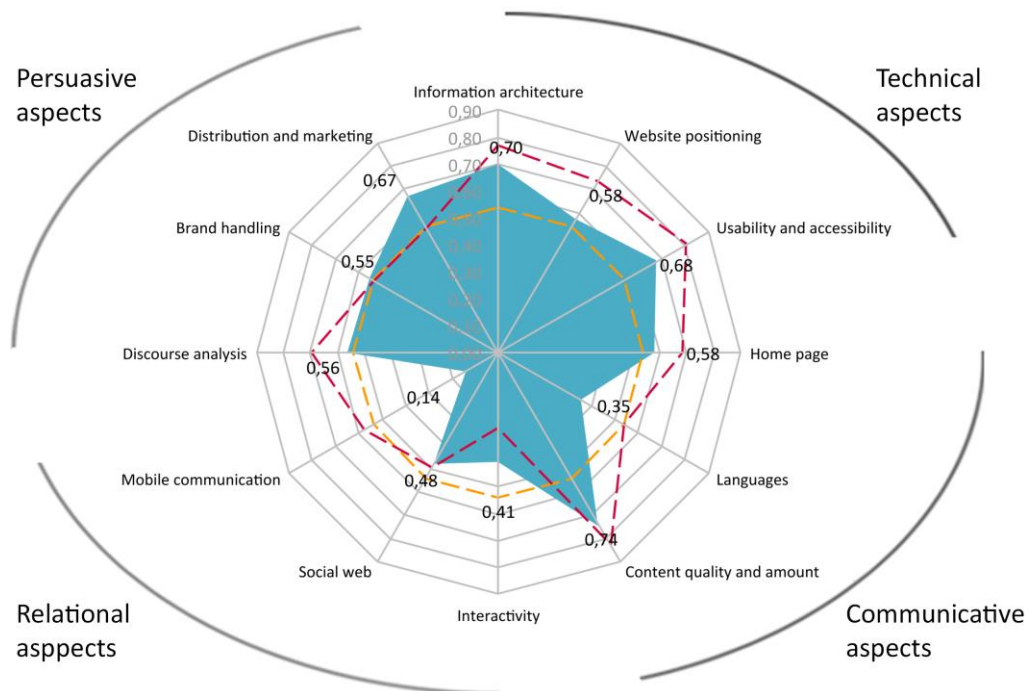
Source: Author

In this case, the technical parameters also show lower results, especially regarding website positioning. Similar to Amsterdam's website, this could be improved by including words related to "tourism" or "destination" within the different pages' titles, in the URL, or in the metadata keywords (i.E2, i.E2 & i.E3). In addition, the website also scores low for indicator E6, taking into account the TrafficRank (i.E6). Based on the information obtained from www.alexa.com, www.howtoistanbul.com is located between the 500,000 and 1,000,000 position, which is very low.

Again, similar to Frankfurt's results, the languages parameter scores only 0.35 points, mainly due to the lack of possibility to select the website's language: it is only available in English. However, in this case, all content is correctly translated into the foreign language. Moreover, mobile communication shows the same results as the previous case: with the same exact scores as Frankfurt for each indicator, Istanbul's website does not offer any app about the destination, either officially developed by the DMO or by other developers. On the other hand, www.howtoistanbul.com is mobile responsive (i.L1).

Among the website's best results, two parameters stand out: content quality and amount, and distribution and marketing, both of them above average. On the one hand, the website scores 0.67 points for the distribution and marketing parameter, a score only surpassed by the websites of Paris and Barcelona. Similar to the latter, Istanbul's website offers the possibility to book tickets directly (i.F5). While it is not a search engine developed by the OMD, as in Barcelona's case, the website integrates a third-party booking system into its layout. In addition, in this case the website also includes links to booking platforms that allow users to purchase flights to the destination (i.F7).

On the other hand, the high score for content quality and amount, 0.74 points, follows the tendency observed in the average results. This is highest score achieved by the website for any parameter. It provides most of the information that is expected from an official tourist website, and stands out in matters such as the history and local culture of the destination (i.B8), and the presence of an interactive destination map (i.B1). However, this parameter could be strengthened by offering content to tourists with disabilities (i.B11) or by adding commercial information about the possibility to hire tourist guides or similar packages.

Furthermore, Istanbul's website also achieves positive results slightly above average for brand handling: 0.55 points. In this case, a logo (in.H2) and also a slogan presenting the destination (i.H1) are present, although the layout of the different pages could better fit the graphic identity set by the logo (mainly in terms of colors) (i.H5). In addition, and related to the discourse parameter, some audiovisual content could also be added to support the brand identity (i.H6 &i.H7).

Finally, as can be seen in Figure 6.22, the discursive parameter scores 0.56 points, which is below average. Although the existence of a single possible world was identified (i.I1), the structure of the discourse and the different content units could be improved to better support this world (i.I2), like in Frankfurt's case.

Table 6.13. **Istanbul's results for h10, i.3, i.4, and i.5 indicators**

h.10 At the homepage	**Are pictures (figures, pictures, videos…) distinctive of the territory?** Images can be unique for the brand or generic pictures that would suit different destinations.	Med. Score
i.3. Superficial level	**Is visual and verbal content using persuasive codes?** Existence of rhetorical figures	Med. Score
i.4. Embodiment	**Does the website combine different types of expressive resources?** It combines text, visual, and audiovisual in a balanced way or it opts for one of them exclusively?	Max. Score
i.5. Embodiment	**Are images well integrated and coherent with the text?** Are images aligned with the discourse conceptually, descriptively or in a complementary way?	Max. Score

Source: Author – WQI template (Annexes)

Regarding the four main indicators of interest, the results are not as good as in the previous cases. While the website combines both textual and visual content, and images are generally well integrated into the discourse, their expressiveness is lower. Furthermore, some generic images are used on the homepage. This indicates that pictures are used as mere descriptors of the textual content, adding little symbolic value aligned with the content.

6.2.4.1. Product-related categories

Further investigating the discourse, this section expounds the findings of the second phase of analysis related to the functional dimension of Istanbul's brand image. The textual content is explored to identify the most prevalent offer-related categories. In Istanbul's case, the homepage and first-, and second-level pages in the hierarchy offered a total 64 analyzable pages, as shown in Table 6.14. Based on these pages, the coding process identified a total of 537 different content units. Corresponding to the high scores obtained for the distribution and marketing parameter, 6.5% of references represent transactional units: content units focused on allowing users to turn their interests into a purchase. However, the most common content unit type is navigational, representing 69.3%, followed by informational references with 24.2%.

Table 6.14. **Istanbul analysis information**
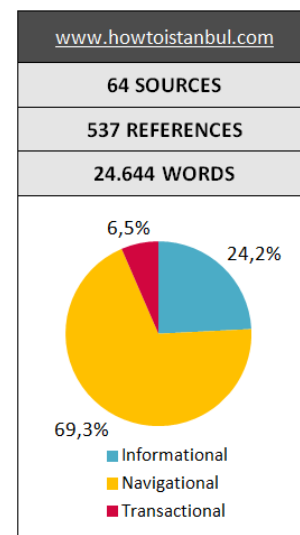
Source: Author

Furthermore, during the analysis, each of these references was linked to the corresponding product-related category. In other words, the coders associated the content topic of each reference with one of the categories previously identified. Surprisingly, this process identified food and drink as the most prevalent offer of the destination. This category is only positioned as the most present content topic on the websites of Paris, Prague, and Istanbul, accounting for 16.89% of the references in the present case. In addition, architecture and heritage also achieve an unusual level of relevance, representing 12.33% of the content.

The prevalence of these two categories over the others is highly distinctive of the destination. Even though food and drink is also well represented in average scores, it occupies the third position after tourist products and cultural attractions. Furthermore, architecture and heritage is in sixth position on average, only achieving a high prevalence in Istanbul's and Rome's case, where it represents more than 10% of the references. It is interesting to highlight, however, that neither of these two categories is present in the textual content of the homepage.

Figure 6.23. **Istanbul's most prevalent product-related categories**

Source: Author

With less but still significant prevalence on the website, the categories of cultural attractions, tourist products, and social life and locals are significantly represented by more than 5% of the references each. The presence of the first two categories is not surprising, since these are the most common topics in the average results as well. However, social life stands out. This

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category only emerges as a relevant topic for destinations' image construction in four cases: Amsterdam, Istanbul, London, and Madrid. Its representation by 6.83% of references in this case is only surpassed by Amsterdam's website, evincing it as a highly distinguishing category for Istanbul.

At this point, it is important to consider that Istanbul's website shows more diversity of content topics and balance between categories than the average. While some categories do prevail above others, it is the only case where 12 different categories are represented by more than 3% of the content, together explaining up to 80.65% of the references. This is also demonstrated by the number of categories represented by between 3 and 4.99% of references: seven, to be precise.

The results obtained for the non-relevant categories, not included in Figure 6.23, also support the content diversity conclusion. All categories from the initial list are represented in the website by at least a couple of different references. In addition, the initial *other*s category, combined with the non-relevant categories in Figure 6.23, had the highest result out of all the destinations in the sample, account for 12.10% of references. This is a significant result pointing to a greater diversity of topics related to Istanbul's offer than that of the rest of the European destinations.

In contrast, it is interesting to highlight that only two categories are present on the homepage. Besides generic information introducing the destination, cultural attractions and activities, and events, fairs, and festivals are the only product-related topics introduced here.

Finally, the analysis of the relationship between product-related categories and tourist profiles sheds some light on the previous conclusion about content diversity and the high score of the *others* category. As seen in Figure 6.24, the latter might be partially related to the importance of students' profiles for Istanbul's destination. From the 65 references linked to this category, 14 are related to academic tourism. This might be explained by certain specific necessities of this tourist profile which differ from those of general tourists.

In this case, 7.1% of the total references on the website are linked to specific tourist profiles. Figure 6.24 shows that students and families are the two priority profiles for the destination. However, content addressed to students barely matches any product category; thus, it can be inferred that the interests of this profile are different to those of others. On the other hand, families are again strongly related to leisure activities and generic information.

Figure 6.24. **Product-related categories and tourist profiles; the case of Istanbul**
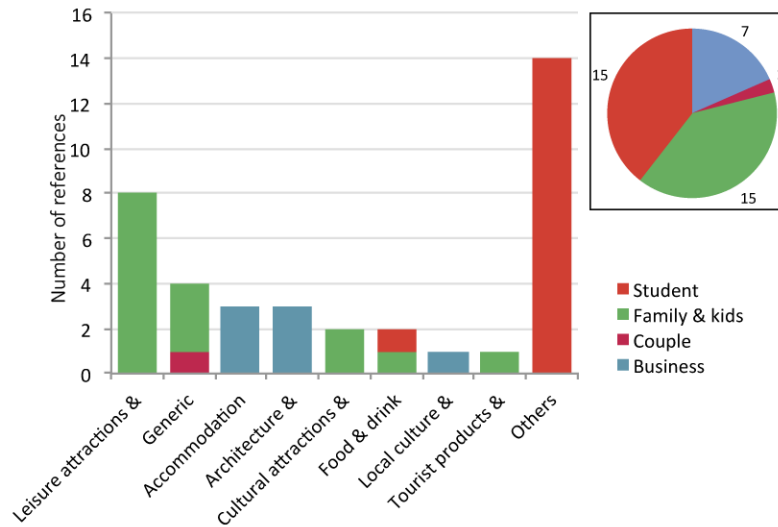
Finally, the author must note that business profile results are not conclusive, since it is known that many destinations have differentiated websites addressed to this target, usually related to the Convention Bureau. For this reason, any conclusion about the importance of business tourists would require further investigation into the existence of other websites addressed to this profile.

6.2.4.2. Personality traits of Istanbul projected on the website

Regarding the symbolic dimension of Istanbul's brand image, the study focused on identifying words related to brand personality traits. The analysis identified 438 words disseminated by the official website related to those traits. Interestingly, Istanbul's brand personality is one of the few where sincerity emerges as the most dominant personality dimension. Furthermore, as seen in Figure 6.25, its personality outline shows the greatest balance between dimensions: the most dominant dimension is represented by 29.22% of the words related to personality, and the least dominant by 12.33%.

Specifically, 11 different personality-related words are used repeatedly in the website discourse. Sincerity and excitement are the richest dimensions in terms of vocabulary, and are represented by four highly repeated words each. Related to the most dominant dimension, the words *historical* and *golden* are the most used in the discourse, above 4%, but *social* and *well* also stand out, representing more than 3% and 2% of the vocabulary, respectively. Two of

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these words, *golden* and *social,* evoke a happy and friendly personality, and both are related to a cheerful side of the brand. Meanwhile, *well,* highly used in the discourse, refers to the wholesome side of the brand, and *historical*, a synonym related to the original personality trait *real*, is related to the destination's honest facet.

Figure 6.25. **Composition of Istanbul's projected personality**
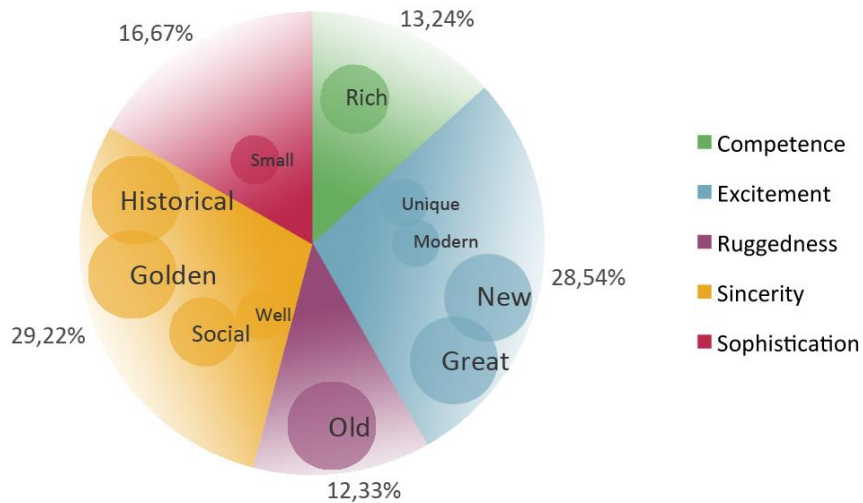
Source: Author

On the other hand, the second dominant personality dimension is represented by 34 different words, from which *great, new, modern,* and *unique* emerge as the most used in the discourse. Even though these words stand out from the vocabulary used on the website, they are not distinctive from that seen for the previous brands, which also use the same words to evoke an exciting personality.

However, this is the first case where the word *rich* is identified as the most repeated word related to competence. As the fourth dominant dimension, it is represented by 21 different words, of which *rich* is the most repeated word, evoking the successful facet of this trait.

Finally, it is interesting to highlight the diversity of vocabulary used to represent sophistication, the third most dominant dimension of Istanbul's personality. A total of 27 different words are identified for this dimension, but only one specific word is frequently used: *small*. Finally, ruggedness is again represented by the repetitive use of the adjective *old*, plus 13 additional less-used words.

6.2.5. The case of London

Regarding the overall assessment of London's official website, the first result to highlight is the high WQI score that it obtains: 0.72 points. This is the second-best score achieved by a destination in the sample, only surpassed by Vienna's website. Furthermore, Figure 6.26 clearly demonstrates that most parameters obtain a score above average, with the only exceptions of the brand handling parameter, which is below average, and usability and accessibility, which is in line with the average result of 0.81 points.

Figure 6.26. **Overall assessment of London's website**
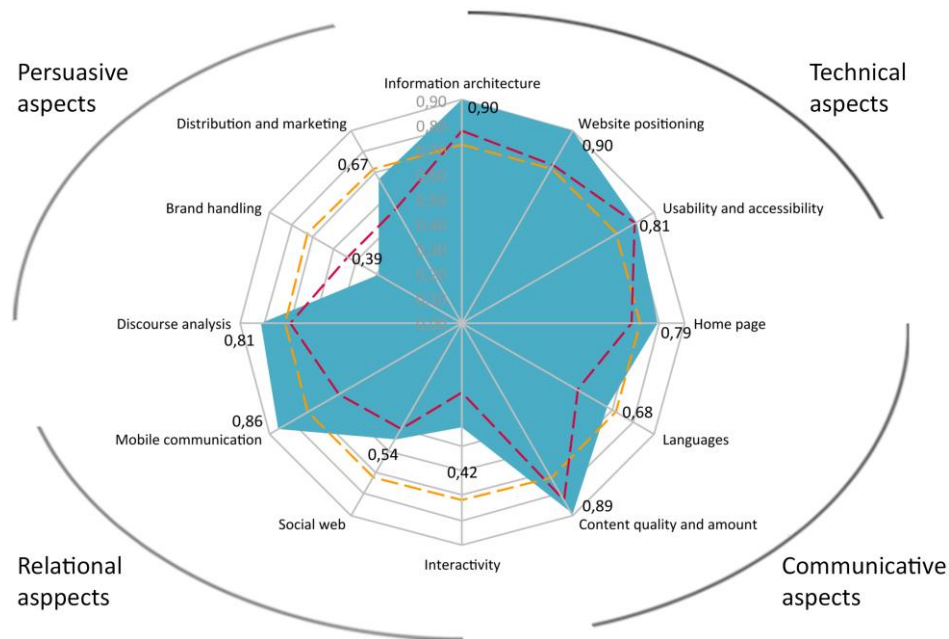
London achieves the highest scores of the sample for two different parameters: information architecture, together with Amsterdam, and website positioning. Regarding the former, this website stands out by frequently using standard labels, such as terms & conditions, accessibility, advertise, etc., which the user can easily identify (i.C2). The site also guides users' navigation experience via breadcrumbs (i.C6), and correctly identifies the different links within the content, anticipating users to the action that each link will conduct (i.C5). On the other hand, this parameter could be improved by reducing the maximum length of the layout: pages that are too long may fatigue users (i.C9). With regard to website positioning, this website surpasses the group. A couple of indicators that demonstrate the website's success for this parameter are its maximum score regarding the Domain Authority (Open Site Explorer) and the TrafficRank (i.E5 & E6).

The site also scores better than average for the relation parameters, with a high score for the mobile communication parameter, highly similar to Barcelona's results; the second-best result for the interactivity parameter; and a score above 5 in for social web. Some features to highlight in this regard are the possibility to share the content on numerous social web platforms (i.K2), and the site's link to Trip Advisor to promote users' recommendations about the destination (i.K8). In terms of interactivity, the website offers a virtual tour of the destination where users can interact (i.J1) and also includes several tourists' experiences and stories to enhance the tourist-to-tourist communication (i.J8). However, there is a lack of interactivity between users and content: there is no possibility for users to vote, comment, or even propose additional content (i.J9, J10 & J11).

Results regarding languages, homepage, and content quality and amount also support the overall strength of this website. It is available in several different languages, and all the content is correctly translated into each of them (i.G1 & G2). Furthermore, the content slightly varies depending on the selected language, evincing a cultural adaptation of the content to the user's language (i.G4). With regard to the homepage, the first thing to notice is that several different tourist profiles are identified, similar to Frankfurt's case. Travelers with kids or with some kind of disability can find suitable content rapidly (i.A6). Moreover, the website also obtains positive results at the content level, with a maximum score for most of the indicators. To strengthen its results for this parameter, however, information about the history and culture of the destination could be improved (i.B8), and details could be provided about climate (i.B9).

On a negative note, while good results are obtained for most of the parameters, brand handling scores considerably below average. Even though the website has a logo and the visual style is coherent with it, London's official website lacks a general description about the brand (i.H12), about London, and about its logo (i.H3). Furthermore, this parameter could also be strengthened by including myths or stories about the destination brand (storytelling) (i.H11).

Finally, regarding discourse analysis, the website again scores above average with 0.81 points. In contrast to the previous cases, London creates one possible world comprising sub-worlds, such as London on a budget and accessible London. All of them are well built, structured, and hierarchically organized to make them credible (i.I1). However, the persuasive effect of the discourse could be strengthened by varying the spokesperson of the discourse, not always using the third or impersonal forms (i.I6), and addressing the discourse to different tourist

profiles (i.I7). This last indicator values those discourses that explicitly identify different tourist characteristics, such as age, gender, individual/group, etc., so that tourists can relate to the text.

Table 6.15. **London's results for the h10, i.3, i.4, and i.5 indicators**

h.10 At the homepage	**Are pictures (figures, pictures, videos…) distinctive of the territory?** Images can be unique for the brand or generic pictures that would suit different destinations.	Max. Score
i.3. Superficial level	**Is visual and verbal content using persuasive codes?** Existence of rhetorical figures	Med. Score
i.4. Embodiment	**Does the website combine different types of expressive resources?** It combines text, visual, and audiovisual in a balanced way or it opts for one of them exclusively?	Max. Score
i.5. Embodiment	**Are images well integrated and coherent with the text?** Are images aligned with the discourse conceptually, descriptively or in a complementary way?	Max. Score

Source: Author – WQI template (Annexes)

Regarding indicators h10, I3, I4, and I5, Table 6.15 shows results similar to those of Istanbul. A medium score for indicator I3 indicates the lower persuasive effect of pictures, text, and their interaction. However, like the previous case, the combination of textual and visual content is balanced, and images are well integrated into the discourse pointing to the same topics. Furthermore, homepage pictures are meaningful, distinctive, and unique to the destination.

6.2.5.1. Product-related categories

Beginning with the in-depth analysis of London's projected image, this section presents the results obtained from the functional dimension analysis. As shown in Table 6.16, the sample collection from London's website identified 92 different pages suitable for the analysis. From these pages, coders identified 1,851 different content units, making this the largest corpus of study in the sample. In this corpus, the most exceptional finding is the elevated percentage of transactional content units: 8.9% of identified references aim to facilitate users in making some kind of product or service purchase. However, the general composition of the sample follows the general trend: a clear majority of navigational units, 69.9%, followed by informational content units with 21.3%.

Table 6.16. **London analysis information**
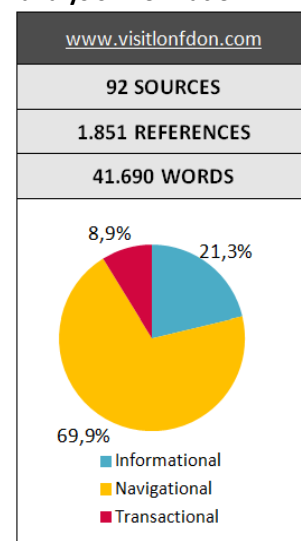
Source: Author

To identify the most prevalent product-related categories in the website discourse, the coders identified the main topic of each of the 1,851 references. As can be seen in the bar chart, the analysis highlighted 11 different product categories that accounted for more than 3% of references. From the original 19 categories, the ones represented in Figure 6.27 account for 92.52% of all content topics. Furthermore, the most dominant category alone, tourist products and packages, already represents 20.11% of content units. Together with cultural attractions and activities, and accommodation, these become the most prevalent topics, accounting for almost half of the references. The three most dominant topics are also represented on the homepage, as an introduction to London as a destination.

Figure 6.27. **London's most prevalent product-related categories**
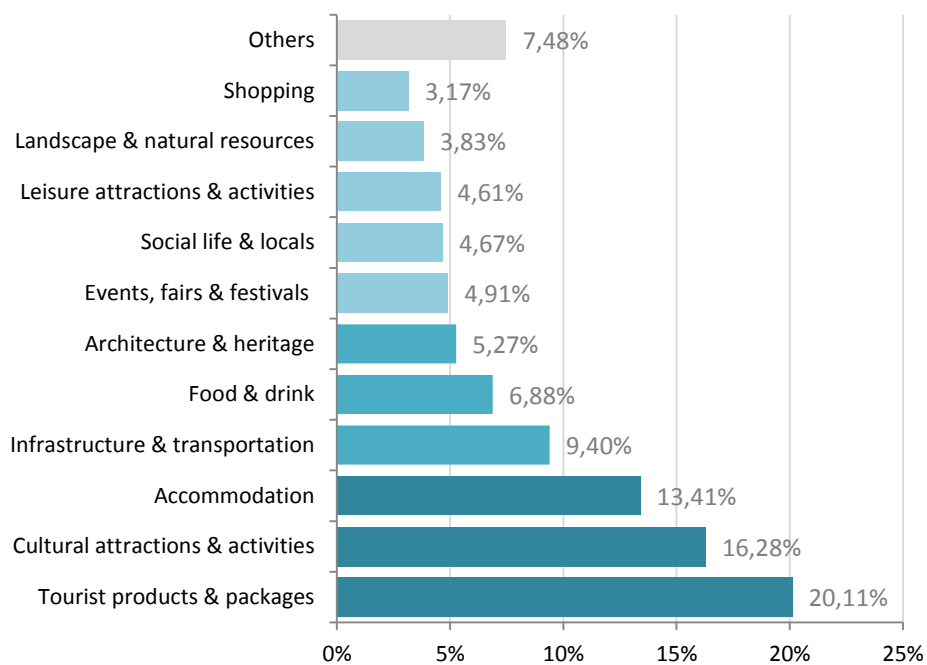
From the remaining eight core categories indicated in the chart, three also have a significant presence on the website, represented by more than 5% of the references. The categories of infrastructure and transportation, and food and drink are some of the most common and prevalent content topics across the sample, and both of them are also present on London's homepage. However, architecture and heritage, also a relevant topic present in 10 out of the 12 websites, is not present in the homepage discourse.

In addition, only two of the less prevalent categories are also presented on the homepage: events, fairs, and festivals; and social life and locals. It is not surprising the presence of events, fairs and festivals category, present in all homepages of the sample, but the latter is a more distinguishing category for the destination. Social life and locals only emerges as one of the core topics on four websites. Furthermore, besides London, only Amsterdam's website also presents this content on the homepage.

Given the importance of the homepage as a summary of the information that users can find on the website, the presence of content linked to the nightlife category must be highlighted. However, a deeper investigation into the overall corpus of study concludes that this content has a lower presence, represented only by 1.46% of references. Furthermore, even though all 19 categories are represented at some point on the website, climate and wellness are the least frequently mentioned, each represented by only 0.05% of references, meaning one single reference per topic.

In contrast, a greater number of references are related to specific tourist profiles: 168 content units are linked to eight different profiles, representing 9.1% of the total references. Of these units, accommodation appears for the first time as the category with the most references related to specific profiles, as seen in Figure 6.28. In second place, a considerable amount of content units also presents different facets of London specifically addressed to tourist profiles; these are part of the content coded at the *generic* node. With less frequency, six other categories also show more than five references related to the target node.

Figure 6.28. **Product-related categories and tourist profiles; the case of London**
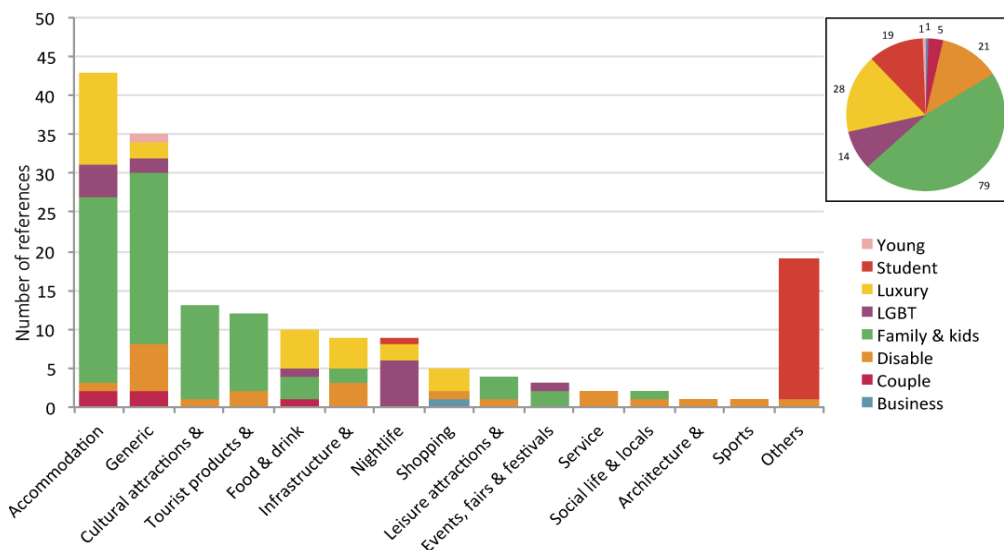
Source: Author

Surprisingly, the *others* category stands out again, with 19 content units linked to tourists' profiles that do not match any of the previously identified categories. Upon closer inspection, students again dominate this result. With the exception of one reference linking nightlife and students, the remaining references linked to this profile do not fit any category. These results appear to support the previous conclusion about academic tourists having different interests than general tourists do.

Regarding the remaining tourist profiles, London's official website shows more content targeting families, followed by tourists seeking a luxurious experience and tourists with disabilities. In the first place, the interests of families appear to be spread across many categories: there is a broad offer of accommodations suitable for families with kids, and also a vast amount of generic content presenting London's family-oriented facet. In addition, cultural attractions and tourist products are relevant topics for these tourists, while leisure attractions appear to be less significant in this case.

The second most dominant tourist profile, the luxury group, appears to be mainly related to luxury accommodation. However, these tourists are also interested in food and drink alternatives, infrastructure and transportation services, and some references even link the group to the shopping category. These are different interests than the ones proposed for tourists with disabilities, which appear to be more diverse. From the data in Figure 6.28, it is not possible to identify categories that are clearly more relevant for this target; instead, fewer references are dispersed across almost all categories.

To conclude this section, it is interesting to highlight the presence of LGBT tourism. With fewer content units targeting this profile, the interests of LBGT tourists are strongly related to London's nightlife, but also linked to accommodation, food and drink, and to special events, as also seen in previous cases.

6.2.5.2. Personality traits of London projected on the website

The last phase of the analysis examines the symbolic dimension of the image of London projected on its website: personality. The content analysis technique highlighted a total of 825 words related to personality traits in the discourse. Similar to the general tendency, London's most dominant personality dimension is excitement, with 36% of the vocabulary related to this

dimension. However, it stands out from other destinations' personalities for its balance between the second, third and fourth dominant dimensions: sincerity, sophistication, and competence also achieve high relevance within the overall personality outline.

Figure 6.29. **Composition of London's projected personality**
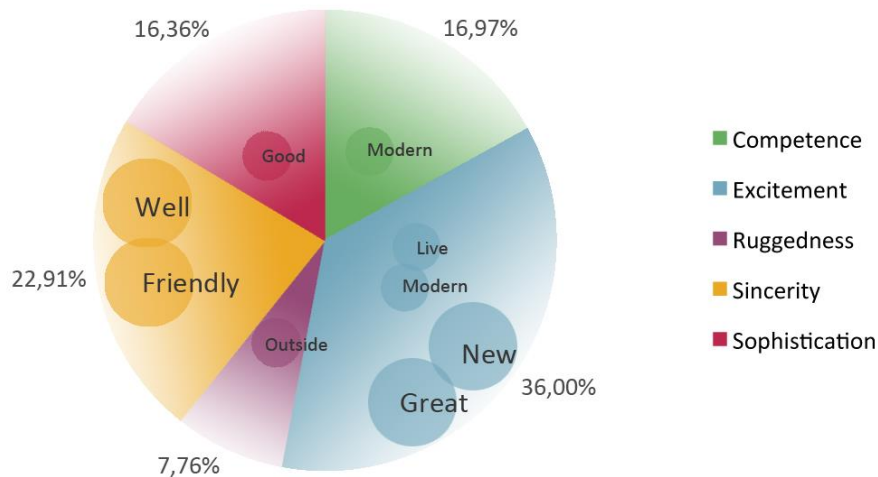
Excitement, the most dominant personality dimension, is represented by 41 different words. Among them, *great, new, live,* and *modern* again appear to be the most recurrent. Moreover, like in the case of Barcelona*, new, great,* and *live* have a greater presence in the content, pointing to a younger and more spirited character of the destination. In addition, the adjective *modern* complements this character, linking it to an up-to-date destination.

On the other hand, the sincerity and competence dimensions are represented by 34 and 33 different words, respectively. Upon closer inspection, two highly repeated words are related to sincerity: *well* and *friendly*, each representing more than 5% of the personality trait synonyms. *Well* is one of the most used words related to sincerity across the sample, and is thus not distinguishing. In contrast, friendly is exceptional in London's official discourse. Less frequently used but also highly present words are *guarantee* and *sure*, emerging as recurrent words to express competence, evoking a secure and reliable destination.

At this point, it is appropriate to note that London and Frankfurt are the only destinations stronger in competence than in sophistication, thereby differing from the average pattern. In London's case, sophistication is positioned as the fourth dominant personality dimension, slightly below competence, with a presence of 16.36% in the content. Regarding its related vocabulary, only the use of the term *good* stands out, representing more than 2% of the words

related to personality traits. Thus, the sophistication dimension is expressed by a greater number of words showing a lower frequency, such as easy, beautiful, fabulous, sweet, etc.

Finally, ruggedness emerges as the personality dimension with the lowest presence in London's brand image, expressed by only 7.76% of the vocabulary. Unlike the previous cases, though, one of the most used adjectives to express ruggedness is *outside*, followed by the adjective *outdoor*. These terms point to a more outdoorsy facet of London, unlike the previous destinations which are closer to the tough facet, represented by the word *old*.

6.2.6. The case of Madrid

This section presents the results obtained for the official website of the destination of Madrid: www.esmadrid.com. Once again, the analysis begins with an overall assessment of the website using the multidimensional methodology based on 12 different parameters. The final outcome of this methodology is the WQI, a numerical value from zero to one indicating the overall quality of the website. Madrid's website scores 0.60 points, as indicated in Figure 6.30 with the yellow dashed line.

Figure 6.30. **Overall assessment of Madrid's website**

Source: Author

229
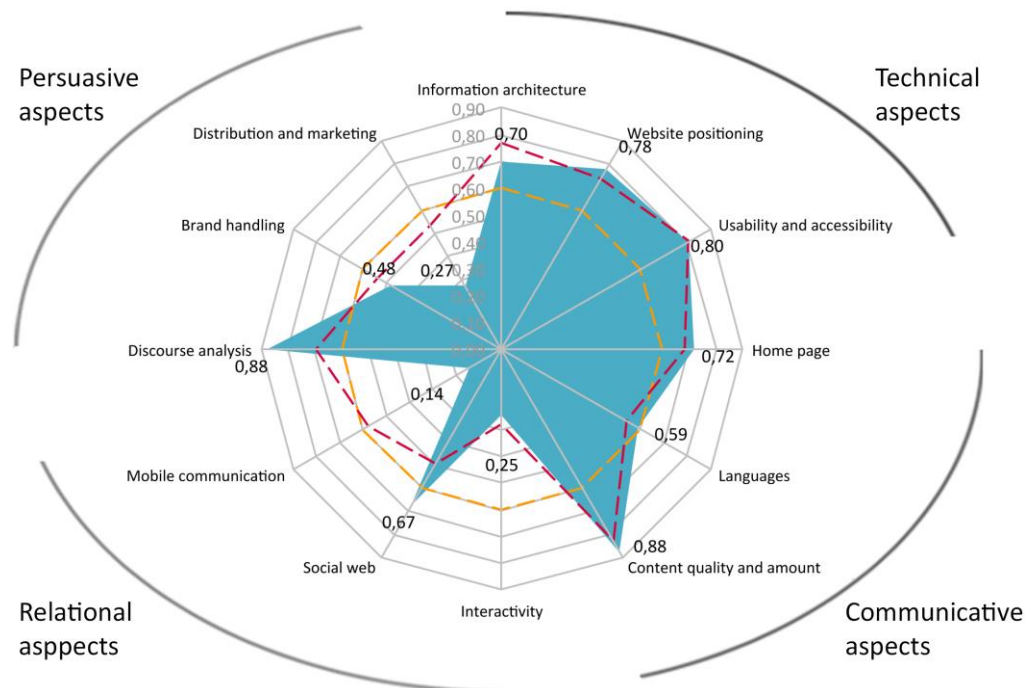
The blue area irregularity immediately stands out in Figure 6.30. The results obtained here show a higher asymmetry between the high scores for the technical and communicative parameters, and the imbalance of the relational and persuasive ones. It is also interesting to highlight that seven of these parameters' scores are highly similar to the average ones, indicated in a pink dashed line. However, two parameters score significantly above average – social web and discourse analysis – and another two score significantly below it: distribution and marketing, and mobile communication.

As mentioned in previous sections, for mobile communication, Madrid, Frankfurt, and Istanbul obtain the lowest score achieved for any parameter: 0.14 points. However, this is also the parameter that shows the greatest variance between the maximum and minimum scores. For this reason, the author understands that this might be a consequence of a strategic decision of the destination. Like in the previous cases, Madrid does not offer any app with useful information about the destination for users (i.L2). Nevertheless, www.esmadrid.com is mobile responsive (i.L1), ensuring correct visibility with any type of device.

Similarly, a low score is obtained for distribution and marketing: 0.27 points. This is one of the parameters with a greater difference between the maximum and minimum scores. Again, while it is positive that official websites facilitate users' access to different platforms to purchase services or products, commercializing is not a goal of all websites. Thus, the low result in this regard might be a consequence of strategic decisions.

Regarding the relational parameters, interactivity shows a low result aligned with the average scores for this parameter. What is the most surprising is the score for social web: 0.67 points, the highest score achieved by any website for this parameter except Rome, which achieves the same score. One of the reasons for this high score is the integration of different social media platforms on the official website. Madrid not only adds links to different social networks, but also displays an open window on the website where users can simultaneously see what is happening on Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube (i.K5, i.K6, i.K7).

In another vein, the communicative parameters all score slightly higher than average. Madrid's website contains all the different content types that are expected from a tourist website, although some aspects could be strengthened, for instance by adding interaction options to the destination map (i.B1), or making the institutional contact more accessible (i.B13). The website is also available in several different languages (i.G1), and all the content is correctly

translated to them (i.G2). In addition, the homepage is representative and distinctive of the destination brand (i.A4) and invites users to keep navigating (i.A14). On the other hand, it does not automatically detect users' language of origin or ask for it (i.A1).

Finally, regarding persuasive parameters, brand handling obtains a low score of 0.48 points. The website shows a destination logo, and the website layout is coherent with the graphical identity set by that logo. However, there is little evidence of functional or symbolic attributes of the brand represented in the logo (i.H4). Furthermore, this parameter could be improved by adding some audiovisual content to support the brand's identity (i.H6 & H7), or some stories and myths about the destination (i.H11).

Table 6.17. **Madrid's results for the h10, i.3, i.4, and i.5 indicators**

h.10 At the homepage	**Are pictures (figures, pictures, videos…) distinctive of the territory?** Images can be unique for the brand or generic pictures that would suit different destinations.	Max. Score
i.3. Superficial level	**Is visual and verbal content using persuasive codes?** Existence of rhetorical figures	Max. Score
i.4. Embodiment	**Does the website combine different types of expressive resources?** It combines text, visual, and audiovisual in a balanced way or it opts for one of them exclusively?	Max. Score
i.5. Embodiment	**Are images well integrated and coherent with the text?** Are images aligned with the discourse conceptually, descriptively or in a complementary way?	Max. Score

Source: Author – WQI template (Annexes)

On the other hand, the discursive analysis yielded excellent results: a score of 0.88 points. In this regard, the identification of different tourist profiles within the discourse stands out (i.I7). Madrid's discourse does not target only a uniform tourist profile, but is directed to multiple profiles depending on the content type. It is also important here to highlight the existence of a possible world comprising other sub-worlds (i.I1), all of them well structured and hierarchically organized (i.I2). Furthermore, the indicators h10, I3, I4, and I5 also show optimal results, as seen in Table 6.17.

6.2.6.1. Product-related categories

The next step in Madrid's official website analysis focuses on projected destination image. To identify the most relevant product-related associations linked to the brand, the author coded all content units on the homepage and all the pages on the first and second levels of the hierarchy. As summarized in Table 6.18, the coding process identified 460 references within 33 different sources. Similar to Frankfurt's case, no transactional content units were identified. This result is in line with the low score obtained for the distribution and marketing parameter, explained in the previous section. However, in this case the low amount of informational content is surprising. In this vein, while the predominance of navigational content is common across the sample, Madrid's website shows one of the greatest proportions of navigational content units, at least on the first two levels of the hierarchy.

Table 6.18. **Madrid analysis information**

www.esmadrid.com
33 SOURCES
460 REFERENCES
9.734 WORDS

- Informational
- Navigational
- Transactional
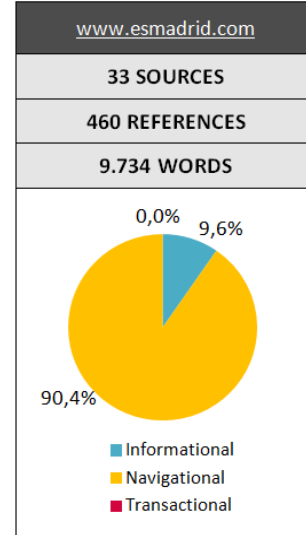
Source: Author

Beyond this descriptive data resulting from the coding process, the most interesting finding of this phase of the analysis is the identification of the most prevalent product-related categories within the discourse: 10 core categories are represented by more than 3% of the references each. These 10 categories alone account for 91.20% of the total coded content.

Figure 6.31. **Madrid's most prevalent product-related categories**
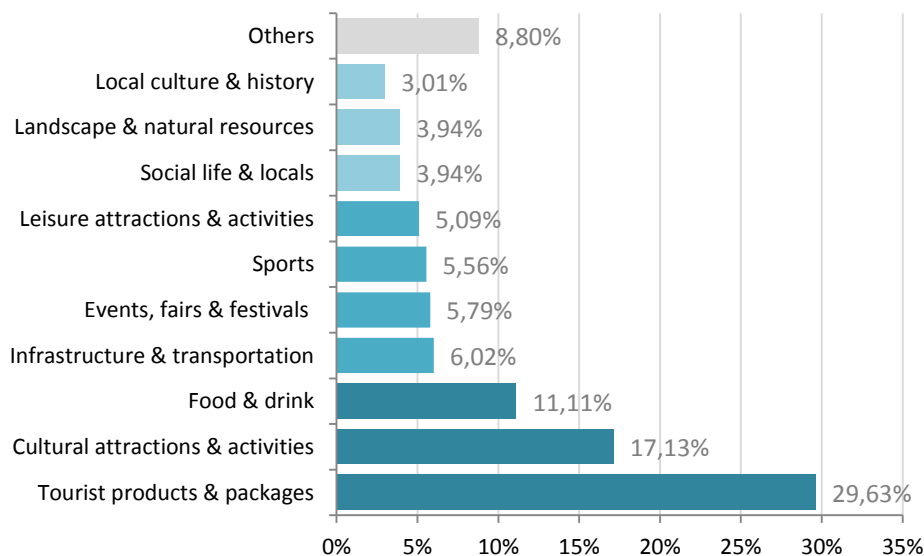
Source: Author

Furthermore, Figure 6.31 shows that the tourist products and packages category is clearly the most dominant, linked to 29.63% of the references. Together, this category and those of cultural attractions and activities, and food and drink are the most prevalent ones on the website, all of them with results above 10%. In other words, these three categories are the main pillars of the destination's image construction, representing 57.87% of the references. It is interesting to highlight that the two most prevalent categories also stand out on all the websites in the sample. Moreover, food and drink also emerges as a dominant category in 11 out of 12 cases. All in all, the first four most prevalent categories identified in this case follow the average pattern.

Also considered significantly prevalent, four additional categories are represented by more than 5% of the content units, and another three have lower scores but are still above 3%. Among these categories, sports, and social life and locals stand out: they are only among the most relevant categories in five and four cases in the sample, respectively. While in this case they do not show a high prevalence, they still emerge as some of the most distinguishing categories of Madrid.

Furthermore, most of the categories identified in Figure 6.31 are present in the introduction of the destination, on the homepage. Only two categories are missing: leisure attractions and activities, and social life and locals. In addition, the local culture and history category is also identified on the homepage, even though it is not part of the core categories associated with Madrid's projected image. This is especially interesting considering that this category is only highly present on four different websites.

At the opposite end, two categories not represented at all on the website: there is no evidence that the wellness and service categories play any role in Madrid's projected image.

Finally, only 18 references target specific tourist profiles, representing 3.9% of the total of references identified on Madrid's official website. This is the second lowest score in this regard, only surpassing Milan. Even though the analysis identified eight categories linked to target nodes, the low number of references makes the interpretation of the results more difficult.

The data summarized in Figure 6.32 suggests the importance of generic content and accommodation information in targeting specific tourist profiles. The different faces of Madrid as a family destination, as luxurious, as LGBT friendly, and as accessible for disabled tourists

stand out based on the number of references associated with them. In addition, accommodation appears to be an important category related to specific targets, with three associated references. It is an interesting topic for couples, LGBT, and luxury tourists, even though only one reference is associated with each target.

Figure 6.32. **Product-related categories and tourist profiles; the case of Madrid**
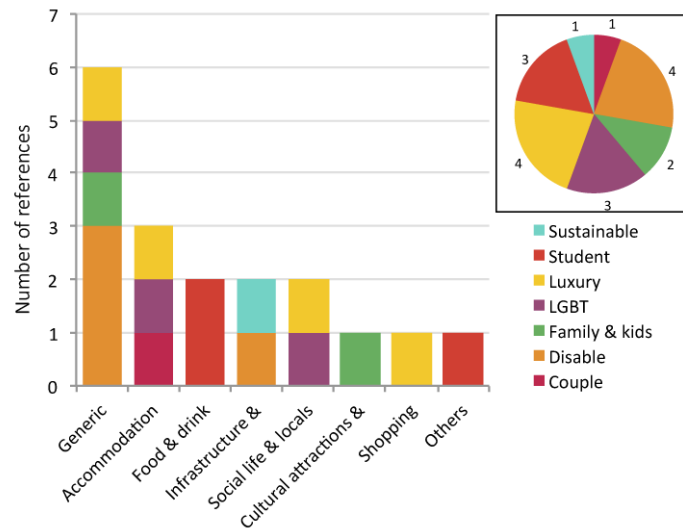
Source: Author

Interpreting the results from the target node perspective, four tourist profiles emerge as priorities for the destination of Madrid. With four references each, tourists seeking luxury experiences and those with disabilities are the most considered profiles on the website, followed by LGBT and students, with three references each.

6.2.6.2. Personality traits of Madrid projected on the website

Regarding the symbolic dimension of Madrid's brand image, the destination personality, the analysis examined different synonyms of personality traits within the website discourse. This process identified 167 words linked to the different dimensions of brand personality. Unlike the general tendency, the data collected from www.esmadrid.es evinces a personality strongly related to the sincerity dimension: 36.53% of words are linked to this dimension, followed by 35.93% linked to excitement.

Figure 6.33. **Composition of Madrid's projected personality**
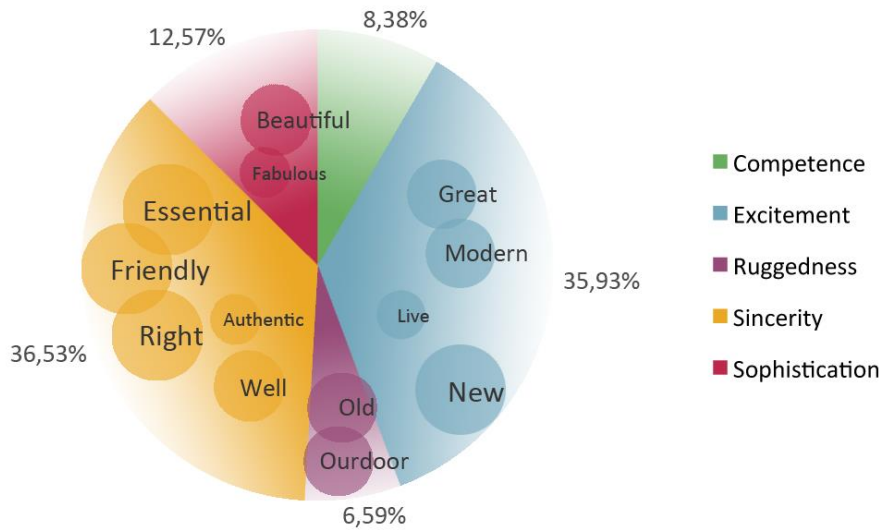
Source: Author

With a lower score, sophistication represents 12.57% of the destination's personality. Moreover, competence and ruggedness emerge as secondary dimensions. The low presence of the competence dimension positions Madrid's personality as the weakest regarding this dimension. It is represented in the text by only 10 different words, none of them recurrently used. Furthermore, the ruggedness dimension is only represented by three words, two of them indicated in Figure 6.33: among them, *old* and *outdoor* each represent more than the 3% of the total words.

In contrast, sincerity and excitement are represented by several words in the text. For instance, 13 different words are related to the most dominant dimension, three of them highly repeated throughout the discourse. The terms *essential, right,* and *friendly* represent more than 4% of the vocabulary each; *well,* more than 3%; and *authentic*, another 2%. Considering these terms, the sincerity dimension is described as closely related to three specific facets: honest, related to the terms *right* and *authentic*; wholesome, related to *well* and *essential*; and slightly linked to cheerful, related to *friendly*.

On the other hand, a greater number of synonyms are linked to excitement, the second dominant personality trait. Specifically, the analysis identified 22 different words, some of them highly repeated. As in previous cases, the most prevalent words in this dimension are *new, great, modern,* and *live*. Moreover, similar to Barcelona's case, *new*, *great*, and *live* evoke the spirited side of the brand, while *modern* points to the up-to-date facet of its character.

Finally, the third dominant personality dimension corresponds to sophistication; it is less represented within the discourse but still relevant. A total of 10 words are related to this dimension. Leading the list, the adjective *fabulous* supports the charming facet of the brand, while the term *beautiful*, more frequently used*,* evokes both charming and upper-class facets.

At this point, it important to highlight that the term *real* was excluded from the thesaurus for Madrid's personality analysis. During the analysis, the term interfered with the national football team's name, Real Madrid.

6.2.7. The case of Milan

The first stage of Milan's website analysis yielded a WQI score of 0.61 points. This is the closest score to the average of all the destinations in the sample: 0.62. Furthermore, the different parameters' results delimited by the blue area in Figure 6.34 seem to correspond highly to the average scores, indicated by the pink dashed line. Only the persuasive parameters seem to differ more from the average.

Figure 6.34. **Overall assessment of Milan's website**
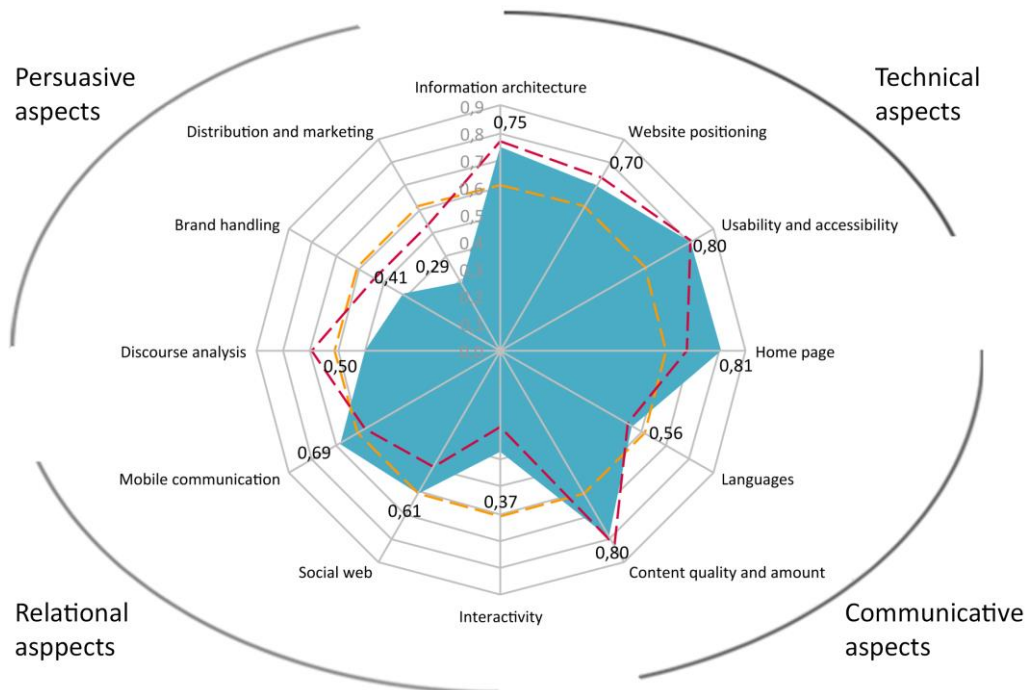
Source: Author

Similar to all the destinations in the sample, all parameters included in the technical dimension show high scores. However, information architecture obtains a score of 0.75 points, which is slightly below average. Milan's website scores well on most of the indicators in this parameter, although some kind of orientation to facilitate navigation is missing, such as breadcrumbs. Moreover, some improvements would strengthen the results, such as using more standard labels like Advertise, Sitemap, Terms and Conditions, etc. (i.C2), or identifying the state of the different links to differentiate those that have already been visited (i.C5).

In contrast to the previous cases, Milan makes effective use of vocabulary in the pages' titles and the URL: the brand name and "tourism/destination" terms are included in all titles (i.E1 & E2). However, it would be useful to implement the same practice for the metadata keywords to achieve better website positioning. In a similar vein, the results for usability and accessibility show high scores with room for improvement, such as making the different pages' URLS easier to read and remember (i.D1); improving the visual consistency of the website layout (i.D2); or improving the actualization of the website content, which currently shows some past events (i.D3). On the other hand, contextual help is offered to users throughout the website (i.D11), which is positively valued by the WQI assessment and highly unusual on the other websites in the sample.

Regarding the communicative parameters, the homepage obtains positive results. Milan, Paris, Barcelona, and Frankfurt share the best score for this parameter: 0.81 points. Milan's homepage includes all the essential information expected from it about the tourist destination. It contains expressive resources introducing the destination, such as a visual presentation (i.A3), as well as functional information about the site map (i.A12), contact details (i.A13), and even the possibility to register (i.A7). Moreover, the website is available in different languages (i.G1), although some un-translated content was found during the analysis (i.G2), and the website language is not automatically detected from the user's origin (i.A1.).

The relational dimension results are also interesting to note: all parameters score above average. Milan's website obtains the second-best score for the social web parameter, 0.61 points, after Madrid and Rome. Similar to these two destinations, this website also integrates an open window showing Twitter and Facebook activity, where users can also participate (i.K5 & K7). In this case, however, YouTube is only connected by a link (i.K6). Moreover, some other indicators stand out on the relational level too. For instance, the website offers some interactive resources, such as an interactive map and a trip planner (i.J5). the Trip planner is a

useful tool for users who are looking for information to plan their trip to the destination. Milan's website offers the possibility to store all the information selected by the user, allowing him or her to build a personalized guide (i.J6). However, in general, there is still work to do regarding the relational parameters.

Finally, Milan's website scores lower than average for persuasive parameters. A destination logo is present on the homepage and throughout the entire website (i.H2), but the visual identity set by the logo does not match the overall layout design (i.H5): there is no visual coherence between the logo and other graphic elements on the website. In addition, similar to previous cases, the inclusion of visual content supporting the emotional identity of the brand (i.H9), or stories and myths about the destination (i.H11), would also strengthen the results regarding this parameter.

On the other side, the discursive results of this website are also low, with 0.50 points. Through its discourse, the website proposes one possible world showing the touristic facet of the city, without linking any sub-worlds (i.I1). While it is a comprehensive world, improving its structure and interlinks connecting the different content units would strengthen its credibility (i.I2).

Table 6.19. **Milan's results for the h10, i.3, i.4, and i.5 indicators**

h.10 At the homepage	**Are pictures (figures, pictures, videos…) distinctive of the territory?** Images can be unique for the brand or generic pictures that would suit different destinations.	Med. Score
i.3. Superficial level	**Is visual and verbal content using persuasive codes?** Existence of rhetorical figures	Med. Score
i.4. Embodiment	**Does the website combine different types of expressive resources?** It combines text, visual, and audiovisual in a balanced way or it opts for one of them exclusively?	Max. Score
i.5. Embodiment	**Are images well integrated and coherent with the text?** Are images aligned with the discourse conceptually, descriptively or in a complementary way?	Max. Score

Source: Author – WQI template (Annexes)

As Table 6.19 shows, the results for indicators h10, I3, I4, and I5, are the same as those obtained by Istanbul. The lower score for indicators h10 and I3 suggest a less persuasive power of pictures, text, and their interaction. Still, the website shows a good balance between textual and visual content, and images are aligned with the textual discourse, albeit in a more descriptive way.

6.2.7.1. Product-related categories

For the in-depth analysis of Milan's projected image on the website, the first phase focused on the functional side of the brand. In other words, the discourse was explored to identify the most dominant associations related to the destination's offer. Before discussing the results, it is first important to describe the sample's characteristics. In this case, 52 usable pages were collected and coded, resulting in a total of 430 different content units, as seen in Table 6.20. Like the cases of Madrid and Frankfurt, the analysis did not identify any transactional content units. However, the number of navigational and informational references is more balanced here than in Madrid case, resembling the average scores. The majority of references, 78.8%, correspond to navigational units, and 21.2% to informational content.

Table 6.20. **Milan analysis information**
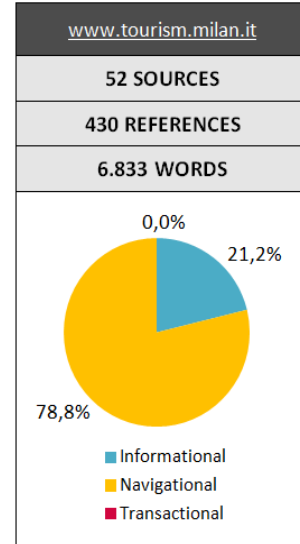
Source: Author

Among these 430 references, eight different product-related categories are significantly prevalent in the website discourse. Together, they explain 80.60% of the references' topics. Moreover, there is a clear dominance of two of these categories: cultural attractions and activities, and tourist products and packages are each present in more than 10% of the content units – 21.64% and 18.41%, respectively. These two categories coincide with the two most prevalent categories found across the websites of the sample. Indeed, all destinations show a high presence of content related to these topics, although average scores indicate a prevalence of tourist products and packages over cultural attractions.

From the remaining six categories, it is interesting to highlight that most of them are significantly prevalent: five represent more than 5% of the references, while only safety has a lesser presence. While the latter does not achieve the 3% prevalence, it is included in Figure 6.35 due to its proximity to it: 2.99%. Furthermore, it is interesting to highlight the presence of this category since it only emerges as prevalent on two different websites. In this case, Milan gives considerable presence to information concerning "healthcare insurance", "emergency numbers", and "in the event of lost documents", among others.

Figure 6.35. **Milan's most prevalent product-related categories**

Bar chart showing percentages for product-related categories:
- Others: 19,40%
- Safety: 2,99%
- Events, fairs & festivals: 5,22%
- Sports: 6,47%
- Architecture & heritage: 7,71%
- Landscape & natural resources: 8,96%
- Infrastructure & transportation: 9,20%
- Tourist products & packages: 18,41%
- Cultural attractions & activities: 21,64%
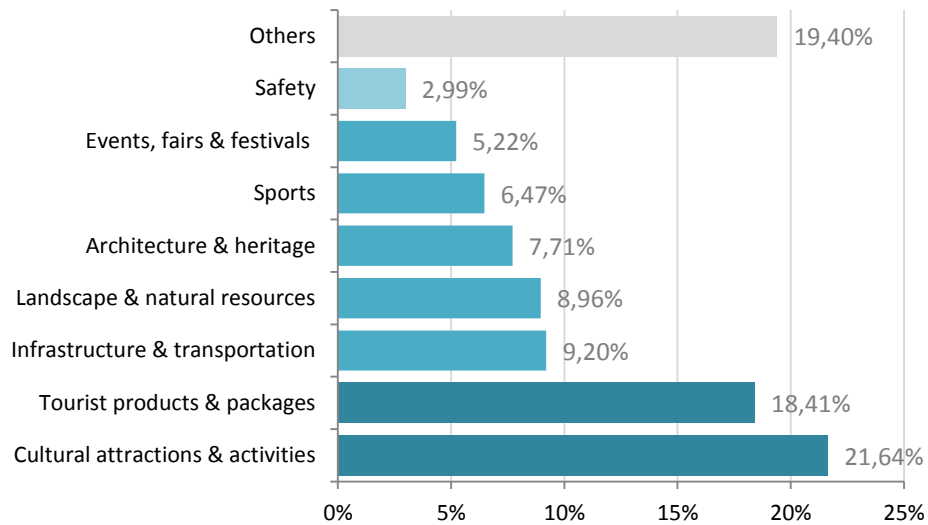
Another finding to highlight is that most categories in Figure 6.35, the most prevalent ones, are also present on the homepage. Only landscape and natural resources, and safety are absent. In addition, some other categories not identified in Figure 6.35 are also referenced on the homepage: shopping, political and economic factors (about the tourist tax), local culture and history, climate, and accommodation. This indicates a wide variety of content on the front page. Wellness and leisure attractions and activities categories are the only ones not represented at all in the discourse, at least within the analyzes pages.

It is important to highlight that Milan is the only website where the food and drink category does not emerge as one of the most prevalent ones. It is represented only by 2.33% of the references, the lowest presence achieved by this category in the sample, and it is not present on the homepage.

Before concluding this section, the relationship between different categories and specific tourist profiles is explored. Thirteen coded references are related simultaneously to both nodes, corresponding to 3% of all analyzed references on this website. Based on this result, Milan is the destination that pays the least attention to specific tourist profiles. Only tourists traveling with family and tourists with disabilities appear to be relevant to this destination. In addition, the LGBT profile is also considered on the website, but only one reference links tourist products to this group.

Figure 6.36. **Product-related categories and tourist profiles; the case of Milan**
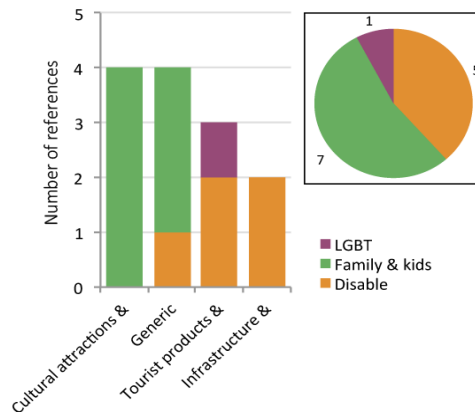
Source: Author

Four content units present the family-friendly and accessible facets of the destination; these four references fall under the generic category. However, the interests of families and disabled tourists differ. In this case, families again appear to be interested in cultural attractions, while tourists with disabilities are more interested in tourist products, and infrastructure and transportation matters. Even though these results are interesting, the low number of identified references makes them exploratory instead of conclusive.

6.2.7.2. Personality traits of Milan projected on the website

The final stage of the destinations' image study focuses on its symbolic dimension: more specifically, on the analysis of the destination's personality. The analysis of www.turismo-milano.it identified 147 synonyms of different personality traits. As Figure 6.37 illustrates, Milan's personality composition is clearly dominated by excitement dimension, followed to a much lesser degree by sophistication and sincerity. Lastly, the competence and ruggedness dimensions have a weaker presence in the overall personality outline.

Milan's personality results are surprising not only due to the high relevance of excitement, but also because of the importance of sophistication as the second most dominant dimension. Only Paris shows a similar pattern.

Upon closer inspection, the analysis identified 24 different terms related to excitement. Given the relevance of this dimension, this is not considered to be a huge variety of words; however, nine of them are highly repeated throughout the discourse. In line with the general tendency, *new*, *great*, *live,* and *modern* are among them, together with *creative,* a less commonly used adjective. Surprisingly, the term *new* alone represents up to 8% of the vocabulary related to

personality. Furthermore, the terms *unique*, *dynamic*, *move*, and *specific* also stand out, each representing more than 2% of the total words. All in all, the vocabulary identified within the textual discourse evokes mainly two different facets of excitement: the spirited side of excitement, expressed by new, great, lively, and dynamic; and the imaginative facet of the destination, linked to the terms unique, specific, and creative.

Figure 6.37. **Composition of Milan's projected personality**
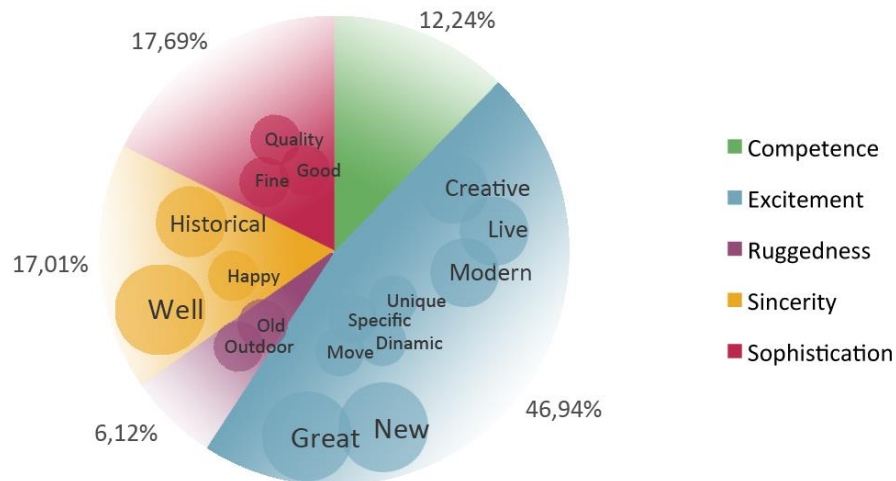
Source: Author

Regarding the second dominant dimension, sophistication, the analysis highlighted 15 different synonyms, representing 17.69% of the total words. While there are no highly repeated terms related to this dimension, three of them appear more than 2% of the time: *quality*, *fine,* and *good*. Regarding the sincerity dimension, representing 17.01% of Milan's personality, three more words are recurrently used in the discourse: *well,* again, with a presence of more than 4%; and *historical* and *happy*, each pointing to a different facet of sincerity. These words are synonyms for wholesome, honest, and cheerful, respectively. It is interesting to emphasize the importance of the term *happy*. This is the only case where the word emerges as highly representative of the sincerity dimension, and it is thus distinguishing of Milan as a destination.

Finally, competence and ruggedness complete Milan's personality outline. Similar to previous cases, competence is represented by 12% of the identified synonyms. However, the list of words linked to this dimension is diverse, and none stands out. On the other hand, out of only four words representing ruggedness, two are used recurrently throughout the discourse: the term *old*, evoking an experienced and tough brand, and *outdoor*, linking Milan to an outdoorsy character, represent more than the 2% of the vocabulary.

6.2.8. The case of Munich

As was done in the previous cases, Munich's website analysis began with an overall assessment of the website's quality; this yielded a WQI of 0.54 points. First, it must be noted that the results for the technical dimension are close to the average sample scores. However, other parameters tend to differ from this average. Furthermore, this website obtains scores below 0.5 for a total of six parameters.

Figure 6.38. **Overall assessment of Munich's website**
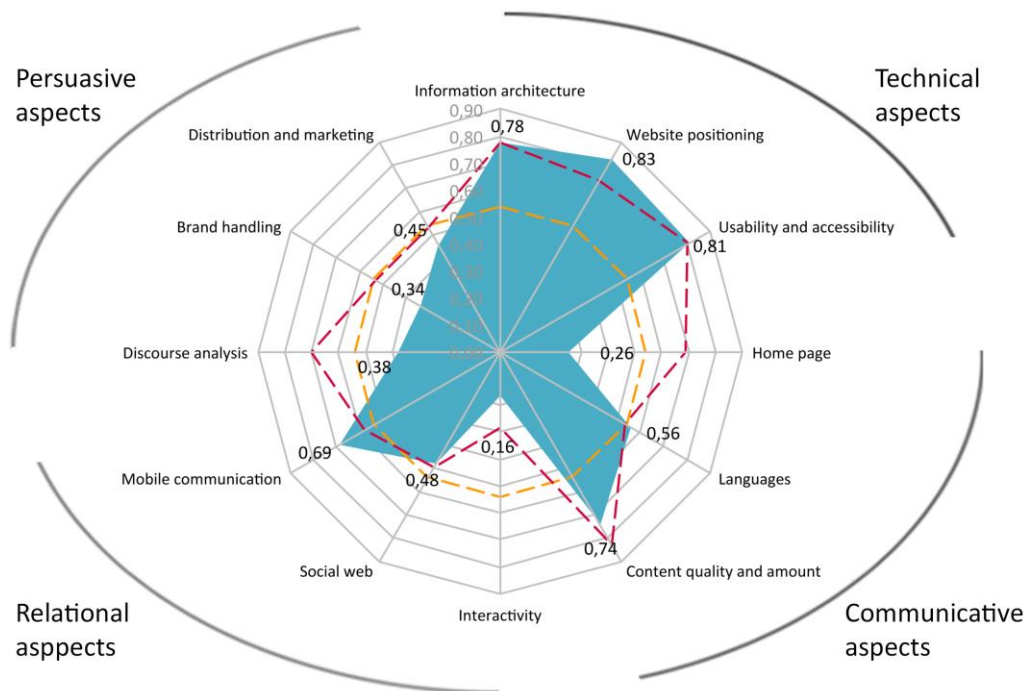
Source: Author

Regarding communicative features, content quality and amount, and languages score close to average. The website shows content about the main tourist topics, such as how to move around (i.B3), where to sleep (i.B4), what to visit (i.B5), etc., with the exception of meteorological information, which is missing (i.B9). In addition, some content areas could be enriched, such as gastronomy, events, and culture and history of the destination (i.B6, B7 & B8). At an institutional level, information about how to contact the institution would also be useful to orientate users (i.B13). On the other hand, the content is available in several different languages (G1) and some content even varies slightly depending on the language, evincing a cultural adaptation of the content (i.G4). However, not all the content is correctly translated (i.G2). All in all, these two parameters show generally good results.

In contrast, what is most surprising about Munich's website is its score for the homepage parameter: 0.26 points, which is the lowest score for this parameter across the sample. To start, contrary to most destinations, Munich's official tourist site is integrated into the City Hall website. Destinations must be careful not to mix content targeting the local population and tourists, as this can confuse users (i.A2). In addition, the homepage does not detect users' language (i.A1), nor does it offer a presentation of the destination (i.A3). Furthermore, at a more functional level, information about the authorities responsible for the site (i.A5), a site map (i.A12), and a contact section (i.A13) are also missing. All in all, the home page does not invite potential tourists to keep navigating (i.A14).

Concerning relational parameters, Munich's website obtains positive results for mobile communication. It is mobile responsive (i.L1), and it offers an official app containing useful information for tourists (i.L2 & L3), also available across different platforms (i.L4). However, the results are poor for the remaining two parameters: social web and interactivity. Regarding the latter, Munich obtains the lowest score in the entire sample. Moreover, similar to other destinations, the website does not allow interaction with the content: there is no possibility to vote on content (i.J10), to comment (i.J9), or to create new content (i.J11). By offering more interactive resources, such as an interactive virtual tour (i.J1), or by including a trip planner (i.J6), among other interactive possibilities, users' experience would improve.

On a positive note, the website positioning has the second-best score, together with Vienna: 0.83 points. It also scores optimally for indicators such as the use of strategic keywords within the metadata (i.E3), as well as TrafficRank and Domain Authority (i.E6 &E5). Regarding i.E5 and i.E6, the website obtains the highest score, becoming one of the two sites in the sample (the other being London's) located among the first 100,000 positions of the Traffic Rank, and scoring above 80 on the Open Site Explorer.

With regard to the persuasive parameters, the results worsen again. Brand handling could be improved by including some audiovisual materials to support the emotional facet of the brand (i.H7 & H9). In addition, the presence of an overall description of the destination brand (i.H12), or some myths and stories related to the brand (i.H11) would also contribute to improving the brand presence. Similarly, there is also room to improve at a discursive level: this website presents one single possible world (i.I1) that could be strengthened with a better structure of the different content nodes (i.I2).

Table 6.21. **Munich's results for the h.10, i.3, i.4, and i.5 indicators**

h.10 At the homepage	**Are pictures (figures, pictures, videos…) distinctive of the territory?** Images can be unique for the brand or generic pictures that would suit different destinations.	Med. Score
i.3. Superficial level	**Is visual and verbal content using persuasive codes?** Existence of rhetorical figures	Min. Score
i.4. Embodiment	**Does the website combine different types of expressive resources?** It combines text, visual, and audiovisual in a balanced way or it opts for one of them exclusively?	Max. Score
i.5. Embodiment	**Are images well integrated and coherent with the text?** Are images aligned with the discourse conceptually, descriptively or in a complementary way?	Max. Score

Source: Author – WQI template (Annexes)

Finally, regarding the four main indicators that can have a strong effect on the message communication, the results are not positive, as seen in Table 6.21. Images are well integrated are coherent with the text, and the website does use both types of content in a balanced way. However, the expressiveness of the content shows a very low score. Specifically, several neutral and non-distinctive pictures are used to refer to different characteristics of the offer. Moreover, there is no evidence of rhetorical figures within the textual content nor the visual one. All in all, the persuasive effect of the discourse obtains a minimum score. The discourse does not show persuasive intentionality (i.I8), and is instead limited to offering information.

6.2.8.1. Product-related categories

The next research phase explored the website discourse to identify the most relevant product-related associations. It analyzed the homepage and all the pages on the first two levels of the hierarchy to identify the most prevalent categories associated with the destination. Since each website has different characteristics, this section first provides a description of the sample of study for Munich's website. Since this website is not exclusive to the tourism brand, some of the pages were excluded due to their topic to avoid a bias in the results. Furthermore, all those pages or content units not available in English were also excluded from the analysis. All in all, the analysis identified 100 analyzable sources and 822 different content units. Once more,

Table 6.22. **Munich analysis information**
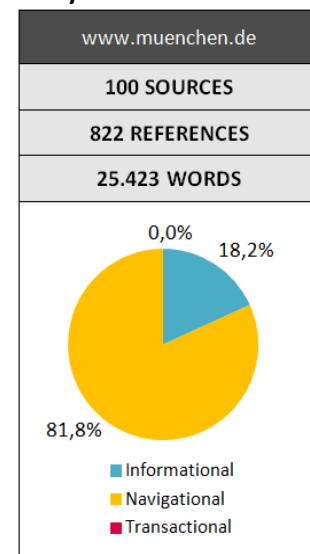
Source: Author

most of these references correspond to navigational units, 81.8%, and the remaining ones to informational content, 18.2%. No transactional content units were identified.

Regarding the main topics of these references, the analysis highlighted 10 different product-related categories highly prevalent within the discourse. A total of 80.79% of all references are related to one of these 10 topics. However, not all categories are equally present. In this regard, Munich is possibly the most differentiated case. It is the only website where shopping emerges as one of the most prevalent content categories, represented by 13.92% of references. Furthermore, accommodation is also unusually dominant on the website, accounting for 11.58% of references, a result that is only surpassed in London's case. In the overall results of the sample, in contrast, these two categories are the seventh and eighth most prevalent ones: shopping is only present as a core category on eight different websites, and accommodation on six of them.

Figure 6.39. **Munich's most prevalent product-related categories**
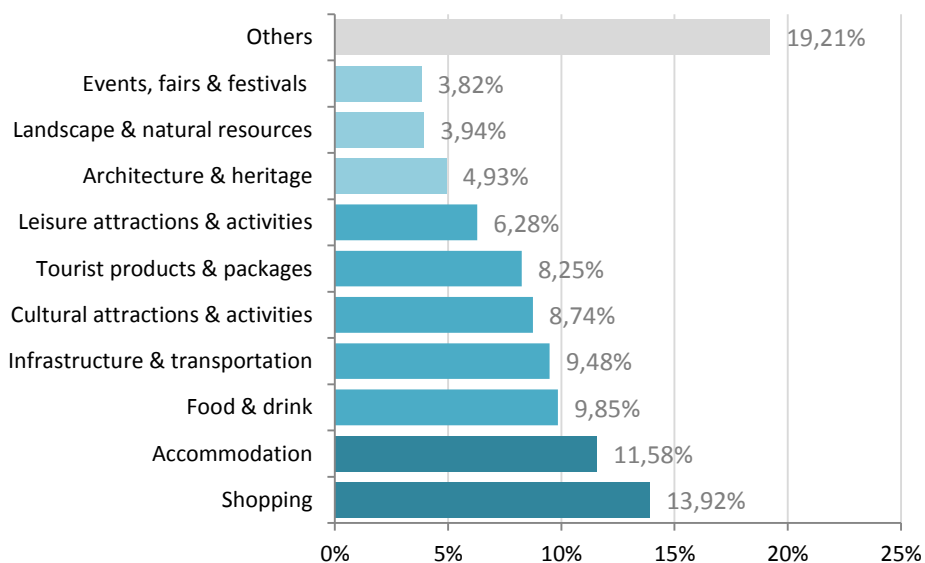
Source: Author

All in all, there are five significantly prevalent categories, each of them represented by more than 5% of references. In addition, three more categories are less present throughout the discourse, representing between 3% and 4.99% of the content. Among these, the leisure attractions and activities category stands out, showing the highest presence in the entire sample.

The homepage also contains some references to leisure attractions and activities. In fact, on the whole, besides their prevalence in the website discourse, almost all categories in Figure 6.39 are also present in the homepage. The architecture and heritage category is the only core association that is absent.

It is interesting to note that Munich's homepage contains almost all the topics included in the original list of categories with at least one reference, with only 4 of the 19 missing from the destination's presentation. Correspondingly, five non-relevant categories are also present on the front page: wellness, sports, safety, political and economic factors, and nightlife. The presence of the wellness category is especially interesting, since is the only category that is not relevant on any website in the sample; in Munich's case, only 1.70% of the content is related to the topic. However, some of the finding on Munich's website previously highlighted, might be caused by its special characteristics, as it is addressed to both tourists and the local population, as well as other profiles.

The exclusion of some sections of information explicitly addressed to non-tourist targets does not imply the absence of different tourist profiles. On the contrary, 44 content units are linked to nine different profiles, as seen in Figure 6.40, which represents 5.4% of the total content. Among them, information regarding accommodation, and infrastructure and transportation stands out. These two categories appear to be more relevant to target specific tourist profiles, together with information included in the *others* category.

Figure 6.40. **Product-related categories and tourist profiles; the case of Munich**
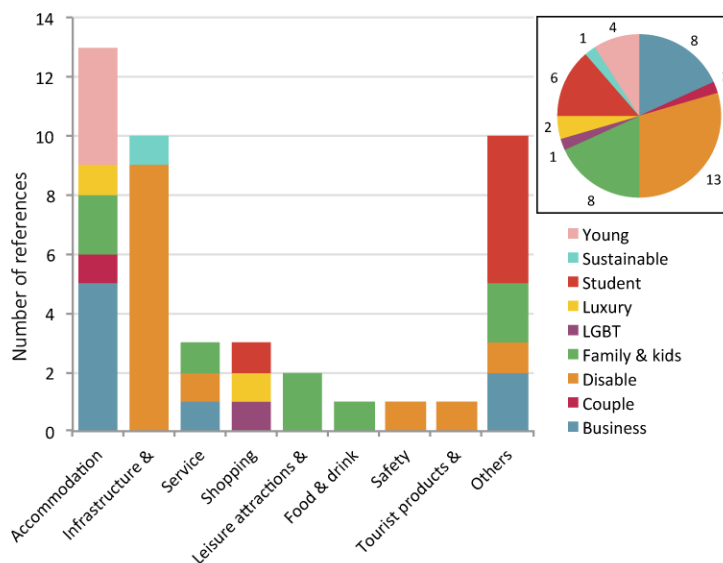
Source: Author

Upon closer inspection, however, the infrastructure and transportation content is mainly linked to a single profile, tourists with disabilities, besides one reference related to tourists seeking a sustainable experience. Thus, infrastructure and transportation become the main focus of interest for the disabled tourist profile. Differently, content regarding specific types of accommodation targets a more diverse group of profiles: young tourists, luxury travelers, families, couples, and business tourists all appear to be interested in accommodations suitable for their specific needs.

To conclude, the presence of the student profile is interesting to highlight. Even though it is the fourth target in terms of references linked to it, academic tourism stands out due to his presence in the *others* category. Again, the interests of this profile do not match any identified categories.

6.2.8.2. Personality traits of Munich projected on the website

Regarding the symbolic dimension of Munich's destination image, the analysis investigated the website's textual discourse for synonyms of different personality traits. This process identified 724 such words. As Figure 6.41 illustrates, Munich's overall personality shows great balance between the different dimensions. Similar to Istanbul's case, no dimension has a presence of less than 10%. However, in this case, the exciting dimension is the dominant one.

Figure 6.41. **Composition of Munich's projected personality**

Source: Author

248
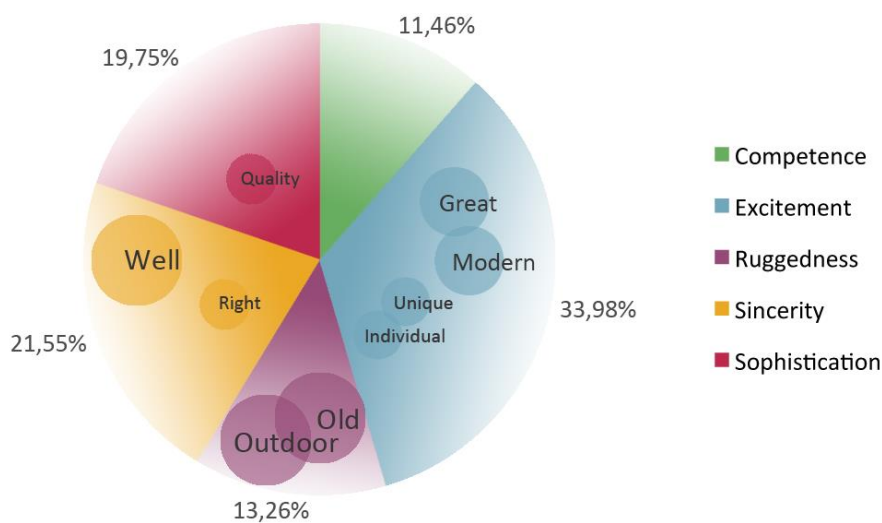
The excitement dimension is represented by 33.98% of the words referring to personality traits. More specifically, 41 different terms are related to this dimension. Of these words, four are the most often repeated in the text. The terms *great* and *modern* represent more than 3% of the vocabulary, and *individual* and *unique* each account for more than 2%. All are popular, recurrent adjectives used to describe many destinations' offer. Furthermore, each of the most repeated words points to a different facet of excitement: being spirited, up-to-date, independent (also related to up-to-date), and imaginative, respectively. Hence, a dominant facet of excitement cannot be inferred in this case.

Sincerity, on the other hand, is also represented by a broad variety of terms, 38 to be precise, but these are less often repeated throughout the discourse. Again, the term *well* is one of the most recurrent, representing more than 5% of words, and linked to the healthy and wholesome side of the brand. The term *right* also emerges as a frequently used word, with a presence of more than 2%, and pointing to the true and honest faces of the destination.

Even though sophistication is the third dominant personality dimension, the range of vocabulary used to express it is much smaller. Specifically, only 24 different words refer to it, and only one is highly repeated: *quality*, representing more than 2% of the words in this dimension. Contrastingly, competence, a less dominant dimension, is represented by a longer list of synonyms. A total of 35 different words are related to competence traits, but none of them are highly repeated in the discourse.

Finally, Munich's personality shows the highest presence of ruggedness in its discourse. Represented by 13.26% of the vocabulary linked to personality traits, this is the highest presence of ruggedness among the destinations in the sample. Once more, *outdoor* and *old* emerge as highly repeated words within the discourse*,* representing more than 4% of the vocabulary. However, only 14 different words in total are linked to this dimension, pointing to less diversity in the associated vocabulary.

It is important to note here that the adjective *bad* was not considered in the analysis of this specific case. This synonym, related to tough, was excluded due to its interference with a proper noun written in German that uses the same three characters with a different meaning.

6.2.9. The case of Paris

This section presents the results obtained from the analysis of www.parisinfo.com, Paris's official tourism website. The overall multidimensional analysis concluded with a WQI score of 0.68 points, which is above average. It is first interesting to highlight the high scores obtained by this website for the three persuasive parameters, all of them significantly above average. Compared to the previous destinations, Paris's website is the only one that performs better in terms of persuasive parameters than technical ones, as shown in Figure 6.42.

Regarding the technical dimension, the information architecture parameter stands out due to its below-average score of only 0.65 points. This is the second lowest score on this parameter in entire sample. Even though this is still a good result, the parameter could be improved by including some standard labels for functional information about the website, such as terms and conditions, privacy, about us, etc., which are useful and easy to identify for users (i.C2). Furthermore, users' experience could be enhanced by improving the links recognition and distinguishing already visited links (i.C4), or anticipating users about the actions of those links (i.e. indicating the size of the document for download links) (i.C5).

Figure 6.42. **Overall assessment of Paris's website**
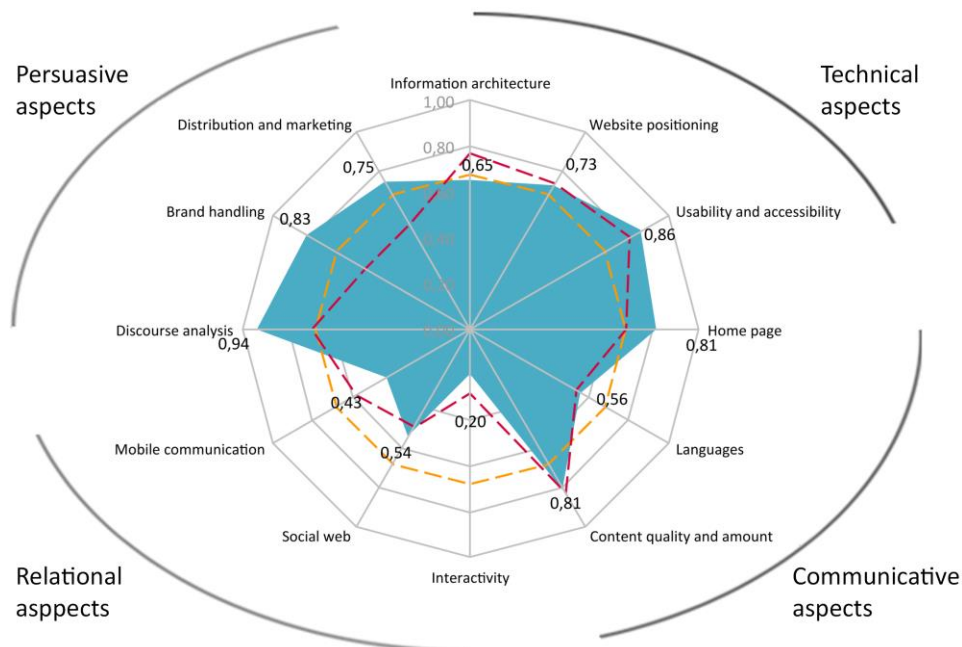
On the other hand, together with Vienna, Paris has the best scores in the sample for usability and accessibility: 0.86 points. Its URLs use a clear vocabulary and are easy to remember (i.D1);

the website shows high-quality visual content but with optimal shape and weight so as not to slow down the website (i.D8); and contextual help is offered for complex tasks on the website (i.D11). These are some of the indicators obtaining the maximum score.

Moreover, in the communicative dimension, Paris's website obtains the best results in the sample for the homepage parameter, 0.81 points, together with Barcelona, Frankfurt, and Milan. The destination's website stands out regarding some indicators, such as including a visual presentation of the destination (i.A3), identifying different tourist profiles (i.A6), showing the logos of the organizations responsible for the website (i.A5), and linking the home page to the official online tourist shop (i.A10). All in all, the website makes a good first impression and invites tourists to keep navigating (i.A14).

The website does not detect users' language based on their origin, nor does it ask the users which language they prefer (i.A1 & G6). Nevertheless, it shows some interesting results in this regard. The website is available in several different languages (i.G1) but, further, it is the only website that integrates the different language versions within its official URL, i.e. es.parisinfo.com for Spanish, and it.parisinfo.com for Italian (i.G5).

Contrastingly, all the parameters with the lowest scores correspond to the relational dimension. With 0.20 points for interactivity and 0.43 for mobile communication, these parameters are the only ones with scores below 0.5. Users can only interact with the website by downloading different promotional documents, such as maps, guides, or tourist plans (i.J3); through some audiovisual material integrated in the layout (i.J2); or through a "trip planner" containing pre-made itineraries. Only the indicator concerning free apps to download obtains the maximum score (i.J4). Moreover, the social web parameter also obtains a score above average: the website is linked to several different social networks, making it easier for users to share the content (i.K2), as well as to an external recommendations social network, TripAdvisor (i.K8).

Finally, the website achieves high scores for all the parameters related to the persuasive dimension. It shows the best results in the sample for distribution and marketing, with a score of 0.75 points. Moreover, brand handling and the discursive analysis obtain the second-best scores out of all destinations, with 0.83 and 0.94 points, respectively. Besides showing a layout that is completely coherent with the destination's visual identity (i.H2 &H3), the website is rich in audiovisual content supporting both the functional and the emotional sides of the brand

(i.H6 & H7). The website makes clear which are the core distinctive attributes and values that distinguish the destination. In addition, the discourse builds a possible world comprising sub-worlds, all of them well structured and credible (i.I1 & I2).

Table 6.23. **Paris's results for the h.10, i.3, i.4, and i.5 indicators**

h.10 At the homepage	**Are pictures (figures, pictures, videos…) distinctive of the territory?** Images can be unique for the brand or generic pictures that would suit different destinations.	Max. Score
i.3. Superficial level	**Is visual and verbal content using persuasive codes?** Existence of rhetorical figures	Max. Score
i.4. Embodiment	**Does the website combine different types of expressive resources?** It combines text, visual, and audiovisual in a balanced way or it opts for one of them exclusively?	Max. Score
i.5. Embodiment	**Are images well integrated and coherent with the text?** Are images aligned with the discourse conceptually, descriptively or in a complementary way?	Max. Score

Source: Author – WQI template (Annexes)

Similarly, all the indicators shown in Table 6.23 obtain the highest scores possible. The only indicator that could be improved to further strengthen the website at the discourse level is the delegation of the spokesperson role to other figures than the official tourism office voice (i.e. other tourists' experiences, locals explaining their point of view, etc.). All in all, at a discursive and persuasive level, www.parisinfo.com achieves almost optimal results.

6.2.9.1. Product-related categories

The following section presents the results of the analysis of Paris's projected image. More specifically, the first step of the image analysis aimed to identify the most dominant product-related associations: those topics that are most prevalent throughout the destination's dicourse. Firstly, the corpus of study for Paris's case is sumarized in Table 6.24. As can be seen, 1,554 references were identified along 124 different pages, corresponding to the homepage and all the pages on the first two levels of the hierarchy. The majority of these references (78.2%) correspond to navigational content units. With lower presence, informational content corresponds to 16.9% of the references, and transactional units to 4.9%. This last figure supports the high score obtained for

Table 6.24. **Paris analysis information**

Source: Author

252
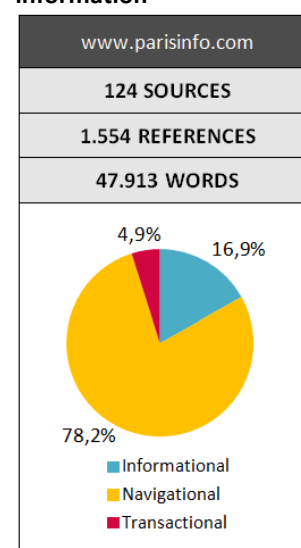
the distribution and marketing parameter, since transactional content is tightly related to commercialization.

Regarding the core interest of this research, the product-related associations, several common offer characteristics were identified, and each content unit was linked to a single category. This process identified those categories with a higher prevalence, meaning more visibility and more relevance in the image construction throughout the website. In this case, 11 different categories emerged that were represented by more than 3% of the references. Correspondingly, these 11 categories, represented in Figure 6.43, explain 88.50% of the total references identified.

Figure 6.43. **Paris' most prevalent product-related categories**
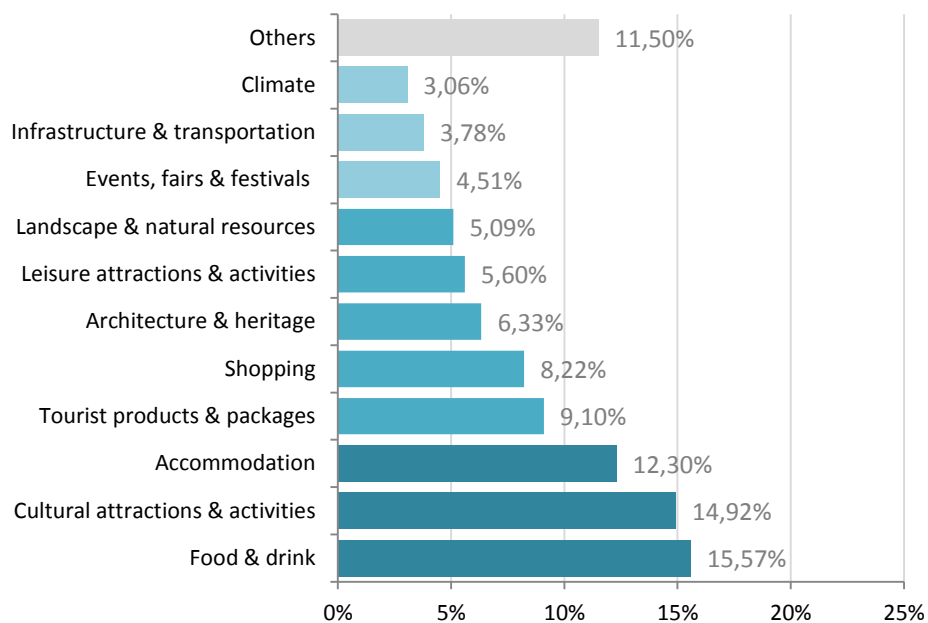
Upon close inspection, the higher prevalence of three of these categories becomes apparent, with each representing more than 10% of the content: food and drink (15.57%), cultural attractions and activities (14.92%), and accommodation (12.30%). However, only the cultural attractions and activities category is included on the homepage. It is also interesting to note that is not common in the sample for the food and drink category to be the most prevalent one: only Istanbul and Prague make this category their first priority. Similarly, accommodation is not one of the most prevalent categories among the sample websites either. These results

point to the higher distinguishing power of these categories to differentiate Paris from the competitors.

With less visibility throughout the discourse but still a significant prevalence, five more categories represent more than 5% of the content each. Among them, leisure attractions and activities achieve the second-best result in the sample, just after Munich's website. Moreover, with fewer content units referring to these topics but more than 3%, events, fairs, and festivals; infrastructure and transportation; and climate categories complete the list of the strongest associations to Paris's offer. The presence of climate is especially interesting, though it is low at 3.06%. The website offers information about the climate and the weather on several pages, giving it a high level of importance, unlike most of the other destinations. This result is only surpassed in Prague's case.

Unlike the previous case, parisinfo.com covers a lower variety of topics on its homepage. As mentioned, it includes cultural attractions and activities; but also landscape and natural resources; and events, fairs, and festivals. In line with the above results, information about the climate is also part of the homepage content. In addition, even though it is not technically a product-related category, the page also includes several references containing generic information. Furthermore, the latter also emerges as a category that is highly related to different tourist profiles.

In that vein, Figure 6.44 shows the importance of specific tourist profiles within the website's content. A total of 294 content units target specific profiles; this represents 18.9% of all units, which is the highest percentage in the sample. Of these units, the most common topics related to different targets are food and drink, accommodation, leisure and cultural attractions, and generic information. At least 30 references in each of these categories target specific tourist profiles, and even food and drink presents more than 50 content units to such groups. Other important topics related to tourist profiles are shopping, with 28 references; landscape, with 17; infrastructure, with 14; and tourist products and events, with 9.

Based on the amount of content addressed to these targets, the most important tourist profiles for the destination of Paris are families, followed by tourists with disabilities. These two profiles are given special attention within the website content. Furthermore, both appear to have similar interests spread across different categories.

Figure 6.44. **Product-related categories and tourist profiles; the case of Paris**
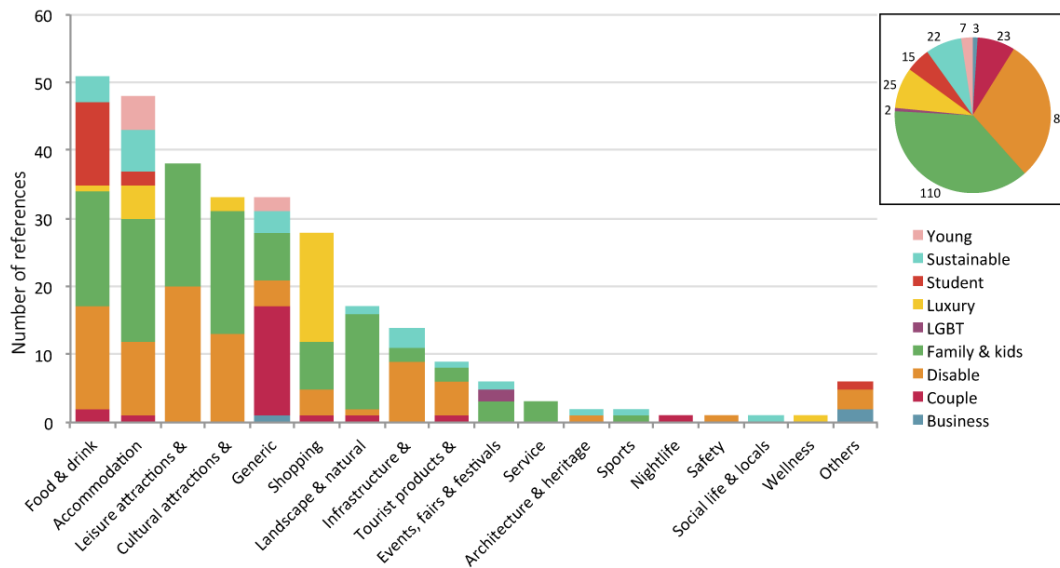
Source: Author

In contrast, the content targeted towards couples and tourists seeking luxurious experiences suggests that their interests are narrower. Positioned as the second and third most important profiles, their results stand out in fewer categories. On the one hand, most of the content offering generic information presents the romantic facet of Paris; for instance, many content units have titles such as "romantic Paris" or "Paris for couples", accompanied by short texts clearly pointing to Paris as an ideal city for couples to enjoy. Only some anecdotal references also link this profile to six other categories. On the other hand, luxury tourists are clearly interested in shopping in Paris, with 16 references linking the profile to this topic. Significantly less prevalent, information about luxury accommodation and cultural activities is also present on the website.

All in all, Paris's website clearly strives to present a highly diverse offer. The same elements of this offer are communicated in different ways to satisfy different tourists' expectations: there is a different Paris experience for each tourist profile.

6.2.9.2. Personality traits of Paris projected on the website

To complete the analysis of the destination image, the last stage of this study focused on the symbolic dimension of the brand: personality. This section summarizes the results regarding the destination personality projected by www.parisinfo.com.

The analysis identified 964 terms linked to personality traits. As Figure 6.45 shows, the most dominant personality dimension among those words is excitement, followed by sophistication and sincerity, which are almost equally present. Conversely, competence and ruggedness have a very low presence in the overall personality outline: the lowest out of any destination in the sample.

Figure 6.45. **Composition of Paris's projected personality**
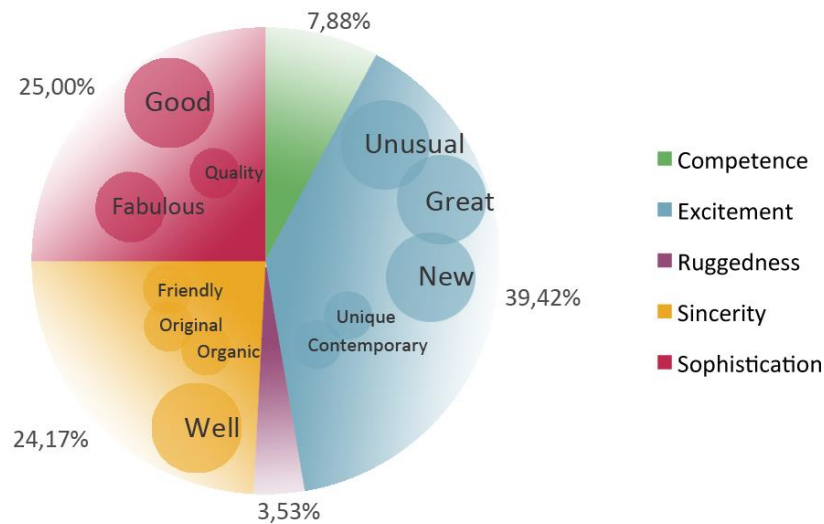
More precisely, with 39.42% of the vocabulary relating to it, excitement is clearly the dominant dimension of Paris's personality. The analysis identified 47 different words related to this dimension, some of which are repeated several times throughout the discourse. For instance, the frequent repetition of the terms *new* and *great* is not surprising, since several other destinations also frequently used these words in their discourse. However, within Paris's content, a third adjective is also highly recurrent: *unusual*. This term was not identified on other destinations' websites, and it is thus highly distinguishing of Paris. Each of the aforementioned words represents more than 4% of the synonyms linked to personality traits. Furthermore, *contemporary* and *unique* also stand out, representing more than 2% of the words. Together, they all evoke more imaginative and spirited facets of excitement, the first related to the terms *unique* and *unusual*, and the second to *new* and *great*.

Next, sophistication is Paris's second most dominant personality dimension, with 25% of words related to it. Paris and Milan are the only destinations stronger in sophistication than sincerity. In this case, out of 36 identified words, there are three that strongly represent this dimension:

good, *fabulous,* and *quality*. The first two represent more than 5% and 3% of the words, respectively, and clearly point to the pleasing and charming side of the brand. With a lower frequency, just above 2%, the term quality complements the personality, pointing to a more upper-class brand.

However, the presence of sincerity within the content is close to that of sophistication, with 24.17%. The list of synonyms representing sincerity is longer, 38 words, but the words are less frequently repeated. Only the word *well* is highly recurrent within the discourse, and *friendly*, *original,* and *organic* stand out, albeit with a lower frequency of just above 2%.

These three dimensions of personality comprise almost 90% of Paris's overall personality outline, leaving little room for competence and ruggedness. Neither of them obtains a significant presence, achieving only 7.84% and 3.51%, respectively, and neither is linked to frequently used words in the text. In this regard, Paris is the city in the sample with the fewest ruggedness traits embedded in its discourse.

6.2.10. The case of Prague

Again, the official website analysis started with an overall assessment of the website, taking into account different characteristics of its communication in a multidimensional analysis. This resulted in a WQI of 0.56 points. With regard to the different parameters, shown in Figure 6.46 in the blue area, the overall shape of the results appears to be close to the average tendency, indicated with a pink dashed line. Three parameters in particular differ from the average scores: website positioning, information architecture, and discourse analysis.

It is important to highlight that in contrast to the general tendency, two of the technical parameters obtain relatively low scores. Prague's website obtains the lowest scores in the sample for both information architecture and website positioning parameters, with 0.58 points each. While these are still positive results, above 0.5, several indicators with low scores could be improved to strengthen the website.

Figure 6.46. **Overall assessment of Prague's website**
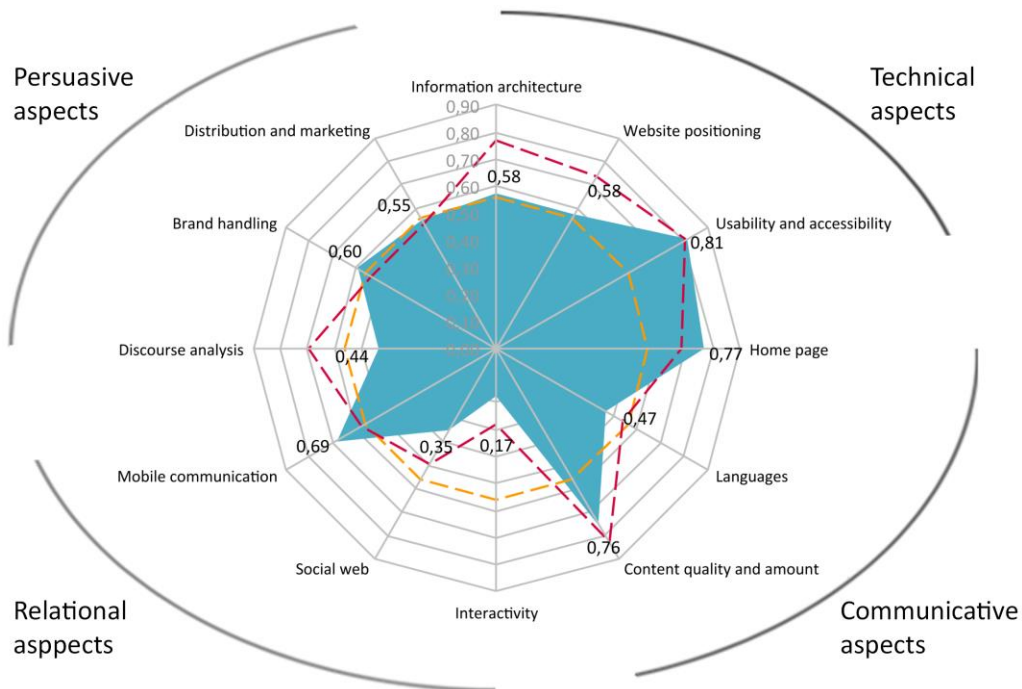
Source: Author

Regarding structure and navigation, the first indicator to highlight is links recognition. They are easy to recognize, but by indicating the different links' actions, users would be able to anticipate their response and, thus, have a better navigation experience. For example, the website could indicate those links that bring users to other pages, or note the weight of documents to download (i.C5). Similarly, another improvement to consider concerns the orientation during navigation: for example, breadcrumbs could be used at the top of pages (i.C6). Furthermore, the impact of the layout's appearance on users' experience must be considered: for instance, long pages may exhaust users (i.C9) and misleading hierarchies may make them miss relevant information (i.C8). Both length and hierarchy could be improved on Prague's website.

On the other hand, the website obtains a high score of 0.81 points for usability and accessibility, and it especially stands out for a couple of specific indicators in this parameter. Besides Milan's website, it is the only one to obtain an accessibility certification at a triple A level (i.D18). A triple A certification identifies those websites that are accessible to all devices, and especially to those fit out for users with some kind of disability. In addition, the website includes a section about its accessibility conditions (i.D19).

Regarding the communicative parameters, Prague's homepage communication also scores above average. With 0.77 points, the site includes a presentation of the destination (i.A3), it shows the logos of the organizations responsible for the tourism management (i.A5), and it is linked to different social networks (i.A8). These results illustrate the homepage's good performance. Similarly, on a content level, the website also contains all the information that is expected from a tourist website: how to reach the destination (i.B2), where to sleep (i.B4), what to visit (i.B5), etc.

However, the website's performance could be improved for this parameter, and also for languages, with the automatic detection of users' language based on their origin, or by asking users for their language preference (i.A1 & G6). Moreover, even though the website is available in several languages (i.G1), a complete translation of all the content would enhance users' experience (i.G2): some non-translated content was found during the analysis.

Regarding interactive parameters, social web and interactivity score lower than average, with 0.35 and 0.17 points, respectively. Further, the website's interactivity score is the second lowest in the sample. Only two indicators obtain positive results for this parameter: the possibility to download different tourist materials, such as maps, tours, paths, etc. (i.J3); and the availability of free apps to download (i.J4). The latter is related to the mobile communication parameter, and its score of 0.69 points is above average. The website is mobile responsive (i.L1) and it offers a free official app about the destination, developed by the same OMD (i.L2 &L3), which is also available for different devices (i.L4).

Finally, concerning the persuasive dimension, the results show a tendency that differs from the average. Prague's website scores higher for brand handling (0.60 points) and distribution and marketing (0.55) than for the discursive analysis parameter (0.44 point). Interestingly, the website is one of the few that include a slogan on the homepage: "Wow pure emotion" (i.H1). However, the destination logo is not present throughout the entire the website, but only on the home page and some other pages (i.H2), and no audiovisual material supports the brand identity (i.H6 & H7).

On a discursive level, the destination builds one single possible world, and while it is credible, there is still room to improve its structure and arguments (i.I1 & I2). On the other hand, as shown in Table 6.25, indicators H10, I4, and I5 obtain the highest score possible. Thus, pictures are distinctive for the destination, and there is coherence between text and images

throughout the content. However, the expressiveness of those materials seems to be weak. The analyzed content does not show rhetorical figures or other resources to enhance its persuasive effect.

Table 6.25. **Prague's results for the h.10, i.3, i.4, and i.5 indicators**

h.10 At the homepage	**Are pictures (figures, pictures, videos…) distinctive of the territory?** Images can be unique for the brand or generic pictures that would suit different destinations.	Max. Score
i.3. Superficial level	**Is visual and verbal content using persuasive codes?** Existence of rhetorical figures	Min. Score
i.4. Embodiment	**Does the website combine different types of expressive resources?** It combines text, visual, and audiovisual in a balanced way or it opts for one of them exclusively?	Max. Score
i.5. Embodiment	**Are images well integrated and coherent with the text?** Are images aligned with the discourse conceptually, descriptively or in a complementary way?	Max. Score

Source: Author – WQI template (Annexes)

6.2.10.1. Product-related categories

To identify the most relevant functional associations to the destination of Prague in the discourse, NVivo was used to code the different content units linked to the previously identified product-related categories. Table 6.26 provides descriptive information about the corpus of study. It is important to note that the architecture of this website is significantly different from that of the other websites in the sample: navigating from one subject to another does not always imply navigation through pages, but can instead occur via flash transitions within the same page. For this reason, the author captured as different pages content that is technically hosted on the same page to make all the content visible for the analysis. This process concluded with 74 different pdfs downloaded which correspond to website pages in the rest of the sample. Within these sources, 1,452 different

Table 6.26. **Prague analysis information**
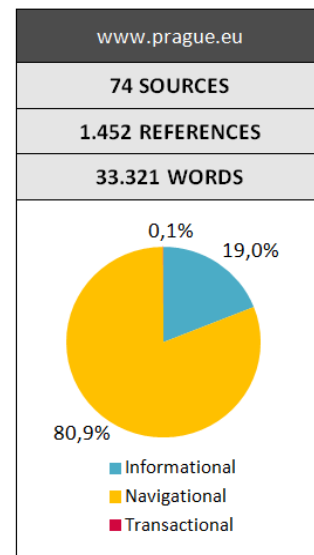
Source: Author

content units were identified and coded. Most of them correspond to navigational content units, 80.9%, while only 19% contain informational content. Moreover, while transactional content does exist on this website, it represents only 0.1% of references.

Moreover, each reference is also linked to a product-related category, making it possible to identify those categories with more presence throughout the content. Regarding the case at hand, 10 different categories stand out, representing more than 3% of the content offered on prague.eu. Altogether, these 10 categories account for 82.65% of the total content.

Figure 6.47. **Prague's most prevalent product-related categories**
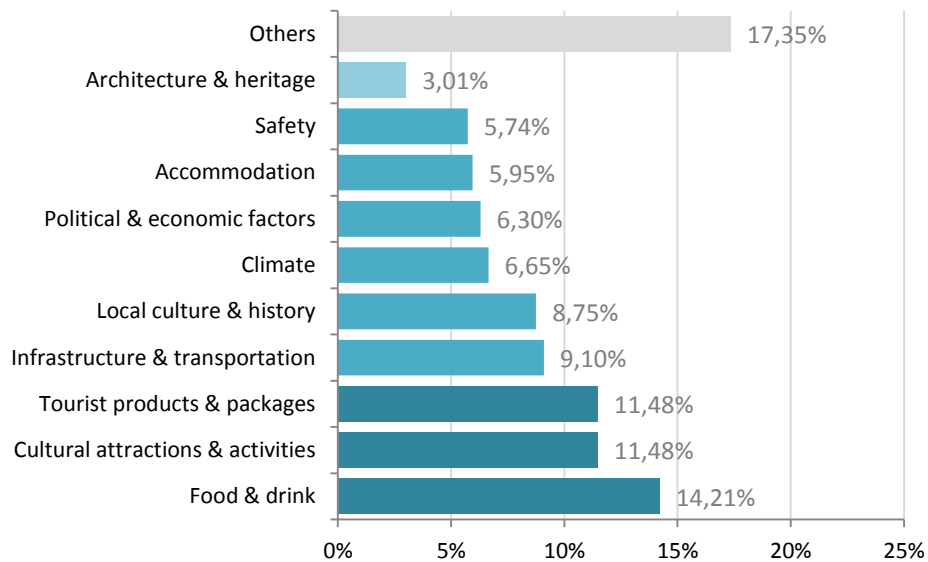
Source: Author

However, there are significant differences between the results of each of these categories, as seen in Figure 6.47. On the one hand, three categories emerge as highly prevalent in the discourse, representing more than 10% of the content each. Among them, the food and drink category corresponds to a high 14.21% of the references, and this is one of the few cases where it is the most prevalent content topic on a website. Conversely, the high presence of both cultural attractions and activities, and tourist products and packages is in line with the average results, where these two categories obtain the top scores. On the other hand, only one category accounts for less than 5% of the references but more than 3%: the architecture and heritage category.

Furthermore, scores obtained by four specific categories are also worth mentioning. Firstly, local culture and history achieves the greatest presence out of all websites, with 8.75% of references linked to this topic. This category only emerges as one of the core associations in four different cases. Similarly, climate and safety are relevant categories on only two different websites. Prague achieves the highest score in matters of safety with 6.65%, which is above

Milan's score; and also for the climate category with 5.74%, which is above Paris's score. Finally, this is the only case where political and economic factors are significantly visible on the website, representing 6.30% of the references. Prague's official website gives great visibility to information about the currency and its value, showing it on almost all the pages along with the weather.

Regarding the homepage, eight different categories can be seen in the discourse, of which only five correspond to the most prevalent ones: food and drink; tourist products and packages; local culture and history; climate; and political and economic factors. Besides these, events, fairs, and festivals, shopping, and sports seem to be relevant in introducing the destination and its offer, even though they are less prevalent throughout the website. Interestingly, this is the only website in the sample where the landscape and natural resources category does not appear as one of the core categories: it is only represented by 2.82% of the references, which is its lowest score in the sample.

Finally, one of the core categories linked to Prague's projected image also stands out due to the number of references linked to specific tourist profiles. Of the 72 references linked to a target node, 5% are related to cultural attractions and activities. Prague's offer presents cultural attractions adapted to young tourists, students, luxury tourists, and families.

Figure 6.48. **Product-related categories and tourist profiles; the case of Prague**
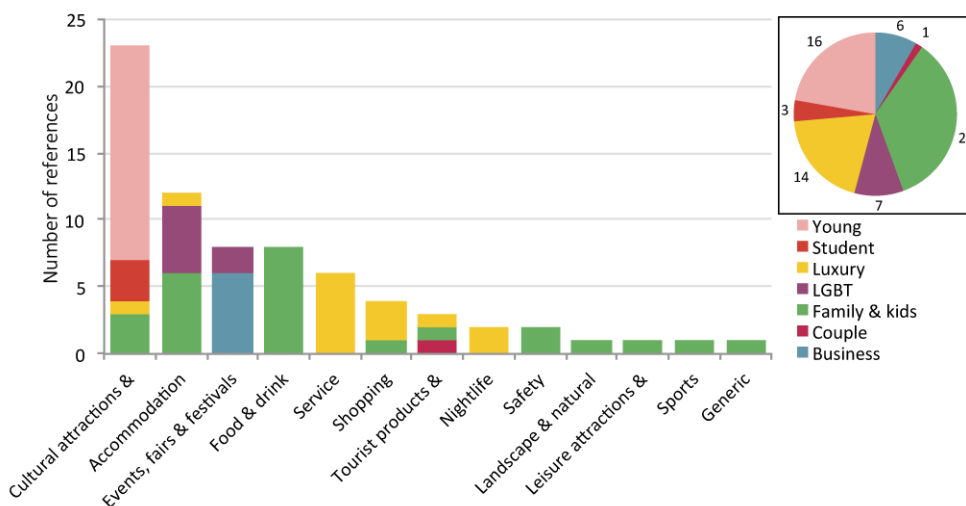
Source: Author

Additionally, a great number of references are also linked to both accommodation and specific profiles. In this case, however, the tourist profiles interested in accommodation are slightly

different: families and luxury tourists are again identified, but LGBT tourists are also addressed. In third place, events, food and drink, services, shopping, and tourist products contain between three and eight references linked to different tourist profiles.

In particular, most content related to cultural attractions targets young tourists; this profile appears to only be interested in this content category. The student profile is also only connected to this category, represented by three references. In contrast, based on the number of references linked to it, the most important profile appears to have more diverse interests: families are linked to several different categories; among them, only food and drink, and accommodation stand out.

Further, the third most important profile is that of tourists seeking a luxurious experience. While references to this group are linked to several categories, these tourists appear to be more interested in special services and shopping facilities adjusted to their needs. Finally, it is also interesting to note that in Prague's case, LGBT tourists' special needs are related to accommodation and events, which is in line with previous cases' results.

6.2.10.2. Personality traits of Prague projected on the website

Once more, the final stage of the analysis of Prague's image focused on the symbolic dimension, yielding a description of Prague's personality based on its official website discourse. The analysis identified 807 words in the discourse that were synonyms of different personality traits obtained from Aaker's (1997) original study (Aaker, 1997). The overall personality outline, represented in Figure 6.49, shows a similar distribution to the general trend: excitement emerges as the main dominant dimension, followed by sincerity and sophistication, while competence and ruggedness occupy the last positions.

Regarding the most dominant dimension, 38.79% of personality-related words are linked to excitement, represented by a total of 44 different words on the website. In this case, seven different terms are used repeatedly in the discourse. Among them, *new* and *modern* are again highly present, but *stylish* is also a recurrent adjective, corresponding to more than 4% of the words. This last term, not highlighted in previous cases, differentiates Prague's personality as a trendier, more daring one. In addition, unique emerges as a relevant word, present in 3% of the cases, and three other words also have a presence of more than 2%: *fresh*, *contemporary*, *young*, and *great*. All of them evoke spirited and up-to-date facets of the city's personality.

Figure 6.49. **Composition of Prague's projected personality**
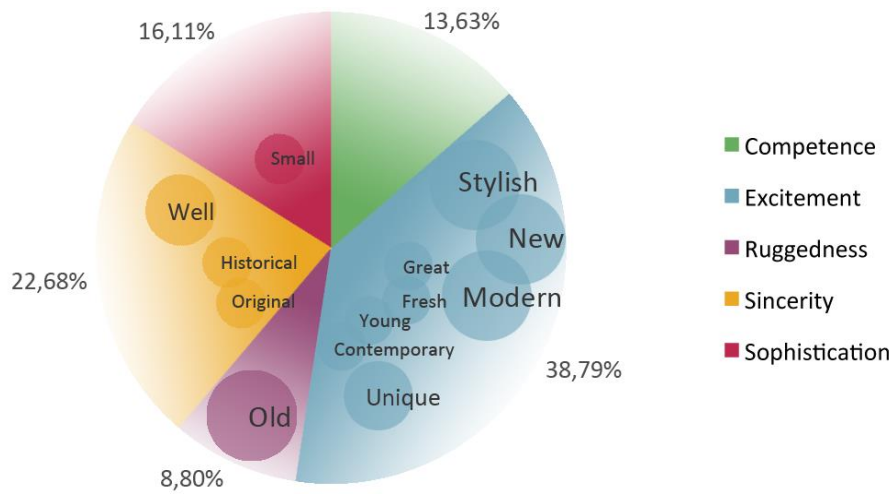
Source: Author

Next, sincerity is positioned as the second most dominant personality dimension. It is also represented by a huge variety of different words – 36, to be precise – but only three recur significantly throughout the text. Again, *well* represents more than 3% of the words related to personality traits, but *historical* and *original* are also significantly repeated, with a presence of more than 2%. Interestingly, even though competence is less present than sophistication in the discourse, the variety of words representing it is almost as broad as for sincerity, with 35 different terms. This coincides with the general trend of this dimension to be represented by a greater variety and lower recurrence of words.

Finally, regarding the two remaining dimensions, one adjective is significantly repeated in each case. On the one hand, sophistication is represented by 28 different words and only one slightly repeated adjective: *small*, synonym of smooth. On the other hand, ruggedness follows the general trend of being represented by very few but highly repeated words; in this case, *old* stands out.

6.2.11. The case of Rome

Rome's official website analysis yielded a WQI of 0.60 points. Similar to the previous case, its scoring for different parameters is close to the sample's averages. Figure 6.50 clearly demonstrates the numerous matching points between Rome's results, in blue, and average scores, indicated by the pink dashed line. Only distribution and marketing, brand handling, and social web parameters differ more from these averages.

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Figure 6.50. **Overall assessment of Rome's website**
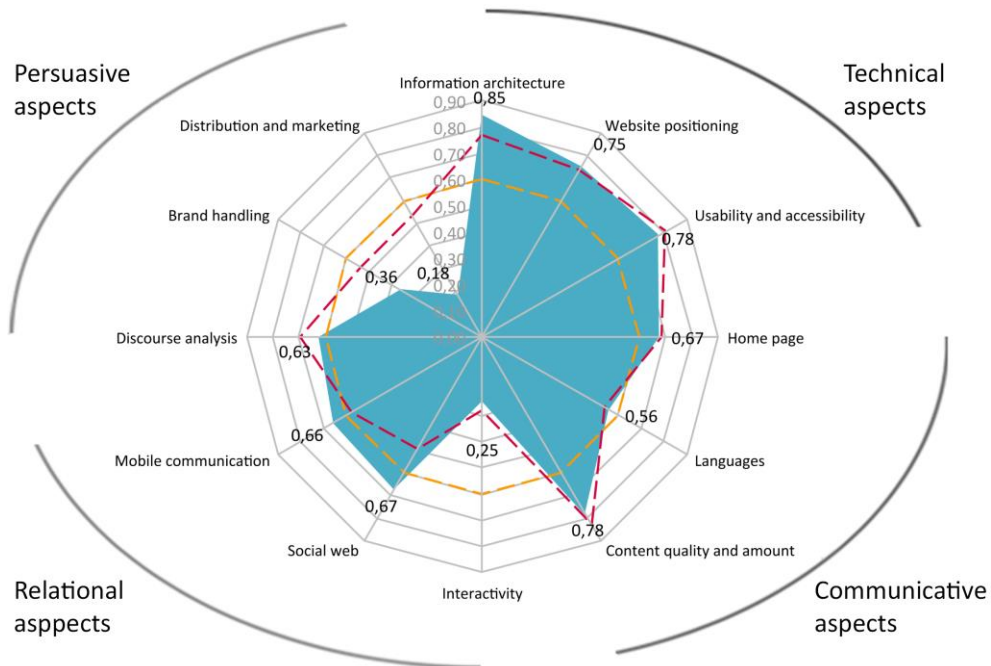
Source: Author

In particular, the scores obtained for distribution and marketing, and social web are, respectively, the lowest and the highest scores achieved by any destination in the sample for those parameters. As mentioned in previous sections, distribution and marketing is one of the parameters with the greatest difference the maximum and the minimum scores obtained in the sample. In this case, the site is clearly not focused on commercialization; regarding accommodation, for example, the content only provides contact information so users can continue the purchase process outside of the official website if they are willing to do so (i.F1). The website only favors transactions for events by linking to an external platform where users can book tickets (i.F5).

On the other hand, social web shows positive results, the highest for this parameter together with Madrid: 0.67 points. The integration between the official website and different social networks goes further than that of most of the other websites in the sample. For instance, Rome's website is not only linked to different social networks, but it also includes an open window within its layout showing social media activity. Users can see what is happening and even participate on Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube (i.K5, K6, & K7). In addition, the website also obtains the maximum score for the K2 indicator, indicating the presence of several tools to share different content. Conversely, the interactivity parameter achieves lower results. The website does not offer users the possibility to interact with the content (i.J9, J10, & J11), nor

does it offer any tourist-to-tourist contact possibilities. The latter could be improved by integrating tourists' previous experiences in the content (i.J8) or integrating a community of tourists into the website (i.J7).

Regarding the overall results, it is surprising how close the technical and communicative parameters are to the sample's average scores. Among these, the information architecture parameter stands out by achieving the maximum score obtained by Rome website. With 0.85 points, it is the second-best score obtained for this parameter in the entire sample. Further, all indicators related to labeling show good scores (i.C1, C2, & C3), similarly to the structure and navigation indicators (i.C4, C5, & C6). With regard to the page layout, only reducing the maximum length of the pages could improve the user experience (i.C9). Moreover, there is still some room for improvement on the technical level; for example, the accessibility of the site could be strengthened by including a section with information about its accessibility conditions (i.D19).

Concerning discourse analysis, Rome's website achieves a score of 0.63 points, which is slightly below average. The website builds a possible world that comprises sub-worlds, such as Rome for families, or studying in Rome (i.I1). However, while all are credible, they could be even more so by enriching their construction (i.I2). Furthermore, the website could enhance the persuasive effect of the discourse by delegating the spokesperson role to other figures, such as locals, tourists, or experts in certain matters (i.I7).

The brand handling parameter also shows different areas for improvement, with a score of 0.36 points making it significantly below average. Regarding the visual identity of the brand, even though there is a destination logo (i.H2) and the layout is coherent with the graphical identity set by that logo (i.H5), there is very little visual and audiovisual support for the brand's emotional and functional identity (i.H6, H7, H8, & H9). This lack of support is also reflected in the score obtained for indicator h10: as shown in Table 6.27, several neutral images appear throughout the website.

Further, while the website combines and aligns its visual and textual content, the expressiveness of that content is low. Very few rhetorical figures are used to lend expressiveness to the discourse; hence, the persuasive effect of the content is low.

Table 6.27. **Rome's results for the h.10, i.3, i.4, and i.5 indicators**

h.10 At the homepage	**Are pictures (figures, pictures, videos…) distinctive of the territory?** Images can be unique for the brand or generic pictures that would suit different destinations.	Med. Score
i.3. Superficial level	**Is visual and verbal content using persuasive codes?** Existence of rhetorical figures	Med. Score
i.4. Embodiment	**Does the website combine different types of expressive resources?** It combines text, visual, and audiovisual in a balanced way or it opts for one of them exclusively?	Max. Score
i.5. Embodiment	**Are images well integrated and coherent with the text?** Are images aligned with the discourse conceptually, descriptively or in a complementary way?	Max. Score

Source: Author – WQI template (Annexes)

6.2.11.1. Product-related categories

Once the overall quality of the website communication was assessed, an analysis of the destination's projected image was conducted. To this end, the author used NVivo to code all the content units present on the homepage and all the pages on the first two levels of the website hierarchy. Since each website in the sample has different characteristics, the first step of this phase was to describe the characteristics of the corpus of study for Rome's website. As summarized in Table 6.28, 46 pages were identified as suitable for the analysis, as well as 537 different content units or, in other words, references. Most of these references correspond to navigational content, 81.9%, to be precise. The remaining 18.1% represent informational content. Similar to previous cases, no transactional content blocks were identified in the analysis. This result is in line with the low score obtained for the distribution and marketing parameter.

Table 6.28. **Rome analysis information**
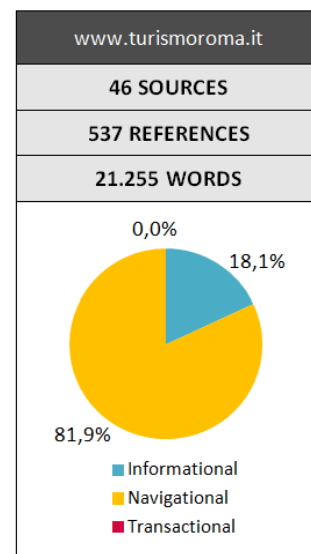
Source: Author

Regarding the main interest of this phase, the analysis identified eight outstanding product-related categories from the original 19. Their higher presence in the content makes them more relevant for the destination's image construction throughout the website discourse. Further, 86.36% of all the coded references refer to one of these eight categories.

Figure 6.51. **Rome's most prevalent product-related categories**
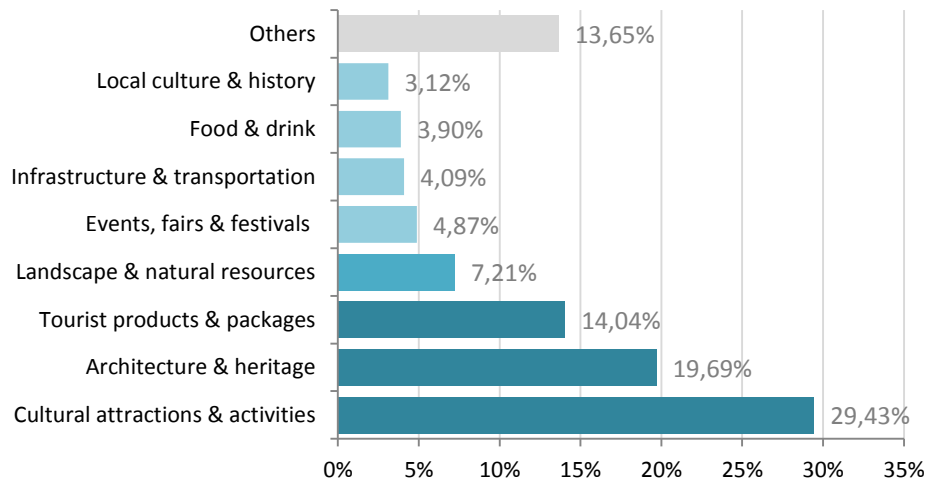
Source: Author

As can be seen in Figure 6.51, three of these categories emerge as highly prevalent on the website. Content related to cultural attractions and activities, architecture and heritage, and tourist products and packages alone represents more than half the identified content units. This is not the first case where the cultural activities and tourist products categories emerge as highly dominant in the text: average scores identify them as the most dominant across the sample, and in seven separate cases these are represented by more than 10% of references. Conversely, architecture and heritage only appears as one of the most prevalent categories in the cases of Istanbul and Rome. Corresponding to 19.69% of references, Rome's website shows the highest presence of architecture and heritage in the sample.

With less frequency, five other categories complete the list of core product-related associations. All of them have a presence above 3%, and only landscape and natural resources above 5%: specifically, it is represented by 7.21% of references, which is in line with average scores. In contrast, the presence of the food and drink category does not resemble the average tendency: it is less characteristic of Rome's projected image, only represented by 3.9% of content units. Its presence is only lower in Milan's case, where it does not appear as a core category.

Another interesting result to highlight is the presence of local culture and history. While it is less prevalent on the website, only four destinations in the sample present local culture and history as one of the pillars of their destination image. This result evinces the distinguishing character of this category for the destination. However, neither of these two categories is present on the homepage.

Regarding the homepage discourse, six different categories are represented, besides several generic content units. However, only four of the most prevalent categories represented in Figure 6.51 are present on this page: infrastructure and transportation; events, fairs, and festivals; tourist products and packages; and cultural attractions and activities. Furthermore, information about the local climate and service is also included.

It is also interesting to note that the wellness category is the only one not represented at all on the website. Similarly, the accommodation and shopping categories have a presence of less than 1%.

Finally, of all the content units on the website, 8.8% are linked to a tourist profile: specifically, 47 references are coded simultaneously to a product-related category and a target node. Among them, two categories show a greater number of references: cultural attractions and generic. Besides the number of references coded for each category, it is interesting to highlight their relation to different tourist profiles.

Figure 6.52. **Product-related categories and tourist profiles; the case of Rome**
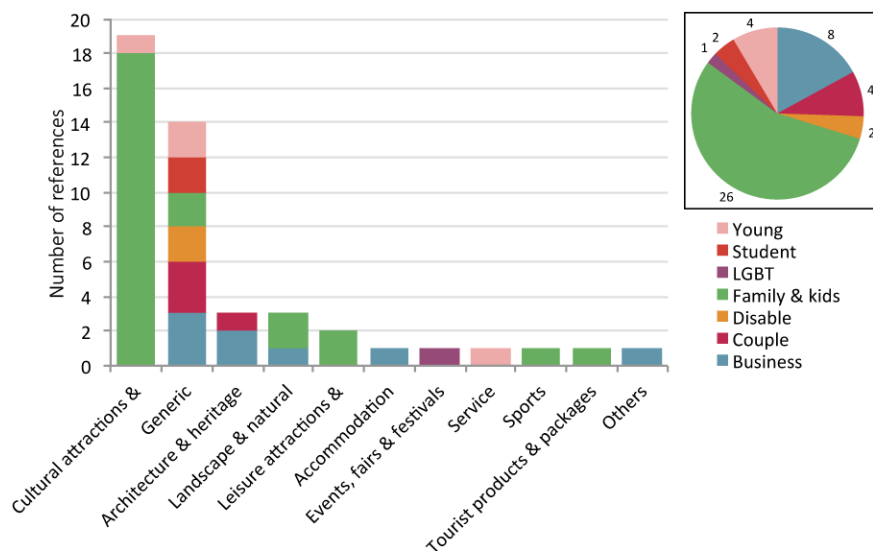
Source: Author

On the one side, many different tourist profiles are linked to generic information. Fourteen references present six different faces of Rome: business tourism, Rome for couples, for travelers with handicaps, families, students, and young tourists. Rome addresses generic content to almost all profiles considered on the website, with the only exception of LGBT tourists. The latter only emerge in a single reference connected to a special event. Moreover, while generic content is addressed to six different tourist profiles, it is interesting to point to

the lack of further product-related content linked to some of these profiles. Besides generic content, the author did not identify any content about the offer characteristics related to disabled or student tourists.

On the other hand, the cultural attractions category mainly focuses on family tourism. This profile appears to be highly interested in cultural matters, but also in other aspects of the offer, such as landscape and natural resources, and leisure attractions and activities. Further, considering the elevated number of references about family tourism in Rome, the greater importance of this profile for the destination can be inferred.

6.2.11.2. Personality traits of Rome projected on the website

After exploring the product-related attributes linked to Rome's functional image, the study investigated its symbolic dimension. Complementing the previous section, this phase identified different words related to personality traits within the text to infer from them the brand character or, more precisely, its personality. This process identified 232 synonyms of different personality traits. As Figure 6.53 shows, Rome's personality is highly dominated by excitement, followed by sincerity and sophistication, a composition aligned with the general trend. However, in this case, competence, and not ruggedness, is the less present dimension, in contrast to most destinations.

Figure 6.53. **Composition of Rome's projected personality**

Source: Author

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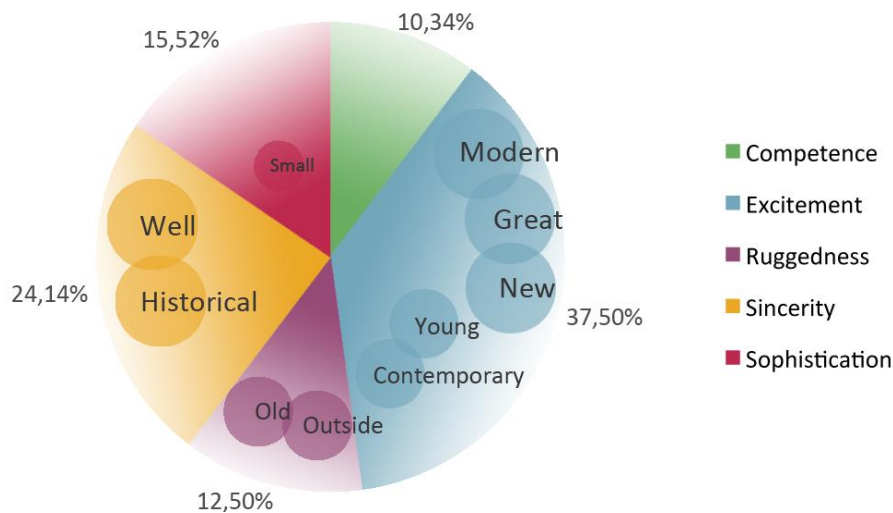
Furthermore, the analysis also identified several words that are frequently used in the text, and thus more relevant in this regard. For example, it is interesting to highlight that even though excitement represents 37.50% of words, more than 13% more than the second most dominant dimension, this corresponds to 24 different words, which is only one more than the sincerity dimension, represented by 23. Thus, the difference between these dimensions is explained by the repetition of several words related to excitement. As Figure 6.53 indicates, the most used terms to express the destination's character are *great*, *modern,* and *new*, representing more than 4% of words. Further, the terms *contemporary* and *young* also emerge as recurrent words, each being repeated in more than 3% of words. All of them are words seen in previous cases and thus not highly unique to this discourse, but they clearly strengthen the spirited and up-to-date facets of the destination's character.

As for the sincerity dimension, only two emerge from the 23 different terms as significantly descriptive of the destination's personality due to their recurrence in the text. Once more, *well* and *historical* are repeated in more than 4% personality-related words. In this case, however, each word points to a different facet of sincerity, being wholesome and honest.

A similar situation can be seen for competence and sophistication, represented by 19 and 20 different words, respectively. Competence's impact is lower since most of its related words are used only once or twice, while words referring to sophistication traits are more frequently used. However, in this latter dimension, only the word *small,* related to the trait *smooth*, is significantly repeated in more than 2% of the vocabulary .

Finally, the ruggedness dimension is represented by fewer different words and, again, two of them stand out due to their high repetition, representing more than 3% of the terms: *old* and *outside*, which point to the experienced, tough, and outdoorsy side of the destination.

6.2.12. The case of Vienna

Vienne's official tourism website completes the sample of European urban destinations. Judging by its results, as the common saying points, "it is the last but not the least": the overall WQI assessment yielded a score of 0.74 points, the highest achieved by any website. Upon closer inspection, its results per parameter are also above the average scores, with the exceptions of social web and homepage, which are slightly below.

Figure 6.54. **Overall assessment of Vienna's website**
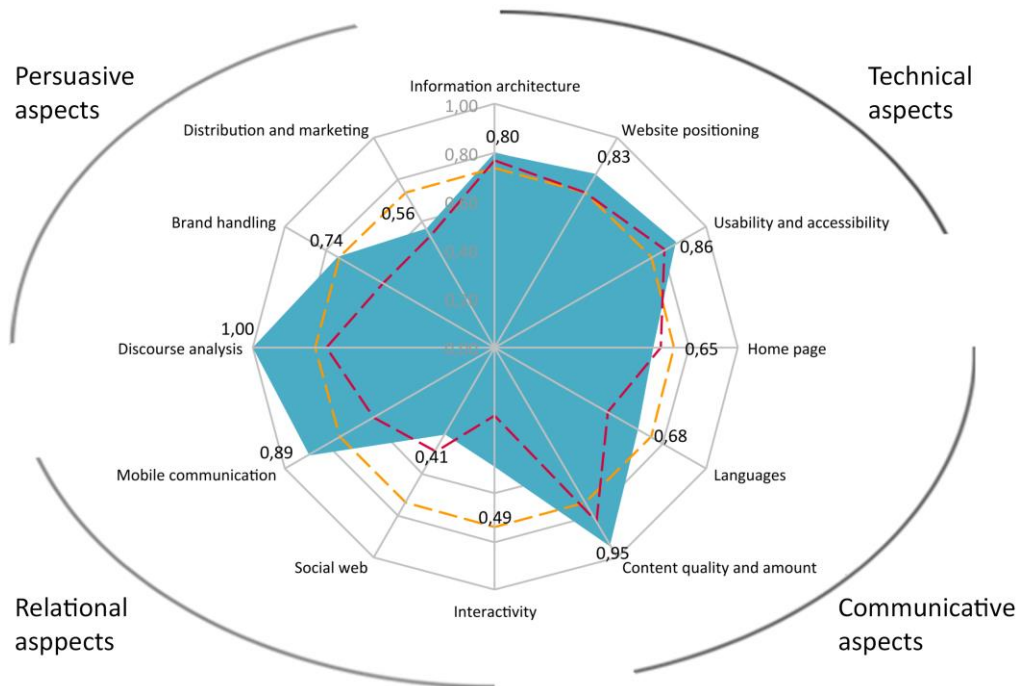
Starting with relational parameters, two results are worth emphasizing. Firstly, social web is the parameter for which Vienna's website achieves its lowest score: 0.41 points. In contrast, the website shows the highest score in the sample for interactivity. In the first case, the website performs well regarding the possibilities to let users share content on different platforms (i.K2), but it does not allow them to participate. Unlike the cases of Madrid and Rome, Vienna is only linked to some social networks through an icon redirecting users to those platforms (i.K6 & K7); hence, both discourses are separated: the one on the social web, and the one on the official website. A recommendation in this regard is to link the website to an external recommendation service, such as Trip Advisor, to improve reliability and users' experience (i.K8).

Regarding the interactivity parameter, Vienna's website scores only 0.49 point; while this result is below 0.5, it is still the highest score across all destinations. This is in line with previous work identifying Vienna as one of the most involving destination websites in Europe (de Rosa et al., 2017). For instance, it uses a static webcam that shows the city in real time (i.J1); it offers some tourist information that is free to download (i.J3); it provides a trip planner that allows users to build their own itinerary based on the website content (i.J6); and it also includes other tourists' stories and experiences, which enhances the tourist-to-tourist relationship (i.J8). However, what stands out the most is the possibility for user-content

interaction: Vienna's website allows users to vote on content (i.J9) and also to comment on it (i.J10), like Istanbul's website.

Concerning the communicative parameters, Vienna's website also obtains great results for content quality and amount, and languages. Together with Barcelona, it achieves the maximum score in the sample for content quality and amount: 0.95 points. The website includes all the expected information, it is available in several languages (i.G1), and all the content is correctly translated. However, the results for the homepage are slightly lower, with 0.75 points. One of the low-scoring indicators is the automatic detection of users' language based on their origin, or asking for their language preferences (i.A1 & G6). In addition, the homepage could be strengthened by including functional information, such as the logos of the organizations responsible for the website (i.A5), a site map (i.A12), or a contact section (i.A13).

Another parameter where Vienna obtains the highest score in the sample is usability and accessibility, together with Paris. With the maximum score for almost every indicator, Vienna achieves 0.86 points for this parameter. It stands out in matters such as contextual help for users on complex tasks on the website (i.D11), but it could still be improved by increasing accessibility so that all kinds of Internet users can have access (i.D18), and adding an accessibility section with information on this topic (i.D19).

Finally, the three persuasive parameters also score above average. Even though Vienna's website does not have a strong focus on commercialization, it integrates a meta-search engine to search for accommodation possibilities (i.F3), and includes several links to platforms where users can book tickets for events (i.F5) and flights (i.F7). Moreover, the website obtains great results for brand handling: 0.74 points. Vienna counts on a presentation slogan, "Vienna now or never", that accompanies the logo throughout the entire website (i.H1 H2). The website shows a consistent visual identity (i.H5) and, while there is no audiovisual material supporting the brand identity (i.H6 & H7), it is rich in pictures representing both the functional and the emotional sides of the brand (i.H8 & H9).

However, the most interesting result is the maximum possible score obtained for the discourse analysis. No other website in this sample or in previous research has achieved this score before. Vienna's website builds an overall possible world comprising different sub-worlds, all of them well structured and rich in arguments (I.I1 & I2).

Table 6.29. **Vienna's results for the h.10, i.3, i.4, and i.5 indicators**

h.10 At the homepage	**Are pictures (figures, pictures, videos…) distinctive of the territory?** Images can be unique for the brand or generic pictures that would suit different destinations.	Max. Score
i.3. Superficial level	**Is visual and verbal content using persuasive codes?** Existence of rhetorical figures	Max. Score
i.4. Embodiment	**Does the website combine different types of expressive resources?** It combines text, visual, and audiovisual in a balanced way or it opts for one of them exclusively?	Max. Score
i.5. Embodiment	**Are images well integrated and coherent with the text?** Are images aligned with the discourse conceptually, descriptively or in a complementary way?	Max. Score

Source: Author – WQI template (Annexes)

To summarize, at a discursive level, Vienna obtains the maximum score for all the indicators contemplated in the methodology, including the four main indicators shown in Table 6.29. Thus, the analysis results illustrate rich, persuasive, and coherent website content.

6.2.12.1. Product-related categories

After determining the overall quality of the website communication, the study further investigated the discourse to identify the most prevalent product-related associations. Since this is not a descriptive study of a single case but a comparative study of the European offer, the associations are linked to broader categories common to all destinations. In this specific case, the coding process identified 1,313 references within the 55 pages compounding Vienna's corpus of study, as seen in Table 6.30. To better understand the characteristics of these content units, the coders noted each reference's content type: navigational, informational, and transactional. The great majority, 94.3%, correspond to the first one, while only 5.4% are informational content units, which is the lowest score achieved by a destination in the sample. Moreover, only a low 0.3% of the content units are transactional.

Table 6.30. **Vienna analysis information**
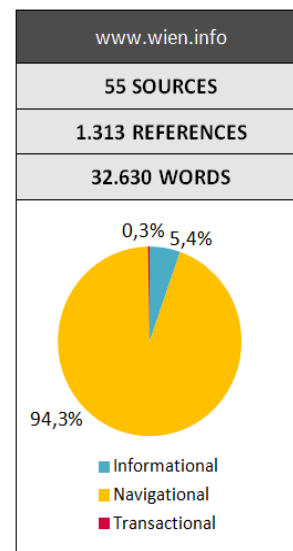
Source: Author

Besides identifiying the content type, the main interest of this phase of study was to explore the relationship between these references and the previously identified product-related categories. As Figure 6.55 illustrates, nine different categories emerged as more prevalent

throughout Vienna's website content. Of all 1,313 identified references, 83.10% are accounted for by these nine major topics.

Figure 6.55. **Vienna's most prevalent product-related categories**

Category	Percentage
Others	16,90%
Sports	3,24%
Events, fairs & festivals	4,50%
Infrastructure & transportation	5,45%
Architecture & heritage	5,92%
Landscape & natural resources	7,27%
Shopping	8,93%
Tourist products & packages	10,66%
Food & drink	17,14%
Cultural attractions & activities	19,98%
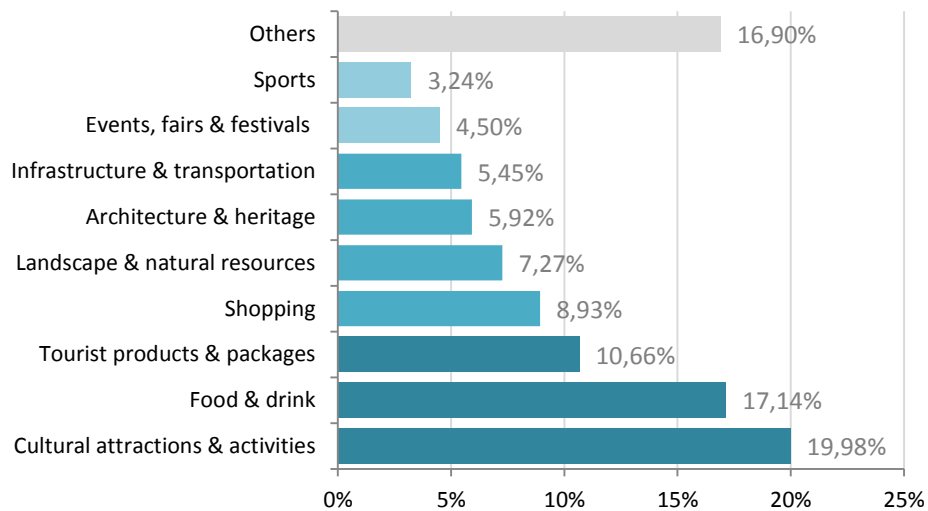
Source: Author

However, as seen in Figure 6.55, three categories are far more prevalent than the others, each represented by more than 10% of the references. This result is highly in line with average results regarding the most prevalent topics of European destinations' offer: tourist products and packages, food and drink, and cultural attractions and activities obtain the highest scores. Moreover, the presence of these three categories on the homepage supports their high relevance to Viena's image construction throughout the website discourse.

It is also interesting to highlight the elevated presence of shopping-related content. Linked to 8.93% of content units, this category has the second-highest score, following Munich's outstanding result. Further, shopping plus two additional categories complete the list of topics introduced on the destination's homepage. It is not surprising to identify content related to events, fairs, and festivals on the homepage as it is one of the most prevalent categories in the content. Conversely, it is surprising to find information regarding leisure attractions and activities on the front page, since it is only represented by 2.67% of the content units.

All of the remaining categories highlighted in Figure 6.55 are represented by more than 3% of the content units. Furthermore, four of them, including shopping, represent more than 5% of topics, meaning that they are significantly prevalent in the content. Among them, the sports category stands out. Even though it has the lowest score out of these categories, only 3.24%, it is only present on five websites, making it a distinguishing topic.

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In Vienna's case, only one category is not represented at all in the content: climate. Other categories that are not present in several of the other cases, such as wellness, service, safety, and political and economic factors, are represented here by less than 1% of the references.

Finally, the relationship between product-related categories and specific tourist profiles is more complex than in previous cases, as shown in Figure 6.56. A huge number of references are linked to many product-related categories and related to several different targets.

Figure 6.56. **Product-related categories and tourist profiles; the case of Vienna**
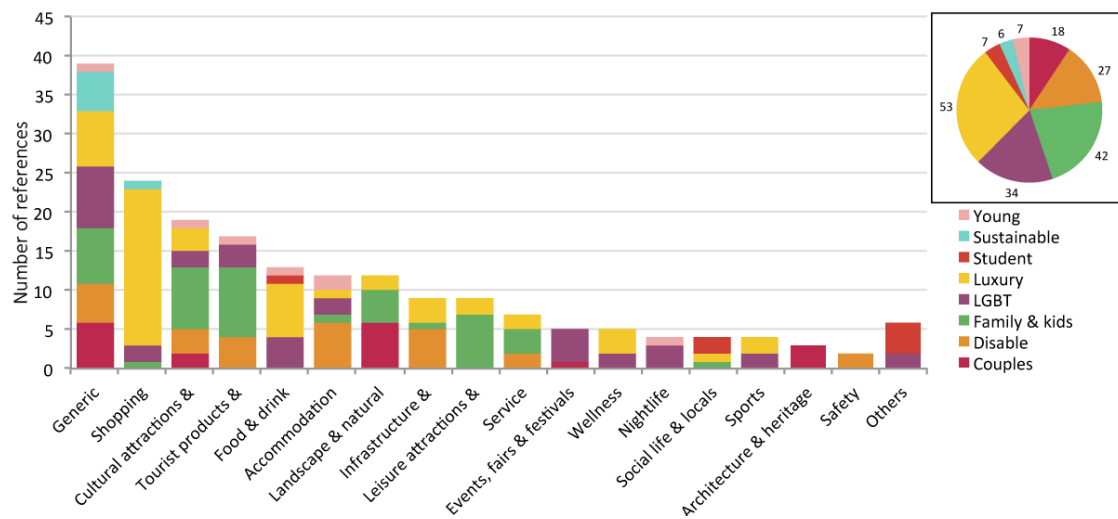
Source: Author

The author identified 194 references related to the target node, corresponding to 14.79% of the total content units. After Paris, this website pays the most attention to specific profiles. As seen in Figure 5.56, generic information is the first category related to different tourist types: 39 references present different faces of Vienna to attract various profiles. The website promotes that couples, tourists with disabilities, families, LGBT, luxury, sustainable, and young tourists can all find an experience in Vienna adjusted to their needs; only the student profile is not represented in this content. Again, this profile is mainly linked to information not matching any of the previously identified categories.

In second place, shopping is related to 24 references linked to specific targets. In this case, though, it is mainly related to tourists seeking a luxurious experience. In addition, cultural attractions, tourist products, food and drink, accommodation, and landscape are also some of the most repeated topics linked to specific tourist profiles.

However, interpreting the results in Figure 6.56 from the different profiles' perspective is more difficult. On the one hand, the data in Figure 6.56 can be used to infer the importance of certain profiles on the website: tourists seeking luxury experiences, families, LGBT tourists, and tourists with disabilities. However, a more detailed analysis of the main topics linked to these profiles is unclear. Each tourist group's references are spread across a great variety of product-related categories; there are very few cases where a specific profile is significantly related to a single content category. Only the relationships between luxury and shopping, students and others, and couples and landscape appear to be stronger, although the latter is less significant.

6.2.12.2. Personality traits of Vienna projected on the website

To complete the investigation of destinations' image projected on their websites, the final stage of the analysis focused on the symbolic dimension. The website discourse was explored by searching for synonyms of different personality traits. In Vienna's case, the analysis identified 858 such synonyms, summarized in Figure 6.57.

Figure 6.57. **Composition of Vienna's projected personality**
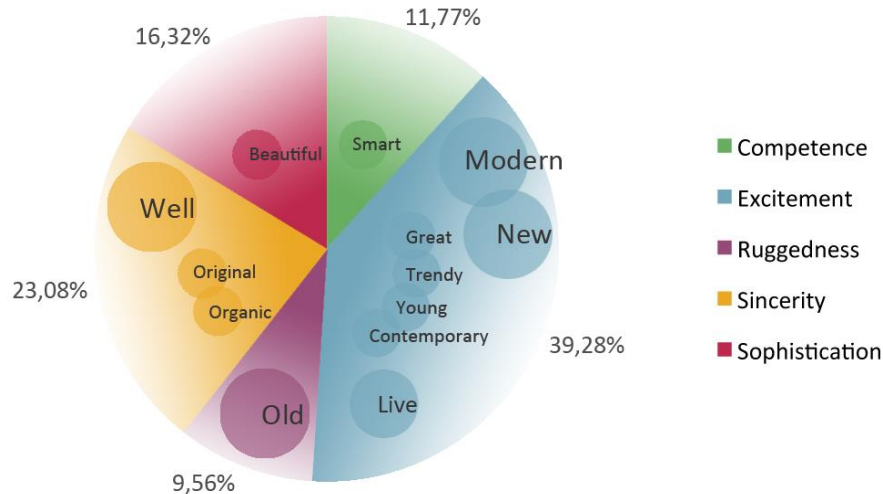
Source: Author

Similar to the Rome's case and some others, Vienna shows a personality composition that is clearly dominated by the excitement dimension. In second place, sincerity also has a significant presence, followed by sophistication, and finally competence and ruggedness, in that order. Once more, ruggedness emerges as the least important personality dimension of European urban destinations. In broad terms, these results coincide with the overall tendency of European destinations' personalities.

With regard to how official websites project destinations' personalities, the analysis also highlighted several words that are frequently used to express a characteristic of the destination, as seen in Figure 6.57. Regarding Vienna's case, the analysis identified 38 different words related to excitement traits, of which seven are repetitively used in the text. Similar to previous cases, the terms *new* and *modern* are highly repeated, representing more than 4% of the words, and *live* represents more than 3% of them. Further, four additional words also stand out for being significantly repeated, even though they only represent around 2% of the words: *great*, *trendy*, *contemporary,* and *young*. All in all, most of these words, *new, live, great,* and *young*, support the spirited facet of the destination, while *modern* and *contemporary* also reinforce the up-to-date facet. Interestingly, only the term *trendy* can be considered to be highly particular of Vienna's discourse, since it is not recurrently used by any other destination. It is also the only term pointing to the daring facet of excitement.

On the other hand, 23.08% of words in the discourse are related to sincerity traits. Specifically, 31 different words were identified, three of which are significantly repeated. Also highly present in previous cases, the term *well* emerges as frequently repeated within the text, representing more than 4% of words, but *organic* and *original* seem to have a significant presence in the content as well. Together, they all strengthen the wholesome side of the destination as a well-being brand.

Once more, competence is also represented by a long list of different terms, with the same number as sincerity: 31. In this case, however, only one term is significantly repeated: *smart*. The city of Vienna is constantly described as a "smart city". This is a concept that goes beyond a mere name plus adjective, but it still reinforces the brand's image as a more competent destination.

Regarding the remaining personality dimensions, both count on one significantly repeated adjective. On the one hand, from the 16.32% of words representing the third most dominant dimension, only the adjective *beautiful* stands out. This adjective is identified as a synonym of *good-looking* and is thus representative of the upper-class facet of sophistication. In this case, however, the list of synonyms is considerably diverse, showing a total of 23 different terms. On the other hand, ruggedness is the least present dimension; however, the term *old* again emerges as highly dominant within the content.

6.3. RELATIONAL RESULTS

To conclude the results chapter, this final section explores the relationships between the different cases and variables. As mentioned at the beginning of this thesis, this study not only aims to describe how different brands are represented on their websites, but also to identify common points and differences between European offers. With that purpose, the first following section uses destination personality to compare and map destinations in a competitive space. As previous investigations suggest, personality is a useful variable to compare destinations' positioning (De Moya & Jain, 2013; Pitt et al., 2007). The proximity between the most dominant destinations in Europe is assessed in terms of their communicated personality.

Furthermore, this project not only aims to compare cases, but also to assess the relationship between two constructs: brand image and personality. Based on the findings presented in the State of the Art chapter, one hypothesis points to possible relationships between these two constructs and not only a coexistence. Thus, the last part of this thesis explores two specific possible relations: expressiveness of product-related categories and dominant personality patterns within those categories.

6.3.1. Mapping European urban destinations' personalities

One of the main hypotheses of this research concerns the potential of brands' symbolic dimension, their personality, to differentiate destinations from their competitors. However, as mentioned in the overall results section, average scores are not enough to understand the different destinations' personalities in a competitive context. For this reason, the author found it interesting to further explore possible relationships between the different personality patterns based on additional statistical analysis.

Correspondence analysis is a multivariate statistical technique frequently used to explore relationships between different brands (Greenacre, 2007; Greenacre & Torres, 2002; Whitlark & Smith, 2001). Further, in many previous studies related to personality and image constructs, correspondence analysis has been found useful in interpreting results in a graphical

representation (Choi, Lehto, & Morrison, 2007; Költringer & Dickinger, 2015; Opoku, 2009; Pratt, 2013; Prayag, 2007; Tang, Choi, Morrison, & Lehto, 2009; Youn Kim & Yoon, 2013).

In short, the main contribution of this technique is the simplification of a multidimensional set of data into a plot with fewer dimensions, ideally two. It transforms correspondence tables into a graphic depiction showing the proximity between different items in this table (Bendixen, 1996; Greenacre, 2007; Whitlark & Smith, 2001). In other words, the correspondence analysis technique reduces the number of dimensions to represent data in an easy-to-interpret chart based on fewer axes. Since this thesis is not about statistics, but instead only uses this technique to interpret the results, the trigonometric basis of this procedure is not explained.[22]

In this case, the five dimensions of personality are reduced to two, creating a plane where destinations and personality dimensions are located based on their relative proximity to each dimension and to other destinations in the sample. This kind of technique allows for simplification, and thus offers an easier way to interpret a solution. However, this is done to the detriment of data exhaustiveness: in the simplification process, some information is lost. As Whitlark and Smith (2001, p.24) warn, "it is often difficult to accurately represent multidimensional data in two dimensions." For this reason, it is necessary to take into account that some information will be missed when interpreting these findings.

Thus, while some authors point to two dimensions as the ideal solution to reduce a data set, not all cases are equal (Greenacre, 2007; Whitlark & Smith, 2001). The author must ensure that simplifying data to two dimensions is still sufficiently significant and that there is minor loss of information (Whitlark & Smith, 2001). Table 6.31 reports the characteristics and quality of the correspondence analysis test conducted in this study.

Table 6.31. **Correspondence analysis technique summary**

Dimensión	Valor propio	Inercia	Chi-cuadrado	Sig.	Proporción de inercia		Confianza para el Valor propio	
					Explicada	Acumulada	Desviación típica	Correlación 2
1	,126	,016			,541	,541	,011	,025
2	,079	,006			,210	,751	,013	
3	,068	,005			,158	,909		
4	,052	,003			,091	1,000		
Total		,029	187,726	,000[a]	1,000	1,000		

a. 44 grados de libertad

Source: Author

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[22] To learn more about correspondence analysis, see Greenacre (2007).

As can be seen in the table, a two-dimensional figure is a good alternative for this study. The accumulated inertia indicates that a two-dimensional solution explains 75.1% of the information gathered in the content analysis. Dimension 1 explains 54.1% of the data inertia, and dimension 2 another 21%. By adding a third dimension to the plot, only an additional 15.8% of information would be explained, and the complexity of the plot would increase considerably. Therefore, as argued by Bendixen (1996), the two-dimensional scenario presented here is a good solution for final retention.

In addition, three other results in Table 6.31 support the validity of this approach: chi-square, significance, and degrees of freedom. The correspondence analysis map yielded a chi-square of 187.726, based on 44 degrees of freedom, and a high significance, $p < 0.001$. This data also supports the suitability of a two-axes map to explore the relationships between European urban destinations' personalities.

Figure 6.58 presents the resulting two-dimensional plot obtained from the data. According to Bendixen (1996), the first step to explain the results is to determine whether the data will be interpreted in terms of rows or columns. Given the aims of this study, the figure will be interpreted as destinations positioned in a personality space.

The first interesting finding to highlight is the delimitation of the personality space. Focusing only on the position of the personality points, one can notice that dimension 1, the horizontal axis, is delimited by ruggedness on one side and sophistication at the opposite pole, both of which are located far from the centroid. Regarding dimension 2, the vertical axis, competence and sincerity behave similarly.

Surprisingly, excitement is the dimension closest to the centroid, meaning that it contributes less to explaining similarities or differences between destinations. In other words, it is the most dominant dimension in most of the sample but is less meaningful to explain differences and similarities between brands. Applying the same reasoning to rows, the destinations, Vienna is highlighted as the closest destination to the centroid, and its personality pattern is the most similar to average scores. This interpretation is coherent with the overall results as well as Vienna's descriptive results.

Figure 6.58. **Correspondence analysis symmetric plot**
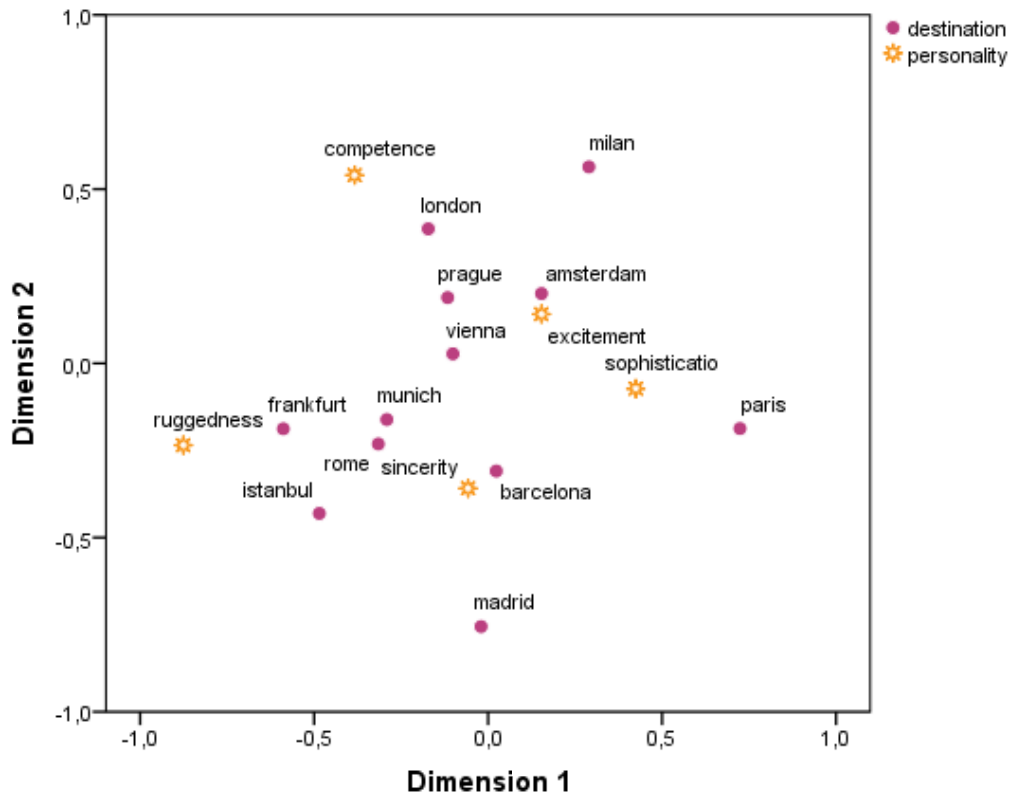
Source: Author

As mentioned earlier, the interpretation of this figure is based on the distance between brands: the closer they are, the higher similarity (Whitlark & Smith, 2001). However, several considerations must be noted when interpreting the plot. In the first instance, the distance interpretation can only be applied between different items in rows and different items in columns, and not between rows and columns (Bendixen, 1996; Greenacre, 2007). The proximity of a row point to a column point indicates a tendency of this specific point that is different from the average pattern. Put differently, the plot summarizes the distance between column items and the distance between row items, and it positions both of them in the same space, presenting the best two-dimensional solution to represent the association between rows and columns.

Regarding the case at hand, the distance between the brands is an indicator of their similarity or differences. In contrast, the distance between a brand and a personality dimension cannot be interpreted in the same way. For example, Frankfurt's brand is more similar to Istanbul than to Paris, but its proximity to the ruggedness node does not imply a brand personality dominated by this dimension, only a stronger result than the average tendency in this regard.

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On this basis, several relationships were identified between the projected personalities of the sample brands. First, two different groups were identified as having more similar personalities: one located on the bottom left side of the figure, and the other on the top left.

Group 1

On the one hand, a closer proximity can be seen between Istanbul, Frankfurt, Munich, and Rome on the bottom left side of Figure 6.59. These four destinations show a greater balance between dimensions: no dimension represents less than 10% of the overall personality. In this scenario, the high score obtained by ruggedness is the most differentiating trait common to all destinations in the group. Figure 6.59 clearly shows the proximity between their personality patterns. Within this group, one can also see that Frankfurt is the farthest to sophistication, while Munich shows the best performance in this regard. Furthermore, Istanbul is slightly separated from the rest due to its strength in the sincerity dimension.

On the group's periphery, Madrid is located in the bottom left quadrant, closer to Istanbul. However, it appears to project a more differentiated personality in terms of the sincerity dimension. In addition, its low strength in ruggedness and competence positions it at a greater distance from destinations in group 1.

Figure 6.59. **Correspondence analysis; proximity between destinations**
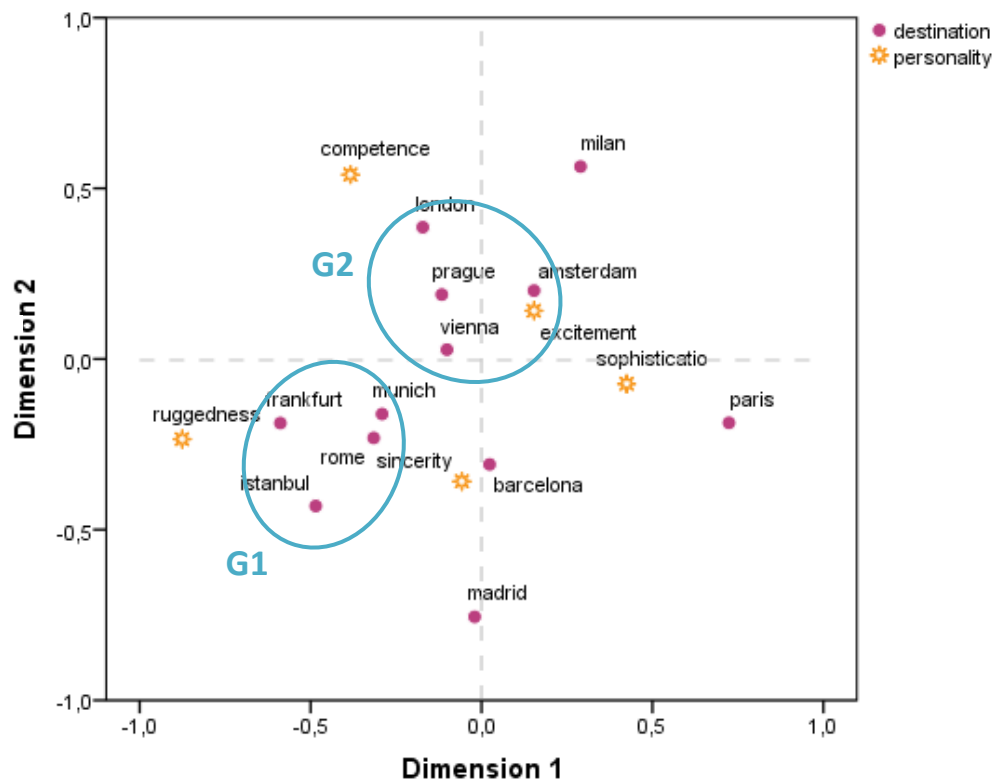
Source: Author

Group 2

The second group, located in the top area, is characterized by the destinations' similar balance between competence, sophistication, and sincerity. This group's main difference compared to the previous one is its lower presence of ruggedness traits, and also its slightly lower scores for sincerity. Within this group, Vienna and Prague have personality patterns that are close to the average. Conversely, Amsterdam projects more sophistication traits than the other destinations in the group, while London is stronger in competence.

At a greater distance to group 2, Milan is also located in the top area of the figure. Projecting one of the most differentiated personality patterns, it stands out for its low score in the sincerity dimension compared to the other destinations. Correspondingly, in Figure 6.59, the destination is located at the opposite pole from sincerity. Interestingly, even though the descriptive results show a high presence of excitement in Milan's case, the differentiating role of this dimension is low, as mentioned before.

A different tendency is shown by Barcelona's personality, even though it is located between the two identified groups. On the one hand, its lower presence of the ruggedness trait separates this destination from group 1; in Figure 6.59, Barcelona is positioned on the horizontal axis farther away from the ruggedness point. On the other hand, its personality shows more strength on the sincerity dimension than destinations in group 2. At the same time, its score on the competence dimension is also lower than those of group 2. For these reasons, Barcelona is located below the second group in the vertical axis, closer to sincerity and farther away from competence than the average tendency.

Finally, Paris also projects one of the most differentiated personalities. Located at the right extreme of the horizontal axis, its personality is much richer in sophistication traits than the average. The descriptive results show that it is the only destination with more than 20% of personality trait synonyms related to this dimension.

6.3.2. Relationships between brand image and brand personality

As mentioned at the beginning of the chapter, the final stage of this thesis focuses on the relationship between the two main constructs of study. Following the descriptive analysis, this section explores the relationships between personality and brand associations based on the

collected data. On the one hand, one of the hypotheses points to some of the categories' content being richer in personality-related vocabulary than others. Therefore, the expressiveness of content related to different categories is explored.

On the other hand, the main functional categories are further analyzed to identify their associated personality patterns. Another hypothesis of this research points to the existence of functional categories closely related to specific personality dimensions. Therefore, this section further examines the main product-related categories' content.

6.3.2.1. Product-related categories' expressiveness

In the first instance, all the content related to each product-related category was analyzed to determine the latter's expressiveness. Expressiveness here is understood as the ability of the website communication to transmit personality traits. The overall results section presented the total amount of vocabulary related to personality traits for each website. However, the present section identifies the proportion of personality-related vocabulary within each category's content: put differently, the percentage of words related to personality traits within each category. Finally, the average score of the results is given for each case.

Table 6.32 presents the average scores achieved for each category, plus two other values: standard deviation and sample size. The sample column indicates the final corpus used to calculate average scores. Some average scores are based on smaller samples, since not all destinations consider all categories; for example, the wellness category is only considered on six websites. Furthermore, the standard deviation of the average scores is also included to provide a more accurate description of average scores.

In this regard, some categories show a greater disparity of results, as indicated by the standard deviation. Thus, those average scores summarizing more disperse results must be more carefully interpreted. To this end, all results showing standard deviations greater than the same average score are indicated in Table 6.32 with an asterisk.

Table 6.32. **Percentage of content related to personality traits**

CATEGORY	EXPRESSIVENESS			CATEGORY	EXPRESSIVENESS		
	Sample	**Mean**	S. Deviation		Sample	**Mean**	S. Deviation
Wellness	6**	**0,036**	0,027	Leisure attractions & activities	11	**0,025**	0,016
Tourist products & packages	12	**0,016**	0,005	Landscape & natural resources	12	**0,022**	0,007
Sports	12	**0,015**	0,009	Infrastructure & transportation	12	**0,015**	0,006
Social life & locals	11	**0,031**	0,014	Generic	12	**0,024**	0,015
Shopping	12	**0,026**	0,009	Food & drink	12	**0,030**	0,009
Service	10	**0,014**	0,019*	Events, fairs & festivals	12	**0,016**	0,008
Safety	10	**0,020**	0,025*	Cultural attractions & activities	12	**0,020**	0,009
Political & economic factors	9	**0,013**	0,014*	Climate	10	**0,009**	0,016*
Nightlife	11	**0,025**	0,016	Architecture & heritage	12	**0,024**	0,011
Local culture & history	12	**0,020**	0,013	Accommodation	12	**0,025**	0,014

High standard deviation *
Only 6 destinations consider wellness **

Source: Author

As seen in Table 6.32, most of the results show low standard deviations. This supports the validity of average scores in representing the personality expressiveness of the different categories. However, four categories do have standard deviations that are higher than the average score. Not surprisingly, these correspond to the least relevant categories (see overall results): climate, political and economic factors, service, and safety show more disperse results across destinations, as well as a lower percentage of personality-related vocabulary.

A closer examination of these specific categories reveals a higher number of cases where very little content is associated and no personality terms are present, meaning a percentage of 0. These cases contrast with the significant scores obtained in only a few instances, increasing the dispersion of the results. Considering this fact, these categories are indicated in a lighter color in Figure 6.60, since these average scores do not represent the data as well as they do for other categories.

As can be seen in Figure 6.60, not all categories perform equally when it comes to personality projection. One can immediately notice that personality traits are not spread out homogeneously across the different categories: some are richer in personality vocabulary than others. Thus, the results support the hypothesis that some product-related categories are more expressive than others when projecting the destination's personality. Further, some categories are much more expressive than others: there is more than a 2% difference between the top score and the lowest one.

Figure 6.60. **Expressiveness of product-related categories**
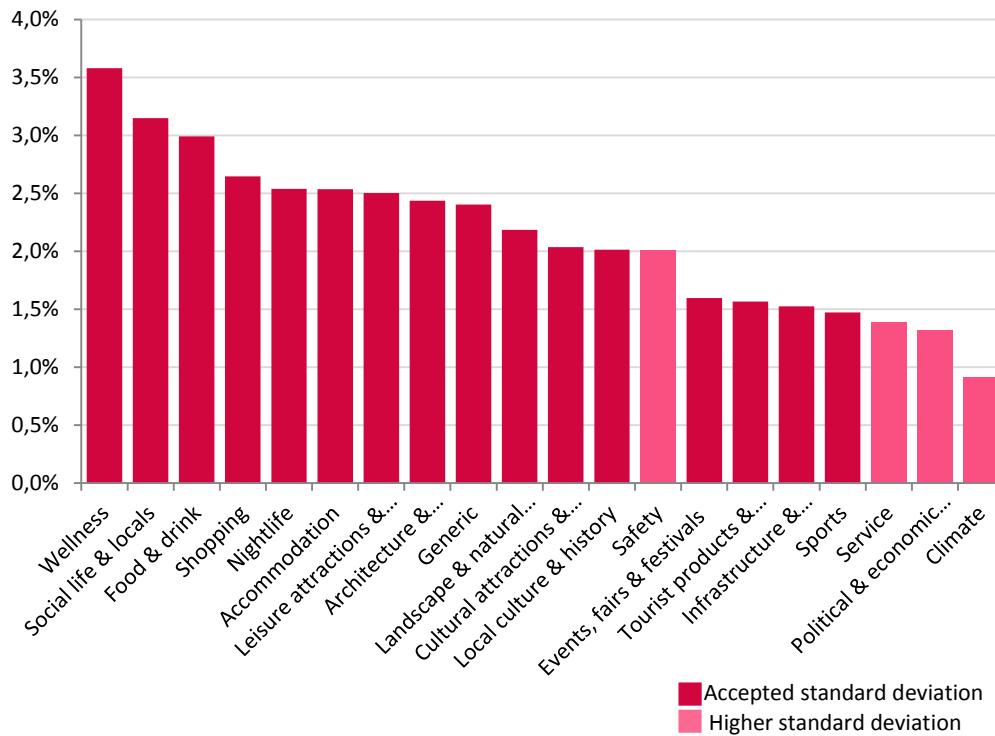
Source: Author
Database: Table 6.32

Taking as a reference point the average percentage of personality-related words within the website's content, 2.1%, the first thing to highlight is the presence of half of the categories scoring above and below average. Even more interesting is that there is no relationship between categories' prevalence and their personality expressiveness. For example, tourist products and packages, the most prevalent category in overall scores, contains only 1.57% of terms related to personality. Conversely, wellness is the least prevalent category and many destinations do not consider it at all, yet those references dedicated to it show a greater proportion of synonyms than the rest. At this point, however, it is important to note that only information from six different websites could be used to calculate wellness's average score, so this result is based on less evidence.

Besides the previous examples, three additional categories stand out regarding expressiveness. After wellness, social life and locals contain the highest proportion of personality-related terms, with 3.15%. Again, this result contrasts these categories' low results in terms of prevalence on websites. Furthermore, food and drink, and shopping also appear to be highly expressive topics with 2.99% and 2.65% of personality terms, respectively, which is significantly above average. In contrast, the climate, political factors, and service categories

appear to be less expressive. In this case, though, these less expressive categories do correspond to those that are less prevalent. However, given the wide disparity of results, they cannot strongly be confirmed.

Interesting to highlight is the low potential of some core categories to express symbolic associations related to destinations' personality. As mentioned, tourist products emerge as one of the least expressive categories, together with events, fairs, and festivals. Both account for around 1.6% of the vocabulary related to personality, which is 0.5 points below average. Furthermore, infrastructure and transportation, the fourth most prevalent category, represents only 1.52% of words, and sports 1.47%.

Finally, the results regarding generic content are also interesting to discuss. Even though generic content is more expressive than the average, is not as rich as was initially expected. As the overall results section explained, the generic category was created to include all those content units that do not refer to a specific offer feature but to a broader conception of the destination. In general, this category includes content summarizing the most characteristic attributes of the brand or content presenting different faces of the destination. Thus, given the broader scope of this content, at a brand level, the author expected more symbolic expressiveness from this category than content referring to specific offer elements.

6.3.2.2. Product-related categories and personality patterns

To conclude the results chapter, this last section further investigates the relationship between personality dimensions and product-related categories. Similar to the previous section, this one focuses on variables and not cases, as the latter are not relevant here. Instead, all the data collected in the different cases is combined to assess the relationship between the variables, taking product-related categories as the independent variables and personality as the dependent one. More specifically, the section aims to determine whether or not some product-related categories are more closely related to certain personality dimensions than others.

To this end, the most prevalent product-related categories' vocabulary is explored. The author identified words related to personality within each category's content. However, since the corpus of study was selected and downloaded based on case-representativeness criteria, some measures had to be taken to ensure the representativeness of this data for product-related

categories as well (Ritchey, 2008). As King, Keohane, and Verba (2000, p.39) note, "we must ensure the observations are relevant to infer consequences in the theory."

Regarding this specific study, the descriptive results section points to the importance of identifying enough synonyms to infer a destination's personality: a minimum of personality-related terms. Inferring a brand's personality based only on two or three words would certainly yield misleading results, since the author could not ensure the presence of these terms by chance. As seen earlier, all websites show a broad range of words related to personality, from 99 to 964 words, ensuring that there is enough data to infer destinations' personalities. To identify the different categories' personality pattern, a minimum number of words is also needed.

As a measure to ensure the quality of the data in this analysis, only those categories containing more than 25 synonyms related to personality traits were used. Setting the limit to 25 words was an arbitrary decision made by the author considering the overall characteristics of the data. It is a neutral criterion that does not affect personality pattern results but does ensures a minimum amount of data to analyze. Like in the overall personality assessment, basing the categories' personalities on too few synonyms could bias the results.

Therefore, to proceed with the analysis, the search for personality traits within the content was repeated. In this occasion, however, this was based on each destination's product-related categories. Put differently, the total number of personality-related words identified within a single website were assigned to the corresponding product-related category. Thus, the sum of all categories' results is the same as the total number of terms indicated in the previous section.

Once the personality synonyms in each category were identified, those categories related to more than 25 different terms were considered to contain a significant amount of data, and their personality patterns were therefore calculated in percentages. The analysis identified which of these words belong to each dimension of personality. Finally, the results of the same category in the different cases were grouped and the average scores calculated, as summarized in Table 6.33. Again, it is crucial to consider the standard deviation measure to ensure the representation of the group's results in the average score.

Table 6.33. **Product-related categories' personality results**

		AVERAGE SCORES					Total words personality	N. cases
		Competence	Excitement	Ruggedness	Sincerity	Sophistication		
Tourist products & packages	AVERAGE	0,0915	0,3631	0,0606	0,2966	0,1881	483	9
	S.DEVIATION	0,0612	0,1889	0,0685*	0,2228	0,0830		
Cultural attractions & activities	AVERAGE	0,1114	0,5172	0,0561	0,1835	0,1318	850	9
	S.DEVIATION	0,0579	0,1088	0,0309	0,0650	0,0762		
Food & drink	AVERAGE	0,0991	0,2866	0,0715	0,2710	0,2718	973	9
	S.DEVIATION	0,0376	0,0733	0,0399	0,0411	0,0453		
Infrastructure & transportation	AVERAGE	0,2308	0,2392	0,1119	0,2027	0,2154	224	5
	S.DEVIATION	0,1377	0,0985	0,0753	0,0299	0,1935		
Architecture & heritage	AVERAGE	0,1034	0,3477	0,1854	0,2123	0,1512	381	8
	S.DEVIATION	0,0758	0,1021	0,1352	0,1007	0,0925		
Landscape & natural resources	AVERAGE	0,1406	0,3073	0,1651	0,1965	0,1905	287	7
	S.DEVIATION	0,1056	0,1027	0,1459	0,0585	0,0661		
Accommodation	AVERAGE	0,1044	0,3962	0,0728	0,2444	0,1822	491	5
	S.DEVIATION	0,0924	0,1196	0,0383	0,0830	0,0722		
Shopping	AVERAGE	0,0941	0,4221	0,0419	0,2409	0,2010	399	6
	S.DEVIATION	0,0592	0,0603	0,0336	0,0739	0,0590		

High standard deviation *

Source: Author

As shown in Table 6.33, the eight most prevalent categories' personality patterns were analyzed based on more than 200 synonyms of personality traits, specifically between 224 and 973 words. Furthermore, based on the standard deviations, all average scores appear to represent the summarized data well. This value only exceeds the average score in one case: the ruggedness dimension of the tourist products and packages category. In this case, the separate results of the different cases in the average scores are more diverse. Thus, this specific value must be interpreted with more caution since the average score is not that accurate.

All in all, Figure 6.61 represents the personality pattern of the analyzed product-related categories. In general terms, all categories appear to be stronger in excitement, followed by sincerity and sophistication and, at the other end, competence and ruggedness. This pattern is coherent with the average personality pattern described in the overall results. A perfect match between the average proportion of personality dimensions and the proportion achieved by each category separately would clearly refute hypothesis H10 presented in Chapter 1. However, Figure 6.61 outlines some significant differences between certain categories: some display more differentiated personality profiles than others. Specifically, five categories are more strongly related to four different personality dimensions.

Figure 6.61. **Product-related categories' personality patterns**
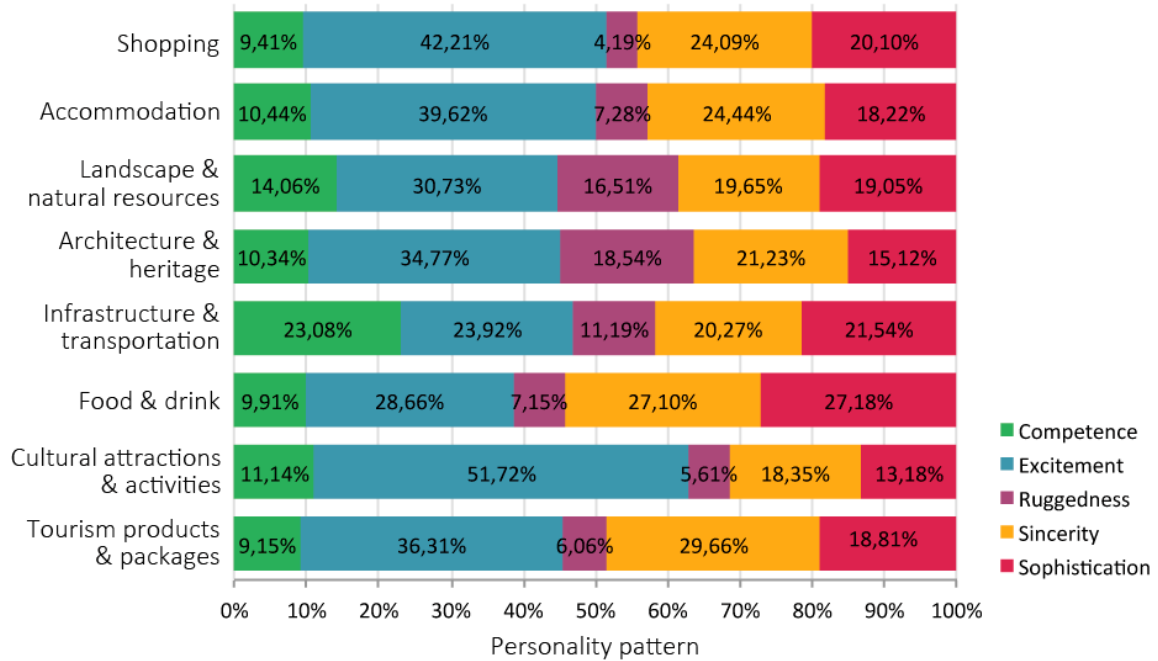
Firstly, the personality projected by cultural attractions and activities content is more closely related to the excitement dimension in a greater proportion than the remaining categories. From the personality synonyms identified within this category's content, 51% are related to excitement traits, which is almost 10% more than in the second most exciting category. Consequently, this category is responsible for a lower score of the remaining dimensions, except in the case of competence, which achieves results close to the average.

Secondly, one category appears to project a personality that is significantly higher in competence: infrastructure and transportation. Once more, it is almost 10% higher in this trait than the second most competent category. Infrastructure and transportation content transmits 23.08% of the personality vocabulary related to the competence dimension. Similar to the previous case, the tendency of this category to use vocabulary related to competent personalities is a detriment to the transmission of the excitement dimension, which scores significantly lower than average.

The third finding worth highlighting is the strength of the ruggedness dimension in two different categories: landscape and natural resources, and architecture and heritage. Both transmit more words related to ruggedness than the remaining categories or the average

score: 16.51% and 18.54%, respectively. Finally, there is also one category that projects a personality pattern significantly stronger in sophistication than the rest. With 27.14% of personality-related terms linked to this dimension, the food and drink category projects a personality pattern that is 10% higher in sophistication than the average.

From a conceptual point of view, these results also make sense. Infrastructure and transportations usually offers more practical information about how to travel through a city. In general, tourists do not aim to experience transportation or infrastructure; instead, these are characteristics that allow them to satisfy their interests, for instance by bringing them from one place to another. Thus, it is reasonable to project more competence than usual when communicating infrastructure and transportation matters.

Similarly, it is reasonable for landscape and heritage content to be more closely related to ruggedness, and for it to be linked to the two different facets of this dimension. Conceptually, heritage has to do with the legacy, with the experience of the city through all those monuments and buildings that might have witnessed significant episodes of the city's history – hence, the tough facet of the destination. On the other hand, content related to landscape and natural resources is intimately linked to outdoor attractions and activities exposed to outside conditions; this is aligned with another facet of ruggedness: the outdoors. In addition, besides being exciting, activities related to eating out, restaurants, discovering the local gastronomy, etc., are more sophisticated alternatives of the destination offer.

In addition, the descriptive and overall results appear to be coherent with the findings presented in this section. For example, cultural attractions and activities is one of the most prevalent content types across the websites, and the average personality scores point to excitement as the most dominant personality dimension; thus, findings pointing to a predominance of excitement within the cultural attractions category are coherent. Furthermore, destinations projecting a high volume of content related to the food and drink category, for example, also show a highly sophisticated personality, such as in Paris's case. Istanbul's and Rome's results are also coherent with these findings: they offer an elevated volume of architecture and heritage content and project some of the most rugged personalities in the sample.

Certainly, the author cannot confirm a direct relationship between certain categories' prevalence and the personality patterns of a destination: many categories contribute to the

overall image construction, each of them associated with specific personality patterns. Thus, more data is required to complete the personality profiles of all the categories, and a further analysis of cases would be needed. However, the comparisons between descriptive and relational results presented earlier evince the coherence of the findings of this study. The results for the three levels (overall, descriptive, and relational) are coherent and point to the existence of a relationship beyond mere coexistence between these two variables.

To conclude, abstracting the results obtained from particular cases to a more general model points towards a relationship between the functional and symbolic dimensions. Although exploratory, the findings confirm the hypothesis proposed in Chapter 1 that some product-related categories are more expressive in certain personality dimensions than others. In addition, some of the product-related associations are more prone than others to projecting certain personality dimensions.

CHAPTER 7: DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

7. DISCUSION AND CONCLUSIONS

The final chapter of this thesis summarizes its main contributions. The critical analysis of the main European urban destinations' official communication has provided several insights into website communication characteristics and brand image composition. Some of these findings follow the academic debate surrounding the destination image formation and other fundamental matters in the field. For this reason, the following sections highlight the key contributions of this research.

In the first instance, the discussion section summarizes the main points emphasized in this study that are in line with previous work in the field. The section contains points in common, contradictions, and new implications with regard to previous research and the findings of this doctoral thesis. Next, the conclusions section reviews the main outcome of this study and its goals, and validates or rejects the hypotheses presented at the beginning of the dissertation. Finally, some lines of future research are delineated.

7.1. DISCUSSION

The research contained in this dissertation contributes to the destination branding field in various ways. Firstly, the new outcomes regarding the official website communication practices and the findings related to content personalization contribute to understanding DMOs' online communication practices and strategy. Secondly, the results add to the knowledge about projected destination image assessment. Specifically, the methodological triangulation proposed in this thesis presents a new approach that enables both symbolic and functional dimensions to be assessed simultaneously. Thirdly, the study adds to the ongoing discussion about the composition of destination image.

In the first instance, the research contributes to the understanding and orientation of official destination website communication. Besides being necessary to understand the overall communicative activity (Ip et al., 2010), the study of website communication from a multidisciplinary perspective has yielded many insights into the website strategy of European destinations. The findings of this research are in line with those of previous studies pointing to the supremacy of technical efforts over other crucial features of websites, such as content or

persuasive-related efforts (Fernández-Cavia et al., 2013; Inversini et al., 2014). All the destinations in this study score higher for the technical parameters that they do for others.

However, compared to previous studies, the communicative and persuasive dimensions also achieve good results in this study. This indicates that DMOs invest significant effort into enhancing their official websites' content and appeal. In this regard, some of the critical points of improvement highlighted in Miller's (2005) study appear to have been addressed and resolved by the destinations in the sample. The most popular European urban destinations' websites achieve high scores for all technical parameters, especially in terms of usability, and are found out to be rich in quality content, the latter achieving the highest average score. Finally, the homepages of almost every website also score high. Considering the importance of first impressions, as noted by Kim and Fesenmaier (2008), all cases not only present most of the essential information, but also their layouts are well designed and inviting. Munich's homepage is the only exception achieving a low score in this regard.

Reconsidering the classification proposed by Morrison (2013), shown in Figure 2.6, and the evidence presented in Chapter 6, it can be stated that the official websites analyzed in this study serve different critical roles of the online communication strategy. It can be asserted that these websites fulfill all roles of destination sites as brand portrayals. Results on the content level are high, and the scores achieved with regard to discourse, the homepage, and brand handling indicate an effort that goes beyond mere information: the destinations in the sample treat official website content as a promotional and branding tool. Furthermore, in some cases, these websites also contribute to the overall strategy by calling to action potential tourists – in other words, acting as an e-commerce channel for the tourist products and packages.

Conversely, destinations are investing an insufficient amount of effort into turning their official websites into spaces to interact with potential tourists. It is true that some websites include interactive features, such as gaming, virtual tours, or downloading options, as Dou and Krishnamurthy (2007) suggest; however, they still lack many other features to enable user interaction. Establishing relationships with users through the website (Li & Wang, 2010), allowing them to co-create the content (Therkelsen, 2015), and conceiving of the website as a database generator and research source (Morrison, 2013) are still unresolved matters.

Another contribution related to the understanding of European urban destinations' website strategy is linked to the importance of personalizing content. As Park and Gretzel (2007)

propose, customizing website content to different target groups is a key to official websites' success. Besides being a characteristic of the destination image, the analysis of the user imagery attributes, or in this case tourist profiles, can also be read as an indicator of DMOs' efforts to personalize content. The results of the present study show that DMOs are indeed making efforts in this regard, albeit to different extents. All the destinations in the sample offer personalized content to at least three different tourist profiles at some point on their websites. Furthermore, some destinations allow users to build their own travel experience by assembling different pieces of content from the site in a single personalized itinerary: Vienna, Milan, and Madrid present interesting solutions in this regard.

As a second contribution, the proposed methodological approach adds precision to methods used so far in the study of destinations' projected image by combining the analysis of image's functional and symbolic dimensions into one. Based on the approach designed by Pitt et al. (2007) for the analysis of projected personality and the work of (Choi, Lehto, & Morrison, 2007) on product-related associations in website content, this investigation integrated the study of both constructs in a single project using the software of analysis NVivo. In particular, this research contributes methodologically regarding three points.

First, NVivo features made it possible to design a useful methodology for exploring the interaction between brand image and brand personality. Further, as shown section 6.3, this allowed to confirm a closer relationship between personality and image projected in the destinations' discourse. The repeated co-occurrence of certain personality traits and particular product-related associations led to one of the main findings of this study: some product-related attributes are more likely to transmit certain personality traits than others. In light of this finding, researchers must carefully design and strategically select the corpus of study to represent the overall destination message and not only refer to some services or elements of the offer, since this could bias the results. This study has proven that the separate parts are not the same of the overall brand. For example, Dickinger and Lalicic's (2016) research on hotels, restaurants, and sight reviews on Trip Advisor must be understood within the context of the present study. Specifically, the identified personality traits represent the three specific services offered by the destination on Trip Advisor, but they cannot be read as an accurate reflection of the overall brand personality.

In this regard, another contribution of the proposed methodological approach is the process of coding content units and the use of a posterior frequency count instead of overall word

frequency. Considering that a website's act of communication is not limited to a single page's content, but is instead a result of the navigation across different pages (Miller & Remington, 2004), the coding system in this study allowed the author to assess users' exposure to the different topics and avoid the possible bias that a single page, crowded with content, could cause. The proposed system is a more accurate way of testing a website's capacity to expose users to "what the destination is" and guide them through all the attractions that better characterize the city. Furthermore, this contribution is not only relevant on an academic level: it can also be a highly useful tool for practitioners to assess their communication activity, since it provides more detailed information about how they project their desired image.

Finally, another advance related to the methodological approach concerns the creation of the personality trait thesaurus. In particular, this study addressed the problem of polysemy for the first time. This issue was not dealt with in Pitt et al.'s (2007) original work, nor in later research following the same methodological technique (De Moya & Jain, 2013; Kim & Lehto, 2012). The solution presented in this study minimizes the effect of the polysemy limitation by identifying the similarity between the words in conflict and the two related original personality traits (see Chapter 5). In particular, the word embedding technique allowed the author to assess the contextual similarity between the terms and choose the most common acceptation of the word in that context (Mikolov et al., 2013). While this is not considered to be a definitive solution, it opens new possibilities for the study of specific vocabulary that has similar limitations.

Thirdly, the relational results presented in section 6.3 contribute to the ongoing discussion about the composition of destination image. The double understanding of brand image as a wider concept and as a more concrete construct makes its study more complicated (Alonso, 1993). While it is widely accepted that a broad understanding of the brand image construct includes any node of information that is linked to the brand in consumers' mind (Kapferer, 2012), research focusing on this construct requires more concrete knowledge about its composition and the nature of the associations. In this regard, several attempts have been made to describe a typology of associations (Cho & Fiore, 2015; Keller, 1993). However, less attention has been given to how symbolic and functional associations may coexist and interact as part of the overall image.

In particular, the state of the art chapter demonstrated that no recent research has combined the study of two crucial constructs, the functional image (examined here through product-

related associations) and the personality, as interrelated variables in the overall brand image formation. While earlier work has pointed to the possible relationship between some functional associations related to user imagery and the emergence of personality-related associations (Aaker, 1997; Keller, 1993), it is only recently that Souiden et al. (2017) propose how brand image construct acts as an antecedent of brand personality psychological formation. However, this link needs further exploration.

While a psychological explanation of this relationship in consumers' minds goes far beyond the ambition of this study, the investigation does shed some light on how these two constructs are projected through communication acts. In other words, this study does not explain any causal relationship between these two variables in the psychological formation of overall image, but it does demonstrate how to promote and strengthen both constructs through the website discourse. The findings of this study prove that product-related associations and personality traits are not entirely independent from each other and do not merely coexist: some associations related to the product are more likely to transmit specific personality traits. Thus, future studies about projected brand image should consider integrating both constructs for a more accurate understanding. The positive relation between these two constructs in the described communication practices is aligned with recent investigation into the psychological formation and relation of the same (Souiden et al., 2017).

Moreover, as orientation for practitioners, brand managers should work with both constructs as strategic pieces that can affect one another. In particular, working with intangibles in communication might be more challenging due to their vague delimitation; thus, the findings of this study could guide practitioners on how to enhance certain personality traits by also emphasizing particular product-related features.

All in all, these contributions provide new insights for both academics and practitioners, as mentioned in Chapter 1. On the one hand, several outcomes of this study add to the knowledge in the academic field, and it would be interesting to consider them in future research on official website communication and destinations' projected image to improve their precision. On the other hand, as was argued above, some findings have practical implications regarding how to manage destination image through communication practices, and official websites in particular.

7.2. Conclusions and hypotheses validation

As explained at the beginning of the dissertation, this study was designed to investigate three different levels: cases, the European offer, and theory. Therefore, similar to Chapter 1, the hypothesis testing was organized progressively: as the research advanced, the hypotheses went from particular and case-related, to broader and relational across cases. Furthermore, besides testing the hypotheses, some additional conclusions complement the final considerations of this dissertation. Their aim is to answer the central research question of how are functional and symbolic dimensions of destination image represented in the official website communication of the most popular European urban destination brands. All in all, the following sections summarizes the main conclusions of this investigation and validates or refutes the original hypotheses formulated in Chapter 1.

7.2.1. Case-related hypotheses

The investigation first aimed to assess the overall quality of the European urban destinations' official website communication (O.1). In this regard, the CODETUR assessment methodology was useful to evaluate the general quality of the websites from a multidimensional perspective. This analysis **confirmed hypothesis 1**, pointing to the high quality of the websites. The 12 sites in the sample all have a WQI of more than 0.5 points, which is a good according to the methodology authors' indications (Fernández-Cavia et al., 2014) and previous research using this index (Fernández-Cavia et al., 2013).

Furthermore, the study revealed that most of the content units on the official websites correspond to navigational and informational content. While some destinations do favor commercialization possibilities for users who have purchase intentions, transactional content units have a minor presence on the websites. The high scores achieved for the marketing parameter are mainly related to giving marketing information, such price, location, and how to purchase; however, users are redirected to other pages for the transaction step. Even in those cases where the trade can be made on the official site, these content units are present only on specific pages, and their presence across the website is lower (or at least on the analyzed pages). On this basis, it can be asserted **that official sites' main goal is to inform and attract people to the destination** more than to become platforms from which to sell tourism

products. Certainly, some destinations do make efforts in this regard, such as London, Paris, and Barcelona, but considering the evidence gathered in the study, this appears to be a secondary purpose, after first persuading users to select the destination. Therefore, **the important role of the official website in positioning the brand in consumers' minds is supported;** official sites are mainly conceived as brand portrayals.

Moreover, the coherence and combination of textual and visual content proposed in **hypothesis 2 is partially confirmed**. Expressive and fully aligned content was only found in six cases, while the remaining six lack expressiveness or persuasive power. In the cases of Amsterdam, Barcelona, Frankfurt, Madrid, Paris, and Vienna, the impact of the brand image described in this study can be attributed to the overall website communication discourse. In contrast, the persuasive effect of text and image combinations in projecting their image is slightly lower in the cases of London and Prague. Furthermore, while they present consistent messages, in the cases of Rome, Munich, Milan, and Istanbul the visual material appears to be less representative of the destination. Thus, the findings regarding the textual content of these websites are only partially transferable to pictures, which are coherent but less representative of the unique destination's image. All together, these findings contrast with the use of different-nature content on the websites of different USA states: Lee, Cai, and O'Leary (2006) highlighted a lack of consistency between visual and verbal content and their promoted slogans on most websites.

Interesting to note is that, in general, those destinations with a higher WQI score are those that perform better in terms of image and text coherence and persuasiveness. Vienna, Amsterdam, Barcelona, and Paris obtain the highest WQIs and also the maximum scores possible for the four highlighted parameters. The only exception is London's website which, albeit presenting one of the highest WQIs, contains some low-meaning pictures. At the opposite end, Istanbul, Munich, and Prague, destinations with a lower overall score, also show worse results for the four parameters referring to image and text coherence and expressiveness. Conversely, the case of Frankfurt's website is an exception: it achieves the lowest WQI, but also combines text and image satisfactorily. Thus, even though the overall quality of the site usually ensures good coherence of the content, **a separate analysis of specific indicators regarding multimedia content alignment is crucial to extrapolate the results regarding projected image to the overall website communication,** since some cases do not match the general tendency.

Regarding the specific characteristics of the projected image's functional and symbolic dimensions (O.2), three different hypotheses were formulated. First, the results showed that not all website content presents an itemization of product-related attributes. Instead, it also incorporates discursive nodes referring directly to the overall brand image, which are linked to the generic node. Thus, **hypothesis number 3 is refuted.** As seen in section 6.1.2.2, in all 12 cases content was identified that referred directly to the brand and not only to a particular characteristic, resulting in a huge amount of generic references. Conclusively, even though most of the content units present items concerning the destination offer, **DMOs do not forget to present and discuss their overall brand**.

Similarly, a significant number of references were also identified linking the content to specific tourist profiles. This evidence served to clearly **confirm hypothesis 4,** since all the websites diversify their strategy based on different targets. The efforts that Paris, Vienna, and London make are especially remarkable in this regard.

As for the symbolic dimension of European urban brands' image, the method of analysis also concluded with interesting descriptive data useful to understand the character of the destinations. As seen in the results, every destination's personality outline is delineated. However, out of 916 words and expressions related to personality traits, many destinations concur in using the same most prevalent vocabulary. Thus, **hypothesis 5 is partially refuted.** While some destinations use more singular terms to describe their character – such as rich and golden for Istanbul; authentic and essential for Madrid; interesting Barcelona; stylish Prague; happy Milan, etc. – most destinations choose similar vocabulary. Some of the most used terms are great, unique, modern, new, old, well, outdoorsy, and right, which are present on almost all the websites. Thus, there is a high coincidence in the vocabulary used by the European urban destinations to express their character – i.e., in the way they "talk".

7.2.2. European-offer-related hypotheses

Beyond the previous findings, this investigation also contributes to the understanding of the overall European destinations' image characteristics, including points in common and differences between cases. On the one hand, an aim of this study was to identify the product-related categories common to European urban destinations (O.3.), while on the other hand, another was to examine the overall tendency of the these destinations' personalities (O.4.).

Regarding the first goal, the study identified three categories common to all destinations: of tourist products and packages; cultural attractions and activities; and food and drink. These appear to be imperative to characterize the European urban destinations' image. Similarly, the results also support the categories of infrastructure and transportation, architecture and heritage, and landscape and natural resources as mandatory attractions of the European offer. It is interesting to note here that previous investigation into 50 USA states also indicate culture, heritage and nature as the most emphasized topics in their official destination website (Lee et al., 2006). Conversely, the relevance of the other highlighted categories varies more depending on the case. For example, content about social life and locals, local culture and history, or sports only appears to be relevant to describe a few destinations' image. All in all, these findings allow **hypothesis 6 to be confirmed,** pointing to the existence of "must have" categories, which are essential to all European urban destinations, and categories more unique and distinguishing of certain cities.

Another interesting conclusion related to this phase of the research is **the important role of events, fairs, and festivals as a way to attract city tourism.** This category is not intensively present throughout the sites: it is not one of the most commonly used product-related categories. However, it is always present on the official websites' homepage – even in the case of Barcelona and Prague, where this category is not among the prevalent ones. The relevance of events as a lure on the front page is also highly consistent with the interest of European cities in projecting exciting personalities. **Confirming hypothesis 8**, there is a clear trend of presenting European urban destinations as having exciting and sincere natures. Hence, **showcasing event-related content on the front page allows DMOs to reinforce the up-to-date and exciting facets of their destinations**.

Returning to the functional dimension analysis, and the user imagery attributes in particular, the results demonstrate the higher priority of certain tourist profiles in the destinations' strategies. Families are the quintessential travelers to European urban destinations, or at least, they are prioritized as such on the websites. Tourists with disabilities are also given prominent attention, mainly due to their need for accurate information related to physical limitations. Besides these two profiles, the attention that other tourist profiles receive on the websites is variable across cases. Therefore, **hypothesis 7 can only be partially confirmed**. Every website targets different tourist profiles as strategic segments to attract to its destination. For example, the higher presence of the LGBT tourist profile on Amsterdam's official website is not

surprising, nor is that of the luxury-seeking profile in Paris's case. At the same time, the important amount of attention that Prague gives to young tourists is highly revealing.

In this regard, it is interesting to highlight the importance of certain product-related categories to promote specific profile-adjusted content. In general, cultural attractions and activities, accommodation, and tourist products and packages appear to be the functional attributes more likely to target specific profiles. While this phenomenon requires further research, this study generally proves that DMOs' current communication practices adapt these three types of information to the special needs of different tourist profiles. Furthermore, the results for the separate cases indicate that **different tourist profiles are interested in or linked to different product-related attributes**. In this regard, the stronger relationship between some profiles and specific topics across cases evinces the particular interests of each market segment. Some examples are the stronger presence of content linking luxury-seeking tourists and shopping-related associations, the LGBT profile and nightlife, tourist with disabilities and infrastructure and transportation, and families and cultural activities. However, this is a line of research that must be further explored.

Before concluding this section, it is interesting to discuss the results linked to the student profile. Besides its interest in food and drink content, this profile does not seem to match the regular destinations' offer categories; instead, in several cases, it appears to be significantly linked to the category *others*. While this is a tentative conclusion, the author interprets this finding as an attempt by DMOs to address the increasing importance of students as city visitors (Martínez-Roget, Pawlowska, & Rodríguez, 2013). However, like business visitors, they seem to have completely different interests than other tourist profiles. Thus, it might be appropriate to consider the dissemination of this information through other circuits or through ad hoc websites, as is done for business visitors.

7.2.3. Theory-related hypotheses

Finally, some overall conclusions related to the image and personality constructs are drawn below. Firstly, one aim of this thesis (O.5) was to test the capability of brand personality to position destinations in the competitive context. Despite the general trend of European cities to project brand personalities higher in excitement and sincerity, based on a correspondence analysis test, this study also confirms the ability of personality dimensions to differentiate

similar destinations from each other. Destinations distinguish themselves by projecting different overall personality patterns. More interestingly still, the excitement dimension plays a less relevant role in this differentiation. Similar to certain product-related categories, **excitement is an essential rather than a distinguishing trait**.

Also related to the personality outlines, it is important to note the existence of two groups of destinations projecting similar personalities. These two niches are particularly competitive, which is highly relevant information for destination managers. In the author's opinion, it should be relevant for destinations to consider this assessment technique as a means to identify similar destinations and make strategic decisions regarding whether to bet on differentiation or to establish synergies with destinations with similar characters.

Finally, the study has far deeper implications on a theoretical level. Firstly, it aims to help destinations understand and improve the way they project their personality through their website discourse. In this vein, two additional hypotheses pointed to the relationship between the functional and the symbolic dimension of the brand image; both **hypotheses 9 and 10 are confirmed**. On the one hand, the study reveals that some product-related categories are more expressive in terms of personality vocabulary. Thus, besides strategically reformulating their overall website discourse to use more expressive vocabulary, destinations aiming to strengthen the symbolic dimension of their brand image might consider discussing certain topics that naturally occur in spreading personality and character. In this regard, it is reasonable to identify social life and locals, and food and drink as some of the most expressive categories. However, DMOs must be aware that disseminating content about tourist products and packages, and infrastructure and transportation, for example, tends to strengthen the functional dimension of the brand image but not the symbolic one – or, at least, it strengthens the latter to a lower degree.

Similarly, if marketers aim to strengthen their brand personality in a particular direction, enhancing not only the symbolic message but specific personality traits, some product-related attributes could make it easier. For instance, food and drink attributes are more prone to transmitting sophistication; the cultural attractions and activities category is closer to excitement; and infrastructure and transportation communicates a more competent personality.

7.3. LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE RESEARCH

The results and outcomes of this dissertation must be understood in light of their limitations. Before concluding, the shortcomings of this investigation must be acknowledged and further explored to identify future lines of research. The place branding domain of study is expanding and, as one facet of places, so too is destination branding. Researchers are increasingly adopting branding concepts and tools useful to understand and strengthen territory management in all its facets. However, while the knowledge borrowed from commercial branding is enlightening and serves a guiding purpose in this research, the applicability and transferability of those concepts to destination brands still require a deeper understanding. In particular, although brand image investigation appears to have reached its maturity, this knowledge still needs to be deepened. Therefore, not only the contributions of this investigation, but also the guidelines and orientations for future research based on the findings could be highly valuable for researchers in the field.

To complete the dissertation, this section points to some limitations of the study that, at the same time, delineate some lines of future research. In particular, the author identifies three areas for improvement or future research: the scope, the method, and the results.

7.3.1. Regarding the scope

The scope of this study is limited to projected image and personality. It is highly relevant for scholars and destinations to learn how to promote certain personality traits and image associations; however, it cannot be forgotten that these are two psychological constructs. Strictly speaking, these are psychological formations happening in consumers' minds, and projected image is only a metaphor useful to delimit and identify those communication techniques that help brand managers to stimulate and enhance it in consumers' perception. Thus, all the findings of this research are a reflection of what DMOs intend to promote, their desired image, and not a picture of the real image held in consumers' minds.

Similarly, the relationship between image and personality constructs identified in section 6.3 can only be associated with DMOs' communication activities, and not to the overall

psychological construct. In other words, to prove the possible relationship between image and the personality construct, further investigation focusing on tourists' perception is needed.

It would be interesting in future research to replicate the study as it applies to the receiver, who is the decoder and interpreter of the sent message as well as the new encoder. In the era of communication, decoders are gaining in relevance and are becoming new coders of a bidirectional process of communication. This bidirectional model emphasizes the importance of the decoder becoming a new coder; in this case, the tourist becomes not only a passive decoder of this communication, but also the coder of new messages that contributes significantly to the image formation in the minds of potential tourists. DMOs need to pay attention to these new messages. Only by understanding the communication process as bidirectional will destinations be able to maintain a coherent image throughout their different communication sources and thereby show a stronger and more stable image to potential tourists.

In this regard, social media has opened a wide variety of channels for users to create new narratives about destinations. For instance, Költringer and Dickinger's (2015), De Moya and Jain (2013) and Marine-Roig's (2014) have proposed different approaches to study user generated content as sources of consumers' perceived image information. Therefore, the present author suggests that a priority line of research should be the replication of this study on the narratives about destinations created by tourists. Furthermore, comparing the results of both these studies would provide valuable insights.

7.3.2. Regarding the methodology

An apparent limitation on the methodological level is the superior attention that textual content is given in the analysis. The study of official websites as the source of destinations' projected image required a complex methodological approach able to capture both the depth and precision required to analyze the projected image, and the broadness to assess the complexity and multidimensionality of website communication.

While this shortcoming was addressed in the study by using different techniques, there is still room for improvement. The author is confident that, given the overall quality of the websites and, particularly, the coherence between their visual and textual content, the detailed

outcomes regarding the product-related associations and personality traits projected through the text can be attributed to the overall website communication. Nevertheless, this solution is not as accurate as a methodology combining the analysis of text and image would be. In those cases where the coherence, persuasive capability, and uniqueness of the visual content do not achieve the best results, the author cannot be sure that the finding represents the general message accurately. Thus, in this regard, the methodological triangulation only partially overcame this limitation.

Future research should consider integrating the study of textual and visual content in a single content analysis approach. In this regard, Stepchenkova and Zhan's (2013), Govers and Go's (2005), and Sun, Ryan, and Pan's (2014) work on analyzing visual material about Peru, Dubai, and New Zealand respectively could serve as a guide. Furthermore, in the present study the NVivo software was found useful to code both textual and visual material from online sources. This software would make possible a combined method approach.

7.3.3. Regarding the results

Finally, another limitation of this research concerns the collected data. The corpus of the study was systematically and equally selected from all the destinations' website content, to ensure the data representativeness of each case; the author followed the same criteria to download the equivalent amount of content from each site. However, while representative of each case, the content was not enough to complete the relational results. Once the focus of the study turned from the cases to the product-related variables, a lack of evidence was identified regarding some specific categories.

Since not all product-related categories are given the same level of attention on the websites, sufficient data regarding all the categories was not available from every site to test their relation to the personality traits. Sub-segmenting the data of analysis into smaller groups of study is one of the main risk factors in any statistical analysis for obtaining spurious results. Therefore, instead of conducting the inquiry with all the categories, the final phase of the study was limited to those that had a significant amount of content on each website to be able to draw meaningful conclusions. Those categories with fewer associated content units were not tested.

A similar situation arose with the relationship between some tourist profiles and their interest in specific product-related attributes, which was only briefly explored in this study. The findings presented in sections 6.1 and 6.2 indicate a possible relationship, but more data would be needed to test this connection statistically.

All in all, future research could gather more data from the same sample of study to thoroughly test the relationship between all the product-related categories and personality traits. Furthermore, it would also be interesting to shift the focus onto the relationship between tourist profiles and product-related attributes or even personality traits.

CHAPTER 8: REFERENCES

8. REFERENCES

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CHAPTER 9: ANNEXES

ANNEX 1. EXPERT QUESTIONNAIRE (IN SPANISH)

Datos de identificación

Nombre		Agencia	
Edad		Departamento	
Sexo		Cargo	
Ciudad		Años de experiencia en la estrategia de marca	

1. Defina brevemente el concepto de *branding*
2. Valore del 1 al 5 (siendo 1 muy poco y 5 mucho) cuál es, en su opinión el conocimiento del cliente sobre la importancia y el alcance del *branding*

Para responder a la siguiente pregunta considere la lista de vocablos facilitada a continuación.

Si cree oportuno añadir un concepto, siéntase libre de hacerlo.

Loyalty, personality, image, satisfaction, awareness, brand extension, purchase intention, advertising, product reality, user-imagery, trust, satisfaction, interactivity, customization, usefulness, easy-to-use, responsiveness, country of origin, consumer response, product evaluation, attitude, product fit, familiarity, associations, attribute dominance, top of mind, equity, performance, quality, brand application, values, brand preferences, usage

3. Enumere tres conceptos relacionados con la disciplina del *branding* que considere muy relevantes para el **posicionamiento** de la marca en el **mercado**.

Para responder a la siguiente pregunta considere la lista de vocablos facilitada a continuación. Si cree oportuno añadir un concepto, siéntase libre de hacerlo.

Loyalty, personality, image, satisfaction, awareness, brand extension, purchase intention, advertising, product reality, user-imagery, trust, satisfaction, interactivity, customization, usefulness, easy-to-use, responsiveness, country of origin, consumer response, product evaluation, attitude, product fit, familiarity, associations, attribute dominance, top of mind, equity, performance, quality, brand application, values, brand preferences, usage

4. Identifique tres conceptos relacionados con la disciplina del *branding* que considere muy relevantes para el **posicionamiento** de la marca en la **mente del consumidor**.
5. Proponga una definición para la noción de "Imagen de Marca"
6. ¿Conoce algún autor que haya ofrecido una definición satisfactoria de este concepto? Si/No ¿Cuál?
7. ¿Está de acuerdo con la siguiente definición de imagen de marca? Sí-parcialmente-No

"Se define imagen de marca como las percepciones acerca de una marca, reflejadas en las asociaciones de marca existentes en la memoria del consumidor. Las asociaciones de marca son los otros nodos de información vinculados al nodo de la marca en la memoria y que contienen el significado de la marca para el consumidor."

¿Porqué?

8. Las grandes categorías de elementos que pueden formar parte de una determinada imagen de marca son las siguientes:

Logotipo de la marca
Atributos relacionados con el propio producto
Atributos relacionados con el precio
Atributos relacionados con el *packaging*
Atributos relacionados con el imaginario/modelo del usuario de la marca
Atributos relacionados con el imaginario/modelo de uso de la marca/producto
Beneficios funcionales que ofrece la marca
Experiencias ofrecidas por la marca
Beneficios simbólicos de la marca
Actitudes de marca

a) ¿Considera que el listado facilitado anteriormente es exhaustivo a la hora de identificar los grandes grupos de componentes que se asocian a la imagen de una marca? SI/NO

b) En caso negativo, proponga aquellos elementos que ha echado en falta o que no considera parte de la imagen

9. Siendo 1 muy poco y 5 mucho, valore del 1 al 5 la capacidad de los siguientes métodos para obtener información acerca de la imagen de una determinada marca.
   i. Preguntar directamente al consumidor mediante una encuesta.
   ii. Analizar comentarios y *feedback* online de los consumidores sobre la marca.
   iii. Realizar *focus group* para obtener información las relaciones entre consumidores.
   iv. Realizar entrevistas en profundidad a los consumidores.
   v. Realizar entrevistas en profundidad con los responsables de la marca.
   vi. Preguntar a los responsables de la marca a través de un cuestionario con preguntas cerradas.
   vii. Analizar los contenidos de las comunicaciones oficiales de marca (ej. Spots TV, web, etc.).

Excelente – Muy bien – Bien – Suficiente – Insuficiente

Pongamos un ejemplo…

10. Describa brevemente la imagen que puede tener el consumidor de la marca Coca Cola.
11. ¿Alguna vez ha trabajado con el concepto de personalidad de marca?

Nunca – Alguna vez – A menudo – Constantemente

12. ¿Qué entiende por personalidad de una marca?

¿Conoce algún autor que haya definido este concepto?

13. Valore del 1 al 5 la importancia de la **personalidad de marca** en la construcción de la imagen de marca

14. ¿Cree que existe una relación de interdependencia entre imagen y personalidad de marca? SI/NO

15. ¿Podría explicar a continuación el tipo de relación que existe entre los conceptos de **personalidad** e **imagen de marca**?

16. Indique su valoración de las siguientes afirmaciones:
    i. La personalidad de marca es un componente que forma parte de la imagen de marca.
    ii. Todas las marcas tienen siempre una personalidad asociada en la mente de su consumidor.
    iii. Las acciones de comunicación tienen un papel muy relevante en la construcción de la personalidad de marca.
    iv. El consumidor transfiere a las marcas que le gustan rasgos de su propia personalidad.
    v. Existen marcas con personalidad clara pero sin una imagen de marca bien definida.
    vi. La comunicación es la principal vía a través de la que los responsables de la marca propician la creación de una determinada personalidad para dicha marca.
    vii. En relación a una marca: si existe personalidad de marca necesariamente existe una imagen de marca asociada.
    viii. Los responsables de marketing consideran en su plan estratégico la personalidad de marca deseada.
    ix. Existen marcas con una imagen de marca bien definida pero sin una determinada personalidad asociada.
    x. Es el consumidor el que crea la personalidad de marca a partir de la imagen de marca de ésta.

    Muy en desacuerdo –En desacuerdo – Medio – De acuerdo – Muy de acuerdo

Para concluir…

17. ¿Podría proponer una definición/explicación para la imagen de marca que integre los siguientes conceptos?

    Imagen de marca – comunicación – personalidad de marca – consumidor

ANNEX 2. WQI ASSESSMENT METHODOLOGY TEMPLATE (IN SPANISH)

– Versión: Junio 2016 (reducida) –

Leyenda. Muestra por indicador
H: Análisis de la Home
H+2+2: Análisis de la Home + 2 páginas de primer nivel + 2 páginas de segundo nivel
B: Búsqueda en todo el sitio web. (Tiempo máximo de búsqueda: 2 minutos.)

Parámetros iniciales:

- El análisis de las webs se realizará con el navegador Google Chrome, versión 25.
- En el caso de ya disponer de navegador Google Chrome, desinstalar la versión existente y descargar e instalar la versión 25, para que no tenga *plug-ins.*

Capturas de pantalla:

Al realizar el análisis de un sitio web, tenemos que llevar a cabo unas capturas de pantalla. Son las siguientes:

- La "home" del sitio web, completa, con scrolls, tal como se encuentra en la fecha de inicio del análisis.
- Todos aquellos elementos que sean muy destacables: buenas prácticas, cosas positivas o malas prácticas y cosas negativas.
- Todas aquellas páginas o elementos (p.e. planificador de viaje, reserva de hotel, etc.) que den error.

Escalas de los indicadores

0-1-2-3	0-1-2	0-1	E	NC
Mal – Regular – Bien – Muy Bien	Mal – Regular –Bien	No – Sí	Error	No es el caso
No – Poco –Bastante – Mucho	No – Poco –Mucho			
No – Parcialmente – Sí – Extra	No- Parcialmente – Sí			
Bajo- Medio- Alto- Muy Alto	Bajo-Medio-Alto			

- A. Páginas de inicio –

Antes de entrar en la página de inicio propiamente dicha

A1.	¿El sitio pregunta el idioma a escoger **antes de entrar** en el sitio web?	0-1
H	También se valorará con 1 aquellos sitios que detecten automáticamente el idioma[23]	
	Valoración: **No/Sí**	

Una vez en la página de inicio de la marca turística

A2.	¿El sitio web de la marca turística es un sitio web específico?	0-1
H	**No:** Se trata de una sección dentro de un sitio web general del ayuntamiento u otra administración.	
	Sí: Página propia de la marca turística.	
A3.	¿Hay un vídeo o presentación del destino?	0-1
H	Valoración: **No/Sí**	
A4.	¿Se identifica claramente el territorio/destino que es?	0-1
H	Valoración: **No/Sí**	
A5.	¿Se encuentran los logotipos de las administraciones que competen esas marcas de territorios?	0-1
H	Valoración: **No/Sí**	

Estructuración de contenidos y diseño de la página principal

A6.	¿La home page distingue claramente los diferentes segmentos de público al que el destino va dirigido?	0-1-2
H	**No**	
	Parcialmente – Se debe buscar en la home page.	
	Sí - Aparece como destacado (www.andalucia.org)	
A7.	¿El sitio ofrece la posibilidad de registrarse?	0-1
H	Valoración: **No/Sí**	
A8.	¿Aparecen iconos de aplicaciones web 2.0 vinculadas con el territorio - Facebook, Youtube, Twitter, Tripadvisor,…- ?	0-1-2
H	**No:** No existen iconos de aplicaciones 2.0.	
	Poco: La web contiene al menos 2 iconos de aplicaciones 2.0.	
	Mucho: La web contiene 3 o más iconos de aplicaciones 2.0.	
A9.	¿Existe una sección de noticias/agenda/eventos?	0-1
H	Valoración: **No/Sí**	
A10.	¿Existe una sección de tienda online?	0-1
H	Valoración: **No/Sí**	
A11.	¿Existe una sección de FAQs y/o ayuda al usuario?	0-1
H	Valoración: **No/Sí**	
A12.	¿Existe un apartado de mapa web?	0-1
H	Valoración: **No/Sí**	
A13.	¿Existe un apartado de contacto?	0-1
H	Valoración: **No/Sí**	
A14.	¿La primera impresión de la web invita a navegar?	0-1
H	Explicación	
	No (barcelonaturisme.com) (www.malagaturismo.com)	
	Sí - (www.andalucia.org) (www.australia.com)	

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[23] Considering the technological advances, the author of the thesis evaluated positively also the sites that detected the language automatically. This was not considered in the initial template.

– B. Calidad y Cantidad de Contenido –

INFORMACION TURÍSTICA GENERAL

B1. *B*	**Localización** Mapa de situación referencial **Mal:** La web no tiene mapa o, en el caso de que tenga, su visualización es muy mala. **Regular:** La web tiene un mapa, su visualización es correcta pero no es interactivo (imagen fija o no permite ampliar/reducir la imagen). **Bien:** La web tiene un mapa, su visualización es correcta y es interactivo.	0-1-2
B2. *B*	**Cómo llegar** **Mal:** La web no ofrece esta información. **Regular:** Hay información sobre cómo llegar pero es poco clara o está incompleta. **Bien:** Hay información sobre cómo llegar, y además, ofrece enlaces a las principales compañías de vuelos, tres… **Muy bien:** Hay información de calidad sobre cómo llegar, con horarios, compañías, teléfonos, costes, tiempos de llegada al destino y con un buscador de las regiones del destino. Ej. La web de Nueva Zelanda en al apartado *Travel and Distances* :	0-1-2-3
B3. *B*	**Cómo moverse/desplazarse en el destino** **Mal:** La web no ofrece información sobre cómo desplazarse por el destino. **Regular**: La web contiene información al respecto pero es poco clara o está incompleta. **Bien:** La web contiene un mapa de transportes en el destino cuya visualización es correcta e informa de los horarios, costes y estaciones.	0-1-2
B4. *B*	**Dónde dormir** **Mal:** La web no ofrece información sobre alojamientos. **Regular:** La web tiene un listado de los alojamientos. **Bien**: La web contiene información sobre los alojamientos, los sitúa en un mapa, ofrece links a las webs oficiales, describe los costes, ofrece fotos,…	0-1-2
B5. *B*	**Qué visitar.** Información relativa a monumentos, museos, rutas turísticas, itinerarios… **Mal:** La web no ofrece esta información. **Regular:** La web tiene un listado sobre qué visitar. Información muy básica y pocas fotos. **Bien:** La web contiene información sobre lo que visitar en el destino, ofrece una explicación clara, con fotos, horarios de aperturas, y por perfil de turistas…	0-1-2
B6. *B*	¿Aparece la oferta gastronómica del destino? **No** **Sí:** Aparece mediante un listado con la oferta gastronómica, o un mapa con la localización de los establecimientos, o una sección dedicada a la gastronomía local, imágenes de platos tradicionales, recetas…	0-1
B7. *B*	**Eventos/agenda** <u>Explicación</u>: **Mal:** La web no ofrece esta información. **Regular:** La web tiene un listado de los eventos, sin explicación alguna. Contiene información sobre eventos, pero de forma dispersa. **Bien:** la web contiene información en forma de agenda/calendario sobre eventos especiales o destacados del destino. Ofrece una agenda con los eventos bien explicados, links a las webs de los eventos,…	0-1-2
B8. *B*	**Historia del destino/cultura/costumbres** **Mal:** La web no ofrece esta información. **Regular:** La web ofrece información sobre la historia, cultura y costumbres, pero de forma dispersa por la web. O la web carece de información sobre alguno de los temas: historia, cultura, costumbres. **Bien:** La web contiene información sobre la historia, la cultura y las costumbres del destino, ofrece una explicación clara y concisa, fechas, galería de fotos,…	0-1-2

B9. *B*	**Meteorología** **Mal:** La web no ofrece esta información o te redirige a un portal de meteorología. **Regular:** La web ofrece la meteorología de forma incompleta, carece de información sobre la temperatura o sobre el tiempo. No se proyecta la información de forma visible y clara. No informa sobre la previsión del tiempo de los próximos días. **Bien:** La web contiene información sobre la meteorología del destino, la actual y/o la previsión. De forma iconográfica, ofrece el tiempo y especifica la temperatura. La ubicación es visible, bien en la home o en un apartado específico para la meteorología del destino.	0-1-2
B.10 *B*	¿Aparece información de interés general como teléfonos de la policía, bomberos, emergencia, ambulancia, hospitales o leyes del destino? **No** **Sí** - Sí que aparece al menos uno de ellos.	0-1
B11. *B*	¿Dispone la página de contenido para gente con algún tipo de discapacidad? **No** **Parcialmente –** Un listado con links **Sí –** Dedica una página especial, con contenido relevante, permite reservar hoteles adaptados a unas determinadas necesidades… http://www.lleidatur.com/turismo/que_hacer/turismo_accesible.aspx)	0-1-2

CONTACTO INSTITUCIONAL

B12. *B*	**Nombre de la OMD** ¿Aparece el nombre de la organización encargada de la promoción del destino? (Ej. patronato de turismo, ayuntamiento, consejería, empresa municipal, etc.). Valoración: **No/Sí**	0-1
B13. *B*	**Contacto institucional** **Mal:** No existe ningún contacto **Regular:** Existe únicamente un contacto telefónico **Bien**: Existe un contacto telefónico y un email **Muy bien:** Existe un contacto telefónico, un email y un contacto personalizado	0-1-2-3
B14. *B*	**Oficinas de información turística** **Mal:** No existe ningún tipo de información sobre oficinas de información turística. **Regular**: La web ofrece listado de oficinas de información turística pero con carencia de información: ubicación, horarios y/o contacto. **Bien:** La web ofrece listado de oficinas de información turísticas del destino, su ubicación, horario, contacto.	0-1-2

INFORMACIÓN TURÍSTICA COMERCIAL

B15. *B*	**Alojamiento** Valoración: **No/Sí**	0-1
B16. *B*	**Contratación de guías turísticos/excursiones** Valoración: **No/Sí**	0-1
B17. *B*	**Espacios para congresos y turismo de negocios/Información acerca de conferencias** Valoración: **No/Sí**	0-1

- C. Arquitectura –

Rotulado

C1.	**Significación de las etiquetas.**	0-1-2
H+2	Los **rótulos/textos**, ¿son semánticamente claros y **significativos**?	
	Se consideran significativos aquellos que describen adecuadamente el contenido al que dan acceso, en menús, enlaces y encabezamientos. Las etiquetas/rótulos/textos no significativos serán aquellos dotados de poca o ninguna semántica.	
C2.	**Uso de las etiquetas estándar.**	0-1-2
H+2+2	¿En el sitio web se usan **rótulos/etiquetas estándar**?	
	Mal: de 0 a 1 etiquetas.	
	Regular: de 2 a 3 etiquetas.	
	Bien: de 4 etiquetas en adelante.	
C3.	**Adecuación del título al contenido de la página.**	0-1-2
H+2+2	El **título de las páginas**, ¿es **correcto**? ¿Ha sido planificado?	
	El título de la página web se visualiza en la parte superior izquierda. Las páginas web deben presentar títulos que representen adecuadamente su contenido. Un error muy común es utilizar títulos que describan el sitio web en general, y no el contenido particular de la página que se está visualizando.	

Estructura y navegación

C4.	**Enlaces reconocibles.**	0-1-2
H+2+2	¿Los **enlaces son fácilmente reconocibles** como tales?	
	No: No se reconocen fácilmente los enlaces.	
	Parcialmente: Enlaces fácilmente diferenciados pero no se indica el estado de los enlaces.	
	Sí: Enlaces fácilmente diferenciados. Tanto antes de hacer clic como en el estado del enlace.	
C5.	**Enlaces predecibles.**	0-1-2
H+2+2	¿Es **predecible la respuesta del sistema** antes de hacer clic sobre el enlace? El enlace debe ser suficientemente significativo y anticipar el contenido al que dará acceso.	
	Mal: No es significativo.	
	Regular: Es significativo.	
	Bien: Es significativo e indica el formato y el tamaño del documento.	
C6.	**Orientación del usuario en la navegación.**	0-1-2
H+2	¿Existen elementos de navegación que orienten al **usuario** acerca de **dónde está y cómo deshacer su navegación**?	
	Mal: No existen elementos de navegación que orienten al usuario.	
	Regular: Si existen elementos de navegación que orienten al usuario en las páginas del 1er nivel y/o del 2º nivel.	
	Bien: Si existen elementos de navegación que orientan al usuario en todas las páginas de la web.	

Lay-out de la página

C7.	**Puntos de entrada**	0-1
H	¿El sitio web presenta puntos de entrada visuales que captan la atención del usuario?	
	Los puntos de entrada bien diseñados captan la atención del usuario y le orientan, es decir, marcan el inicio de un recorrido a través de sus características visuales que les distinguen del resto de componentes de la página.	
	No: No hay un punto de entrada que destaque y sirva de comienzo de una interacción.	
	Sí: Hay puntos de entrada claros.	

C8.	**Jerarquía informativa de las páginas.**	0-1-2
H+2+2	¿Se aprovechan las **zonas de alta jerarquía informativa** de la página para contenidos de mayor relevancia?	
	Las zonas más visuales de las páginas web, concretamente la parte superior y central de las mismas, deben contener los contenidos más importantes.	
C9.	**Longitud de la página.**	0-1-2
H+2+2	¿Se hace un buen uso del scroll?	
	No: ≥ 3	
	Parcialmente: 2	
	Sí: ≤ 1	

Búsqueda

C10.	**Presencia del buscador interno.**	0-1-2
H+2+2	El **buscador interno** ¿aparece en **todas las páginas**?	
	Mal: No hay buscador interno	
	Regular: Existe buscador interno, pero no aparece en todas las páginas	
	Bien: Existe buscador interno y aparece en todas la páginas en el mismo lugar.	
C11.	**Apariencia del buscador interno.**	0-1
H+2+2	La apariencia del buscador interno debe propiciar que éste sea reconocido como tal por el usuario.	
	Valoración: **No/Sí**	

- **D. Usabilidad y Accesibilidad** –

Indicadores generales

D1.	**Adecuación de la URL.**	0-1-2
H+2+2	¿Tiene una **URL** correcta, clara y fácil de recordar? ¿Y las URL de sus páginas internas, son claras y permanentes?	
	Una URL adecuada será aquella que permita su fácil interpretación a un usuario humano.	
	Por ejemplo: http://www.hp.es/productos/impresoras	
D2.	**Coordinación gráfica y consistencia visual**	0-1-2
H+2+2	¿El sitio web guarda una apariencia formal integrada y coherente?	
	- **Bajo**: Existe poca coordinación gráfica y consistencia visual.	
	- **Medio**: Hay elementos que no son coherentes con el sistema visual del sitio web.	
	- **Alto**: Hay una buena coordinación gráfica y consistencia visual.	
	Buen Ejemplo: Web Ayuntamiento de Barcelona	
D3.	**Actualización de sitio web.**	0-1-2
H+2+2	¿Está actualizado el sitio web y carece de información obsoleta?	
	Mal: con la mayoría de información obsoleta y sin actualizar.	
	Regular: con un mínimo de información obsoleta.	
	Bien: actualizado sin información obsoleta.	

Identidad e información

D4.	**Identidad institución-sitio.**	0-1-2
B	¿Se identifica rápidamente cuál es la OMD responsable de esa marca de turismo?	
	Mal: No, no se identifica.	
	Regular: Sí, se identifica pero es difícil de encontrar por el usuario.	
	Bien: Sí, se identifica rápidamente.	

D5 *B*	**Sobrecarga visual** ¿El sitio web presenta sobrecarga visual? Se valorará positivamente que todas las páginas minimicen el ruido visual **- Sí es 0** **- No es 1**	0-1
D6 *H+2+2*	**Jerarquía visual** ¿Se utiliza de forma clara una jerarquía visual para indicar las relaciones entre los diferentes elementos de una página? - **No**: No hay una jerarquía visual clara. - **Poco**: La jerarquía visual es poco evidente. - **Mucho**: La página presenta una jerarquía visual clara y adecuada.	0-1-2
D7 H+2+2	**Legibilidad** ¿El texto se lee con claridad gracias al uso correcto de la tipografía y la adecuada disposición de interlineados y espaciados, así como una correcta longitud de línea? <u>Valoración</u>: **No/ Sí**	0-1

Elementos multimedia

D8. *H*	**Calidad de imágenes.** ¿Las imágenes están bien recortadas? ¿Se ha cuidado la resolución de las imágenes? Las imágenes deben tener la calidad suficiente para que resulten legibles y atractivas al usuario. Asimismo, su peso (tamaño) no debe ser muy grande (idealmente no más de 100 Kb), para no dificultar su carga desde dispositivos de capacidad limitada.	0-1-2
D9. *H*	**Iconos o metáforas visuales.** ¿Los iconos son comprensibles para cualquier usuario? **Mal:** iconos nada claros o no existen. **Regular:** existe pero iconos poco claros. **Bien:** existe.	0-1-2
D10. *H*	**Valor añadido del contenido multimedia.** El uso de imágenes (o cualquier otro tipo de contenido multimedia) proporciona algún tipo de valor añadido? **Mal:** No proporcionan valor añadido. **Regular:** Proporcionan poco valor añadido. **Bien:** Proporcionan mucho valor añadido.	0-1-2

Ayuda

D11. *B*	**Ayuda contextual.** ¿Se ofrece ayuda contextual en tareas complejas? Valoración: **No/Sí**	0-1

ACCESIBILIDAD
PARÁMETROS ESPECÍFICOS DE LA TEMÁTICA

D12. H	**Tamaño de la fuente.** ¿El tamaño de fuente se ha definido de forma relativa, o por lo menos, la fuente es lo suficientemente grande para no dificultar la legibilidad del texto?	0-1-2
D13. *H+2+2*	**Contraste fuente-fondo.** ¿Existe **contraste** entre el color de fuente y el fondo?	0-1
D14. *H*	**Compatibilidad con los diferentes navegadores web. (Internet Explorer, Mozilla Firefox, Google Chrome)** **Mal:** Sólo es compatible con un navegador. **Regular:** Compatible con dos navegadores. **Bien:** Compatible con tres navegadores.	0-1-2

D15.	**Compatibilidad con diferentes resoluciones de pantalla.**	0-1-2
H	¿Se visualiza correctamente con diferentes **resoluciones de pantalla**? Deberían comprobarse con las siguientes resoluciones de pantalla: 1024x768 1280x960	
D16.	**Instalación de plugins.**	0-1
B	¿Puede el usuario disfrutar de todos los contenidos del sitio web sin necesidad de tener que descargar e instalar **plugins** adicionales? Valoración: **No/Sí**	
D17.	**Etiquetas de texto alternativo.**	0-1-2
H+2+2	¿Se han utilizado los atributos de texto alternativo "alt" y/o "title" y/o "summary" en imágenes, enlaces, y tablas? Explicación: **Alto:** "*alt*", "*title*" y "*summary*" (si hay "*table*") con descripción correcta. **Medio:** alguna de las descripciones de "*alt*", "*title*" y "*summary*" (si hay "*table*") falla o no aparece el atributo. **Bajo:** los atributos no existen o la descripción no es la apropiada.	
D18.	¿Cumple la página los requisitos para la obtención del **nivel de adecuación A / AA / AAA**?	0-1-2-3
H	**Mal**: No es accesible **Regular**: Nivel de adecuación A (Prioridad 1). **Bien**: Nivel de adecuación AA (Prioridad 2). **Muy bien**: Nivel de adecuación AAA (Prioridad 3). *** En el caso de de 1 o 2 fallos en la adecuación, considerar el nivel superado. (Dar un margen de 1 o2 fallos)**	
D19.	¿Tiene el sitio web una sección de Accesibilidad en la que informa al usuario sobre las normativas de accesibilidad del sitio?	0-1
H	Valoración: **No/Sí**	

- **E. Posicionamiento** –

Factores internos

E1.	**Presencia de las palabras clave en la URL.**	0-1-2
	¿Aparecen las **palabras clave "turismo", "tur", "visit" o similares, y "nombre del destino" en la URL** de nuestras páginas? **Bajo:** Ninguna de las palabras clave **Medio:** 1 de las 2 palabras clave **Alto:** las 2 palabras clave	
E2.	**Presencia de las palabras clave en los títulos.**	0-1-2
H	¿Aparecen las **palabras clave "turismo", "tur", "visit" o similares, y "nombre del destino" en los títulos** de las páginas? **Bajo:** Ninguna de las palabras clave. **Medio:** 1 de las 2 palabras clave. **Alto:** las 2 palabras clave.	
E3.	**Presencia de las palabras clave en los metadatos.**	0-1-2-3
H	¿Aparecen las **palabras clave palabras clave turismo" y "nombre del destino" en los metadatos** de las páginas? Concretamente son deseables la presencia de los metadatos "keywords" –subject - , y muy especialmente "description". **Bajo**: presencia de 1 sola palabra clave en total, inexistencia de palabras clave en los metadatos, o el código fuente no ha desarrollado metadatos. **Medio:** presencia de 2 palabras clave en total.	

| | **Alto:** presencia de 3 palabras clave en total. **Muy alto**: completo, total de 4,es decir, las 2 palabras clave en los 2 metadatos, "keywords" y "description" | |

Factores externos

E4.	¿Aparecen nuestro sitio web **entre los 10 primeros resultados orgánicos en búsquedas** con las palabras clave "turismo" y "nombre del destino"? Valoración: **No/Sí**.	0-1
E5.[24]	¿Cuál es el **Domain Authority** de la página web oficial en Google? ¿Tiene una Autoridad **óptima**? Calcularlo en mozz. https://moz.com/researchtools/ose Los resultados indican la autoridad del dominio en general y la de la página concreta. Fijarse en la puntuación sobre 100 dada al dominio Valoración: **Bajo:** <39 **Medio:** entre 40-79 **Alto:** >80	0-1-2
E6.	¿Cuál es el **TrafficRank** de la página web oficial? ¿Tiene un TrafficRank **óptimo**? El traffic Rank lo calcula Alexa en: http://www.alexa.com/siteinfo **Mal:** Más de 1.000.000 **Regular:** Entre 500.000 – 1.000.000 **Bien:** Entre 100.000 - 500.000 **Muy bien:** Menos de 100.000	0-1-2-3

- **F. Distribución o comercialización** –

F1 B	**INFORMACIÓN ALOJAMIENTO** ¿La web dispone de un sistema de búsqueda e información de alojamiento? Explicación: **No:** La web no dispone de información ni comercialización de alojamientos del destino. **Parcialmente:** La web ofrece información básica en forma de listado, de las empresas de alojamiento –al menos hoteles- del destino. **Sí:** La web ofrece un listado del alojamiento con información completa de los establecimientos –al menos hoteles- del destino. **Extra:** La web ofrece un sistema con criterios de búsqueda con categorías de los alojamientos integrado con información completa de las empresas de alojamiento – al menos hoteles- del destino.	0-1-2-3
F2 B	**SISTEMA DE COMERCIALIZACIÓN Y RESERVAS DE ALOJAMIENTO** ¿Posee la web un sistema de reservas de alojamiento? **No:** El destino no ofrece en su web un sistema de reservas de alojamiento. **Parcialmente:** La web ofrece un link externo que te lleva a una central de reservas relacionada con el destino **Sí:** La web ofrece un sistema de reservas de alojamiento integrado en la web.	0-1-2

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[24] This indicator initially referred to the PAGE RANK score, which is not a valid measure anymore. The open site explorer gives an accurate measure frequently used by web developers to measure the Domain Authority on the net. The Domain Authority "predicts this root domain's ranking potential in search engines based on an algorithmic combination of all link metrics" (Moz, 2017)

F3	**GESTIÓN DE SISTEMAS DE RESERVAS DE ALOJAMIENTO <u>INTEGRADO</u>.**	0-1-2-3
B	¿Qué tipo de sistema de reservas dispone la web?	
	Propio (3): La web dispone de un sistema de búsqueda y reservas propio en un entorno seguro de pago.	
	Integrado (2) : La web ofrece un Metabuscador integrado bajo la imagen publicitaria que se da al destino en la web y en el que distintos gestores de reservas (empresas del sector) operan y ofrecen sus servicios de alojamiento según la búsqueda del usuario.	
	Externo (1) : La web ofrece un sistema de reservas de un gestor externo integrado en la web, es decir, el destino cede un espacio dentro de la web a un tercero para poder reservar el alojamiento.	
	No tiene/No funciona (0)	

SISTEMAS DE RECOMENDACIÓN Y VALORACIÓN DE SERVICIOS TURÍSTICOS

F4	¿Posee la web un sistema de recomendación y valoración de los servicios turísticos (al menos hoteles) tipo tripadvisor?	0-1-2-3
B	**Propio (3):** La web dispone de un sistema de recomendación y valoración de los servicios turísticos (al menos hoteles) propio (improbable).	
	Integrado (2): La web ofrece un sistema de recomendación y valoración de los servicios turísticos externo integrado en la web (trip advisor integrado).	
	Externo (1) : La web ofrece un enlace o enlaces a un/os sistema de recomendación y valoración de los servicios turísticos (al menos hoteles).	
	No tiene/No funciona (0)	

DISTRIBUCIÓN Y SISTEMA DE RESERVAS Y COMPRA DE OTROS SERVICIOS

F5	Sistemas de reserva y/compra de entradas para eventos	0-1-2-3-4-5
B	**Propio (5):** La web dispone de un sistema propio de búsqueda y reservas de entradas. Ejemplo, Barcelona turisme.	
	Integrado (4): La web ofrece un sistema de reservas de un gestor externo integrado en la web, es decir, el destino cede un espacio dentro de la web a un tercero para poder reservar entradas a eventos.	
	Externo (3): La web ofrece enlaces a sistemas externos a la web del destino donde se pueden reservas entradas para eventos.	
	Buscador (2): La web ofrece un calendario de eventos con criterios de búsqueda pero no se pueden reservar.	
	Listado (1): La web ofrece información listada de los principales eventos a celebrar en la ciudad.	
	No tiene/No funciona (0)	
F6	Sistema de reserva/compra de restaurantes:	0-1-2-3-4-5
B	**Propio (5): :** La web dispone de un sistema propio integrado de búsqueda y reservas de plazas en restaurantes (improbable)	
	Integrado (4): La web ofrece un sistema de reservas de un gestor externo integrado en la web, es decir, el destino cede un espacio dentro de la web a un tercero para poder reservar entradas en restaurantes.	
	Externo (3): La web ofrece enlaces a sistemas externos a la web del destino donde se pueden reservas entradas para restaurantes.	
	Buscador (2): La web ofrece un sistema de búsqueda con criterios (tenedores, localización, tipo de comida…) para localizar restaurantes pero no se pueden reservar.	
	Listado (1): La web ofrece información listada de los principales restaurantes en el destino.	
	No tiene/No funciona (0) No tiene/No funciona (0)	

| F7 B | Sistema de reserva/compra de billetes de aviones:

Propio (5): : La web dispone de un sistema propio integrado de búsqueda y reservas de plazas en vuelos al destino. (improbable)
Integrado metabuscador (4): La web ofrece un metabuscador (edreams, atrapalo…) de vuelos de un gestor externo integrado en la web, es decir, el destino cede un espacio dentro de la web a un tercero que ofrece multitud de líneas para poder reservar vuelos al destino.
Integrado compañía aérea: La web ofrece un sistema de reservas de una compañía aérea que vuela al destino, el destino cede un espacio dentro de la web a un tercero para poder reservar vuelos al destino bajo esa compañía.
Enlaces a Externos (3): La web ofrece enlaces a sistemas externos a la web del destino donde se pueden reservas vuelos para el destino
Listado (1): La web ofrece información listada de los principales compañías de vuelos que lo hagan al destino
No tiene/No funciona (0) | 0-1-2-3-4-5 |

CARRITO DE LA COMPRA

| F8 B | Sistemas de reserva y/o compra de varios productos/servicios integrados en un mismo "carro de la compra". | 0-1 |

- **G. Idiomas –**

| G1. H | Señala cuántos idiomas **no oficiales** del destino aparecen en el sitio web.
Mal: No posee ningún idioma no oficial.
Regular: Posee 1 o 2 idiomas no oficiales.
Bien: Posee 3 o 4 idiomas no oficiales.
Muy bien: Posee 5 o más idiomas no oficiales. | 0-1-2-3 |
| G2. H+2+2 | **Contenido traducido**
¿Está el contenido traducido a los idiomas no oficiales?
No: No hay contenido traducido a los idiomas no oficiales.
Poco: Parte del contenido traducido.
Mucho: Todo el contenido traducido. | 0-1-2 |

Enfoque cultural-nacional-idiomático

| G3. H+2 | ¿Existe adaptación cultural por países?
No: los contenidos de la web se ofrecen en diferentes idiomas sin distinción de países diferentes del mismo idioma (ej. traducción al inglés pero sin distinción inglés-USA, inglés-UK, inglés-Australia) en idiomas diferentes al castellano pero sin distinción cultural para países de un mismo idioma. Ej. Inglés sin diferenciar público USA y público UK
Sí: además de diferente idioma, dentro del idioma no oficial se distingue por países de procedencia. | 0-1 |
| G4. H+2+2 | **Adaptación Cultural**
No: Los contenidos no cambian al cambiar el idioma, son una simple traducción.
Sí: Los contenidos cambian en función del idioma o la procedencia del turista. | 0-1 |

Dominios adaptados a idiomas

G5. *H*	¿La web adapta todos sus dominios al idioma establecido (integrándolo en la URL oficial principal)? Es positivo que la web respete e integre sus versiones idiomáticas a su dominio oficial. Valoración: **No/Sí**	0-1

Reconocimiento automático de la procedencia

G6. *H*	**Reconocimiento automático de la procedencia** Valoración: **No/Sí**	0-1

-H. Tratamiento de la marca-

Eslogan de la marca		
H1. *H*	Presencia del eslogan en la página inicial. Valoración: **No/Sí**	0-1
Logotipo de la marca		
H2. *H+2+2*	Presencia del logotipo **No:** La marca no tiene logotipo. **Parcialmente:** El logotipo esta presente solamente en la página inicial. **Sí:** La marca tiene un logotipo presente en todas las páginas.	0-1-2
H3. *B*	Existencia de una descripción breve del logotipo y sus aplicaciones gráficas (identidad visual) Valoración: **No/Parcialmente/Sí**	0-1-2
H4. *H*	El logotipo ¿representa algún elemento funcional/emocional del destino? Valoración: **No/Parcialmente/Sí**	0-1-2
H5. *H*	¿Los colores predominantes de la página están coordinados con el logotipo? Valoración: **No /Sí**	0-1
La marca en imágenes		
H6. *H*	¿Existe un vídeo que apoya la creación de una identidad funcional de la marca (explicación de características físicas objetivas del destino)? Valoración: **No/Parcialmente/Sí**	0-1-2
H7. *H*	¿Existe un vídeo que apoya la creación de una identidad emocional de la marca (explicación de los valores subjetivos asociados al destino? Valoración: **No/Parcialmente/Sí**	0-1-2
H8. *H*	¿Existe una imagen fotográfica del destino que apoya la creación de una identidad funcional de la marca? Valoración: **No/Parcialmente/Sí**	0-1-2
H9. *H*	¿Existe una imagen fotográfica del destino que apoya la creación de una identidad emocional de la marca? Valoración: **No/Parcialmente/Sí**	0-1-2
H10. *H*	Las imágenes (gráficos/fotos/vídeos), ¿son distintivas del territorio? Para tener unas imágenes distintivas, el territorio se debería identificar claramente. Valoración: **No/Parcialmente/Sí**	0-1-2
La marca en el texto		
H11. *H+2*	¿Existen historias, relatos o mitos que se asocian con la marca o cuentan sobre ella? (*stroytelling*) Valoración: **No/Parcialmente/Sí**	0-1-2

Gestión de la identidad corporativa

H12.	¿Hay una descripción breve de la marca de territorio? (qué representa, valores asociados)	0-1
B	Valoración: **No/Sí**	
H13.	¿Quedan claros cuáles son los principales valores o las principales características que definen la personalidad de la marca? (¿está claro en qué se diferencia esta marca de destino de las marcas de destino competidoras?)	0-1-2
H+2	Valoración: **No/Parcialmente/Sí**	

I. Análisis discursivo (texto-imagen) –

I1.	**NIVEL PROFUNDO**: MUNDOS POSIBLES Y ACUERDOS GENERALES	
H+2+2	**¿Se construyen mundos posibles cualitativamente válidos?**	0-1-2
(20)	Se evalúa en la web la presencia de mundos posibles y su correcta estructuración (en caso de presentar submundos), así como la riqueza y coherencia de su definición (poblados de acuerdos generales suficientes y claramente jerarquizados).	
	No **0**	
	Parcialmente **1**	
	Sí **2**	
I2.	**NIVEL PROFUNDO:** PROCEDIMIENTOS ARGUMENTATIVOS	
H+2+2	**¿Existe una estructura retórico-argumentativa básica que sustente el/los mundo/s posible/s?**	0-1-2
(20)	Se evalúa en la web la presencia y recurrencia de estructuras retórico-argumentativas que sustenten el/los mundo/s posibles (número, coherencia y estructuración).	
	Sí (elaborada) **2**	
	Parcialmente (básica) **1**	
	No (insuficiente, deficitaria o inexistente) **0**	
I3.	**NIVEL SUPERFICIAL**: FIGURAS RETÓRICAS	
H+2+2	**¿Se explota el potencial persuasivo del lenguaje verbal/visual?**	0-1-2
(10)	Se evalúa la presencia y diversidad de figuras retóricas (elaboración del nivel superficial) y el grado de coherencia con el nivel profundo. Se tiene en cuenta la combinación del lenguaje verbal y visual.	
	Metáfora, metonimia, antítesis, repetición y elipsis.	
	Sí (presencia óptima) **2**	
	Parcialmente (correcta o básica) **1**	
	No (presencia deficiente o ausencia) **0**	
I4.	**NIVEL DE MATERIALIZACIÓN SENSIBLE**: MATERIAL EXPRESIVO	
H+2+2	**¿Se utilizan recursos visuales?**	0-1
(10)	Se evalúan los recursos utilizados, según combinan texto e imagen u optan de manera preferente o exclusiva por un lenguaje visual o verbal (escrito o auditivo)	
	Sí (integración a la par o mínima de la imagen) **1**	
	No (ausencia de imágenes total o significativa) **0**	
I5.	**NIVEL DE MATERIALIZACIÓN SENSIBLE**: COHESIÓN del LENGUAJE VERBAL/VISUAL	
H+2+2	***Tipología***	0-1
	¿Se integra correctamente el uso de las imágenes?	
(10)	**Sí** (indiferenciado si es conceptualmente *integrado* o *complementario con funciones identificativas, descriptivas o expresivas*) **1**	
	NO (sin valor conceptual, valores sintácticos) **0**	
I6.	**NIVEL DE ENUNCIACIÓN**: RELACIÓN EDOR/ETARIO ***Tipología***	
H+2+2	**¿La estrategia enunciativa recurre a la delegación del rol de prescriptor del destino más allá de la propia institución?**	0-1
(10)	Se tiene en cuenta la imagen proyectada de los enunciadores, especialmente su oficio social	

	(autoridad/estatus) y el grado de compromiso adquirido en la comunicación. **Sí** *(indiferenciado si múltiple desinteresado, implicado o simulado)* **No** (único – institucional) **0**	
I7. *H+2+2* (10)	**NIVEL DE ENUNCIACIÓN:** RELACIÓN EDOR/ETARIO *Tipología* **¿Se define al enunciatario de la comunicación?** (individuación y variedad) Se consideran estrategias más adecuadas aquellas en las que se define al enunciatario y se distinguen tipologías **Sí** (indistintamente de si la individuación es clara o ambigua) **1** **No** (indefinido parcial o total)) **0**	0-1
I8. *H+2+2* (10)	**ACCIÓN COMUNICATIVA** **¿El objetivo de la web es perenunciativo?** **(efecto persuasivo: compra de destino)** **No** (es informativa) **0** **Parcialmente persuasiva 1** **Sí** (claramente persuasiva) **2**	0-1-2

- J. Interactividad –

Interacción Consumidor-Mensaje

J1. *B*	**Visualización multimedia** Tours virtuales y cámaras web **Mal:** no tiene **Regular:** tiene cámaras web estáticas **Bien:** tiene tour virtual que permite interactividad, info monumentos…	0-1-2
J2. *H*	**Visualización multimedia** Videos promocionales oficiales del destino **No:** No tiene. **Parcialmente:** videos externalizados (Link/Youtube). **Sí:** videos integrados (Propios de la web). **Extra:** vídeos integrados con opciones interactivas	0-1-2-3
J3. *B*	**Opción de descarga gratuita** **No:** No tiene ningún tipo de descarga. **Parcialmente:** el portal carece de alguna de las descargas: folletos turísticos, planos/mapas, rutas/visitas guiadas. O tiene de todo per algunas son de pago. **Sí:** el portal ofrece al turista tanto folletos turísticos, planos/mapas como rutas/visitas guiadas.	0-1-2
J4. *B*	**Opción de descarga de aplicaciones móviles** **No:** No ofrece aplicaciones. **Parcialmente:** Descarga de pago. **Sí:** Descarga gratuita.	0-1-2
J5. *B*	**Recursos interactivos** Mapa interactivo, Juegos online, Música online, Canal de TV, Podcast /aplicaciones auditivas, Trip planner, Otros **No:** Tiene 0 ó 1 recurso interactivo. **Poco:** Tiene entre 2 y 4 recursos interactivos. **Mucho:** Tiene 4 o más recursos interactivos.	0-1-2
J6. *B*	**Planificador de viaje** ¿Dispone el usuario de un planificador de viaje? **No:** No tiene. **Parcialmente:** Itinerario elaborado por la web. **Sí:** Planificador de viajes con información de la web. **Extra:** Planificador de viajes con información propia.	0-1-2-3

Interacción Consumidor-Consumidor (Relacionado con el concepto de WOM)

J7. *H*	¿Existe un club/comunidad/grupo de usuarios de ese destino? **Mal:** no tiene. **Regular:** Club/comunidad/ grupo de usuarios externalizado. Ej. Comunidad/Grupo en Facebook. Importante diferenciar entre Perfil y Grupo de Facebook. **Bien:** ventana abierta de Facebook en la web del destino. **Muy bien:** Club/comunidad/grupo integrado en la web.	0-1-2-3
J8. *B*	¿Incluye la web historias, experiencias o resúmenes de viajes de otros usuarios? **No:** no tiene. **Parcialmente:** Historias, experiencias o resúmenes de viajes integrados en un soporte externalizado como Facebook, otra web oficial/microsite de comunidad virtual del destino o que el usuario tenga la necesidad de registrarse en al web para conocer historias, experiencias o resúmenes de viajes de otros usuarios **Sí:** Historias, experiencias o resúmenes de viajes integrados en la web oficial.	0-1-2

Interacción Consumidor-OMD

J9. *B*	**Comentarios por parte del usuario** ¿Se permite al usuario comentar los contenidos textuales/noticias/artículos, imágenes/fotografías y vídeos creados por los autores de la web? Valoración: **No /Sí**	0-1
J10. *B*	**Votos por parte del usuario** ¿Puede el lector votar los contenidos textuales/noticias/artículos, imágenes/fotografías y vídeos a los que tiene acceso para mostrar su grado de satisfacción respecto a la información dada? Valoración: **No /Sí**	0-1
J11. *B*	**Publicación de contenidos** ¿Tiene el usuario la posibilidad de crear contenidos textos/entradas/noticias/artículos, imágenes/fotografías y vídeos para ser publicados en el sitio web? Valoración: **No /Sí**	0-1
J12. *B*	Chat line/Human clic Se trata de un Chat con la misma web. Ayuda al usuario a orientarse por la web. Valoración: **No /Sí**	0-1

- K. Web Social –

Uso de plataformas, herramientas y funcionalidades de la Web 2.0

K1 *B*	**Sindicación de contenidos (RSS, Atom, etc.)** ¿Puede el usuario suscribirse a servicios de sindicación de contenidos de la temática que le interesa a través del soporte que considere más conveniente? ¿Puede seleccionar la temática o canal al que quiere suscribirse? **No** = no puede suscribirse **Parcialmente** = puede suscribirse pero no puede seleccionar la temática o canal **Sí** = puede suscribirse y seleccionar temática o canal	0-1-2
K2 *B*	**Herramientas para compartir la información en redes sociales o similares (marcadores sociales)** ¿Permite el sitio web de la marca turística que el usuario comparta con otros usuarios información de su interés a través de herramientas 2.0?	0-1-2-3

	Mal: Nada. **Regular:** 1 red social. **Bien:** 2 o 3 redes sociales. **Muy bien:** 4 o más redes sociales.	
K3 *B*	**Blog corporativo** ¿La marca turística dispone de blog asociado al dominio del sitio web? Valoración: **Sí/No**	0-1
K4 *H*	**Plataformas de imágenes en servicios de alojamiento externos** ¿Emplea el sitio web de la marca turística plataformas 2.0 especializadas en la publicación de fotografías para difundir su material fotográfico (por ejemplo Flickr, Picassa o Instagram)? **Mal:** Inexistencia. **Bien:** Si tiene al menos una Plataforma de imágenes.	0-1
K5 *H*	**Plataformas de microblogging** ¿La marca turística usa plataformas de microblogging (Twitter, Tumblr) para difundir las informaciones que produce? **Mal:** Inexistencia. **Regular:** Simplemente aparece el icono. **Bien:** Aparece una ventana abierta desde donde se puede participar.	0-1-2
K6 *H*	**Plataformas de vídeos en servicios de alojamiento externos (Youtube).** ¿La marca turística usa plataformas de vídeos (Youtube)? **Mal:** Inexistencia. **Regular:** Simplemente aparece el icono. **Bien:** Aparece una ventana abierta desde donde se puede participar.	0-1-2

Empleo de redes sociales

K7 *H*	**Red social** ¿Utiliza el sitio web Facebook? **Mal:** Inexistencia. **Regular:** Simplemente aparece el icono. **Bien:** Aparece una ventana abierta desde donde se puede participar.	0-1-2
K8 *H*	**Red social de recomendaciones externa** ¿Utiliza el sitio web las redes sociales (como TripAdvisor) para que los usuarios hagan recomendaciones sobre la información que ofrecen? **Mal:** No **Regular:** Simplemente aparece el icono. **Bien:** Aparece una ventana abierta desde donde se puede participar.	0-1-2

- L. Comunicación Móvil –

L1 *H*	**Visibilidad** Las páginas webs analizadas ¿Disponen de una versión específica para los dispositivos móviles (que se carga automáticamente reconociendo el dispositivo por el cual se accede)? Valoración: **No/ Sí**	0-1
L2 *B*	Las páginas webs analizadas ¿Tienen aplicaciones móviles? **No:** No tienen aplicaciones móviles. **Poco:** Sí (1) **Bastante:** Sí (2-3) **Mucho:** Sí (4 o más)	0-1-2-3

L3 B	**Aplicaciones Oficiales.** Las aplicaciones móviles que se encuentran en las páginas webs, ¿Son desarrolladas por la OMD? **Mal:** No tienen aplicación. **Regular:** El destino posee aplicaciones móviles desarrolladas por empresas privadas. **Bien:** El destino posee aplicaciones móviles desarrolladas por instituciones públicas. **Muy Bien:** El destino posee aplicaciones móviles desarrolladas por la OMD.	0-1-2-3
L4 B	**Plataformas disponibles.** Las aplicaciones móviles encontradas en los portales oficiales de turismo ¿Para qué plataformas están disponibles? **No:** No tienen aplicaciones móviles. **Poco:** Disponible para 1 plataforma. **Bastante:** Disponible para 2 plataformas. **Mucho:** Disponible para 3 o más plataformas.	0-1-2-3
L5 B	**Funciones** ¿Cuántas funciones cumplen las aplicaciones de los destinos analizados? -Audioguía. -Compartir comentarios. -Galería de imágenes. -Geocalización. -Guía de recursos de la ciudad. -Información de agenda. -Promoción y descuentos. -Realidad aumentada. -Valoración de lugares. -Videoguía. **No:** Ninguna/No tienen aplicación móvil. **Poco:** Cumplen 1-3 funciones. **Bastante:** Cumplen 4-6 funciones. **Mucho:** Cumplen 7 o más funciones. ***Basándonos en la descripción de la aplicación presente en Apple Store y Android Market.**	0-1-2-3

ANNEX 3. DIRECTIONS FOR CODERS

Directions for coders. Analysis of product-related attributes

Content analysis of urban destination websites will be conducted in two phases. Firstly, coders will assign a category to every piece of content shown in the main layout of each page of the website, by linking them to a node. Once the process is finished they will assess the results and note them separately. Coders must consider the following:

What is considered a content unit? (Strijbos et al., 2006)

- Every time the discourse changes the focus of interest and expound information about a different topic.
- When content is refereeing to the same category but the content type is different.
- When there is a differentiated appearance such as a different banner, different colors…
- Each banner/link is captured separately
- <u>Layout area.</u> Only the area comprised between the main horizontal menu (the menu is not included) and the footer (not including site maps or other links included in the footer) is coded. In the case of Milan website the area is limited by the header (top banner) and the footer, excluding the vertical menu that appears in the left side. Additionally, each block of content, graphically differentiated, is coded independently eve if they pertain to the same category.

What is excluded from the coding process?

- No main or secondary menu
- The header; being the area comprised between the beginning of the page and the main horizontal menu, or the breadcrumbs path, in case of having them.
- The footer; being the area at the bottom of the page distinguished with a different color. Despite the different designs this is usually comprised between the end of the page and the beginning of standard labels such as contact or privacy policy, the site map, or the institutional logo depending on the website.

**CONTENT CATEGORIES** (these categories are mutually exclusive)

- **Tourism products & packages**: This category focuses on those pieces of information that are made ad-hoc for the tourist by the tourism office. This includes packages and combined tours. Further it also includes other products that the tourism office makes available for tourists. All in all, this node includes:
  - **Sightseeing bus**
  - **Information about tourism offices**
  - **Tours and combined activities prepared by the tourist office**
  - **Tourism office materials: maps, magazines, cards…**

- **Landscape & natural resources**: every piece of content referring to landscape, general sightseeing or visual appeal of the overall scenery of the city. It can also make reference to natural environment, parks, beaches, mountain and other natural attractions and landmarks.
  - **General views (*vistes*)**
  - **Parks & gardens**
  - **Green areas**
  - **River side**
  - **Hiking and walking paths**

- **Cultural attractions & activities**: This category is narrowed to specific attractions related to culture. Taking into consideration previous research, this node is here defined as a stable tourism offer compound by changing activities related to the cultural offer of the place. In this sense, the following attributes are included:
  - **Museums and their exhibitions**
  - **Art galleries and their exhibitions**
  - **Cultural agendas and related activities**
  - **Concerts**
  - **Performing arts shows**
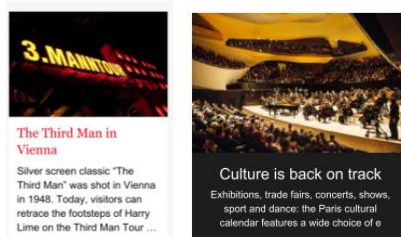
- **Leisure attractions & activities**: Similarly, this category refers to specific attractions, infrastructure and activities focused on leisure. Taking into consideration different destinations offer, activities "for fun" are common and differentiated from the cultural ones. In this sense, the following attributes are included:
    - **Zoos**
    - **Casinos**
    - **Theme parks**
    - **Fountain shows**
    - **Swimming pools for summer**
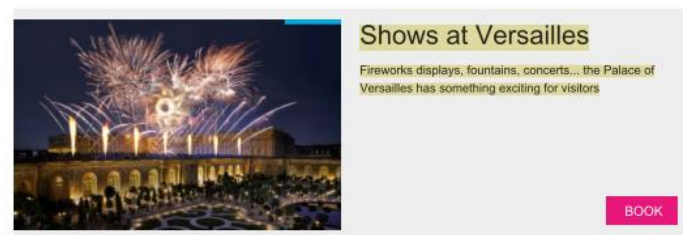
- **Events, fairs & festivals**: Even though in "Tourism attractions & activities" category cultural events are included, given the raise of major events importance on attracting tourists, a separate category is created. Following previous authors descriptions of the category: "special events"[3], "fairs, exhibits and festivals" [1][8], or "interesting festivals" [3], this research includes in this sections those events that outstand from the general agenda. Events, fairs and festivals that may be one of the main reasons for a tourist to visit the destination, not only an activity to do at the destination but a reason to travel and a must see.
    - **Music festivals**
    - **Celebrities concerts**
    - **Singular and exceptional exhibitions**
    - **Outstanding performing arts events (such as new year's concert in Vienna)**
    - **Different kind of fairs**

- **Architecture & heritage**: Heritage refers to historic legacy of a place; places, artifacts and activities that represent the history of the place and its people. As UNESCO (2017) describes there's many kinds of heritage, starting with the distinction of tangible and intangible heritage. In this section only the tangible immovable and underwater heritage will be classified: monuments, archeological sites, buildings, shipwrecks... Even though, some exhibition of paintings, sculptures or other legacy that may also be considered

heritage this will part of the attractions node, given that it is part of the museum offer. Likewise, natural heritage is considered in section "Landscape and natural resources". Therefore, this node will include:

- o **Singular buildings**
- o **Churches and mosques**
- o **Statues and monuments**
- o **Squares**
- o **Ruins**

*All linked to the history of the place

- ▪ **Local culture & history**: This category doesn't refer to specific tangible monuments or buildings but a more overall view of the history and culture of the city. It acts as an overall description of the city. Therefore, it includes all the content about the history of the city, cultural legacy, the place evolution over time, an overall description of the city and the character of the city in general. It is important not to mix it up with "social life & locals". In this case the focus is set on the city while the other category refers more specifically to local people, their activities and behavior.
  - o **History**
  - o **Evolution / transformation of the city**
  - o **The city's character**

- **Social life & locals.** In this category all the content referring to daily life, locals and socializing is included. Differently than local culture & history category, this category includes information about the **present and daily** life of local people culture. Thus, the following content is included here:
    - **How the people is in their character**
    - **Popular activities among the local population.**
    - **Activities to get in touch with local people.**
    - **Different neighborhoods lifestyle and character (except when there are talking about an area that has historic value such a Jewish neighborhood, then is heritage because it is important for the history and architectonical legacy, not its lifestyle).**
    - **Receptiveness & friendliness of the people**

A Glimpse behind the Scenes

Some special tours reveal some of the secrets of day-to-day life in Vienna – ideal for those already familiar with Vienna's main sights or …

My Perfect Day in Vienna

Accompany six Viennese residents on their perfect day with interactive videos.
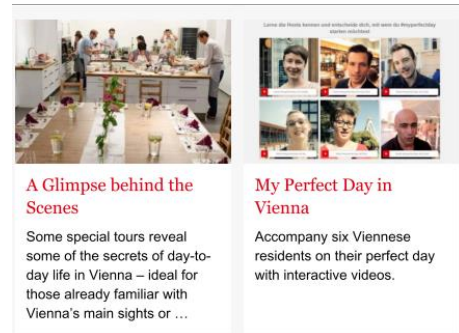
- **Food & drink.** Even though traditional gastronomy is also part of the city's heritage, it is considered in a differentiated section, given its relevance. It also includes other relevant topics such as:
    - **Typical food & beverages**
    - **Restaurants**
    - **Breakfast cafeterias**
    - **Coffee bars**
    - **Snack bars**
    - **Cellars**
    - **Breweries**

- **Shopping.** Shopping has grown in relevance as a tourist attraction desired by many tourists. Further, there's a specific tourist profile that travels seeking shopping areas and attractive shops. Thus, this category includes:
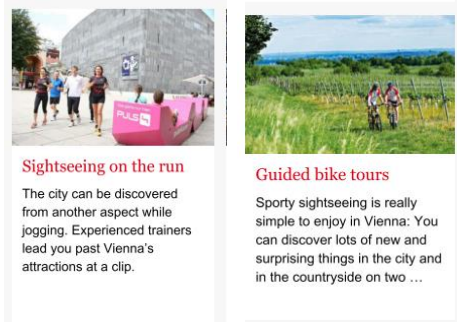   - **Information about shops**
    - **Shopping and commercial areas**
    - **Shopping services**
    - **Tax free**
    - **Local designers**
    - **Souvenirs shopping**

- **Nightlife:** This category focuses on experiencing cities at night. What tourists can do and see at night at the city. Differently than food and drink category, in this category only the cocktail and beer bars are included, plus other facilities and activities such as:
    - **Nightclubs and other night activities.**
    - **Cocktail and beer bars**
    - **Night walks and activities**

*transport at night is not included here but in infrastructure and transportation category.

- **Sports:** All destination's offer focusing on sports activities and how to make sport in relevant destination attractions (i.e. parks). Further it may be possible that inside a It focused on:
  - **Sport infrastructure (gym, pavilions…)**
  - **Sport activities outdoor**
  - **Sports in highlighted attractions in the destination**
  - **Sport events and fairs**
  - **Physical activities in the mornings**

Sightseeing on the run

The city can be discovered from another aspect while jogging. Experienced trainers lead you past Vienna's attractions at a clip.

Guided bike tours

Sporty sightseeing is really simple to enjoy in Vienna: You can discover lots of new and surprising things in the city and in the countryside on two …

* com que és una categoria transversal I petita, a diferencia d'altres categories qualsevol informació (*tours* per exemple) que posi èmfasi en l'esport, la codificarem aquí.

- **Infrastructure & transportation**: This category includes practical information about how to get to the destination and how to move around. These may appear in separate pages or may appear as a complementary information on how to get to a specific attraction or practical information about the accessibility of the place. Mainly it is about transportation and indications to move such as:
  - **How to get there by train, plane, bus, boat…**
  - **How to move in the city in underground, taxis, bike, bus, train…**
  - **Other private transportation services**
  - **Indications on how to get to specific tourism attractions**
  - **Wifi**

- **Accommodation:** Includes all the information about where to stay in the city. It is a very specific category focused on sleeping places:
  - **Hotels, hostels, airbnb, house renting…**
  - **Characteristics of this places to stay**

- **Climate:** Weather conditions short terms (predictions), but also about the general climate of the city. Any attraction specially highlighted in specific climate conditions will also be considered in this category.
  - **General climate**
  - **Temperature and weather**
  - **Activities for rainy days (for example)**

- **Service:** This is a relevant attribute highlighted in previous research, the four investigations highlighting this attributes were base on interview and surveys to tourists. So, even though it is an important attribute for tourists it may be a result of the tourist experience but not an attribute communicated in anticipate (hypothesis). Thus for this reason is not expected to find out a huge amount of content about:
  - Quality of service
  - Friendliness of service staff
  - Contacts of staff from different activities/attractions
  - Indications on how to get in touch with support staff
  - Availability of the staff
  - Deliveries or other alternatives to get a tour…
  - Personalize attention…

  City Guides

  Discover Vienna – with Vienna's city guides. Here they introduce themselves …

- **Political & economic factors:** Similarly to the previous category all the investigations highlighting this attributes were based on tourists' opinions during or after their trip. Thus, contextual information about the city itself and its political and economic context is expected to be a secondary content topic in the official websites. Some of the topics included here are:
  - Information about the government
  - Political stability of the country
  - Money, currency and money change
  - Information about political decisions that affect tourism
    - Sustainability for example

- **Safety:** In this category all information about the safety of the destination or safety measures for the trip are included:
  - Safety of the destination
  - Contact to safe and order forces
  - Tips to avoid suffering burglary, robberies or pick pocketing
  - Safety measures in some tourism attractions and activities
  - Safe ways to travel
  - Heath service

- **Wellness:** This category is included after the pilot coding process and it is partially supported by only a couple of research indicating the importance of "relaxation and restfulness"[1][8] or "peace and quite" [7] that, even though it is not exactly the same it is related. So the category here labeled as "wellness" includes information about:
  - Spas
  - Wellness
  - Ways to get out from the city stress
  - Massages
  - Thermal facilities and other infrastructure

SECONDARY CONTENT CATEGORIES (These categories may appear in pieces of content coded in the previous categories)

▪ **Target:** every time they talk about a specific tourist profile. It is expected that the websites generally talks to a single person that may be interest in visiting the city. So, any time more details about how this tourists is travelling and further characteristics of him are given the content should be coded.

Environmentally friendly in Vienna

Vienna can be experienced in a variety of ways – on foot, by Citybike, on skates, or by boat. From the city center to the Donau Auen …

Family outings in Paris

Paris is the kids' capital! There are outings to suit everyone's...

▪ **Content type**: these are transversal qualities of the content
  o Main content block -Informational
  o Links / banner to other pages – Navigational
  o Buying and booking – Transactional

Reference:

Strijbos, J.-W., Martens, R. L., Prins, F. J., & Jochems, W. M. G. (2006). Content analysis: What are they talking about? Computers & Education, 46(1), 29–48.

UNESCO (19/01/2017) http://www.unesco.org/new/en/culture/themes/illicit-trafficking-of-cultural-property/unesco-database-of-national-cultural-heritage-laws/frequently-asked-questions/definition-of-the-cultural-heritage/

ANNEX 4. PRELIMINARY STUDY, THE CASE OF BARCELONA

The preliminary study about the projected personality of Barcelona was presented during the Inaugural Annual Conference of the International Place Branding Association (Vinyals-Mirabent & Fernández-Cavia, 2016). In what follows, the abstract and the presentation of the main results of the investigation are presented.

COMMUNICATION:

Are cities communicating a consistent image? Analysis of the congruence between place and destination personality.

City branding has become a major topic for governments to compete internationally in different strategic markets in order to strengthen their economies (Braun, 2012; Gertner, 2011; Kavaratzis, 2004; Kotler et al., 1993). In this context the concept of brand image becomes relevant. Building an overall and stable brand image is crucial for the success and positioning of the cities (Kalieva, 2015; Qu et al., 2011; Zenker, Eggers, & Farsky, 2013). Nevertheless, cities usually compete in different markets at the same time and sometimes they are managed by different organizations. One example is the touristic facet of city brands, which has traditionally been lead by a separate department or organization (public or private). City brands should be a reflection of a touristic destination, a city to attract investment, a place to live, etc. at the same time.

However, even though this complexity makes the construction of solid and stable brands more difficult, city brands must be consistent and recognizable across different messages, no matter the stakeholder they are targeting (Qu et al., 2011; Zenker, 2014). Building a coherent image becomes a competitive advantage for the city brands (Brown, Dacin, Pratt, & Whetten, 2006; Sahin & Baloglu, 2014).

This research aims to determine the congruence between the projected city's image disseminated by different official websites. As previous researches point out, personality is a useful indicator to determine the alignment and congruence between different brands and

between brands and consumers (Campbell et al., 2010; Stokburger-Sauer, 2011). Further, the study adopts Aaker's (1997) brand personality framework.

Specifically, the study focuses on the case study of Barcelona. The information communicated via the official websites is analyzed as representative of the projected brand image (Campbell et al., 2010). To that end, barcelonaturisme.com, managed by Tourism of Barcelona, and meet.barcelona.com, managed by the Barcelona City Council, are analyzed.

A computerized content analysis is carried out following the methodological approach set by Pitt et al. (2007) and further research on projected brand personality (De Moya & Jain, 2013; Pereira et al., 2014). It concludes with a City Brand Congruence Index (CBCI) based on two factors. On one hand, it searches for the presence of similar personality traits across the content of both sources. On the other hand, the prevalence of these traits across the website hierarchy is weighted according to the level of occurrence. The qualitative data analysis software NVIVO is used to conduct the analysis (Bazeley & Jackson, 2013).

Keywords: Place branding, Destination branding, Brand image, Brand personality, Communication congruence

PRESENTATION:

IPBA 2016

Are cities communicating a consistent image? Analysis of congruence between place and destination personality
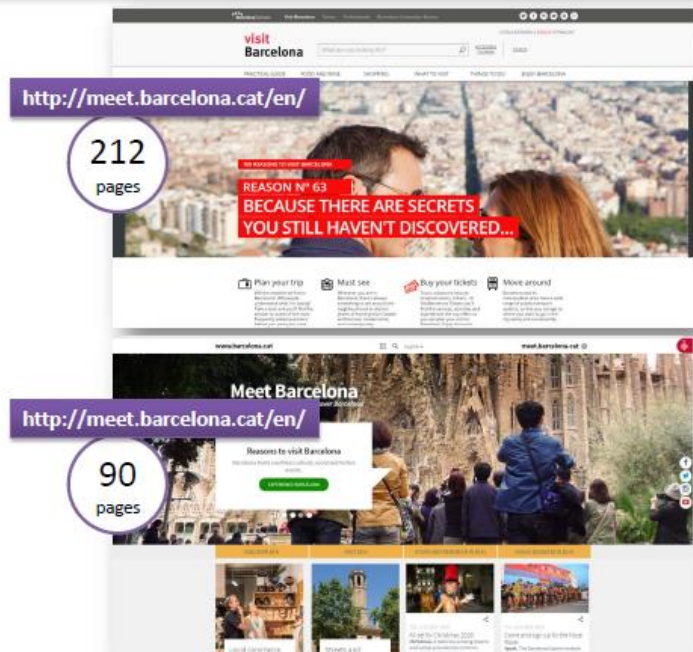
upf.
CAS

Study focus

This research aims to determine the congruence between the projected city's brand personality disseminated by different official websites.

- Place brands as "umbrellas of trust". Complex brands competing in different markets (Anholt, 2002). Communication as a portrayal of strong and stable brands (Torkington, 2012).

- Personality concept outstands; in tourism-related academic literature (Kumar & Nayak, 2014), and as a useful indicator of the congruence between brands (Campbell et al., 2010).

- Strong personalities capable to more efficiently-attract potential tourists/consumers (Stokburger-Sauer, 2011). "Self-expression is usually more vivid when the brand has a strong personality, because it is a personality that is being expressed." (Aaker, 1996, p.173).

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Barcelona case

- One brand
- Two official websites
  - Tourism
  - City Hall
- Home + 3 levels
- 302 pages analyzed
- Captured:
  - from 15 to 30 July
- Nvivo software

http://meet.barcelona.cat/en/
212 pages

http://meet.barcelona.cat/en/
90 pages

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Methodology

Starting point: Pitt et al. (2007).
Computerized content analysis based on a traits of personality dictionary.

Traits of personality thesaurus:
- Based on the BPS (5 dimensions + 42 traits)
- Using Wordnet database
- Two coders – one list (94.38% agreement)
- No duplications (Word Embedding)
- Stemming words grouping
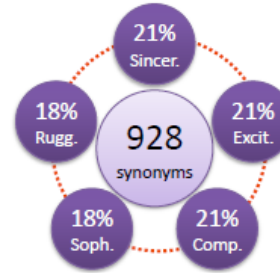
Semi computer assisted analysis
- Nvivo Software – Qualitative research
- Search words – Compound Queries
- Frequencies & coverage
- Each page's results separately

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Methodology

Improvements:

- Coverage, instead of frequency, considers the visibility of each word within a specific page. It is sensible to content volume (navigational vss. Informational).

- Compound Queries enable to look for words close to the word of Barcelona, or any other one.

- Separate results for each page enable to consider single pages independently (i.e. home page) and manually identify deviations and misreporting pages.
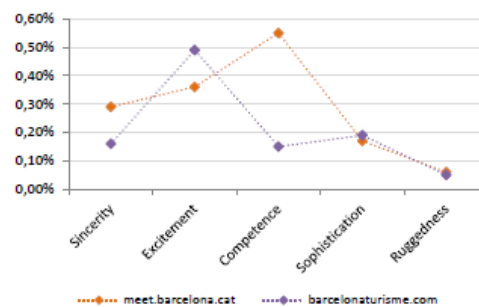
Name	References	Coverage
BAR_03050507_Beach Bike Tour	3	0,27%
BAR_03050508_Barcelona Sun Segway	3	0,29%
BAR_03050509_Parasailing Barcelona	4	0,49%
BAR_03050510_Licence-free boat rental	33	2,56%
BAR_03050512_Flyboard Barcelona	4	0,46%

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Results

Results highlights.

- The methodology performs a more accurate description of the personality disseminated by the website.

- It also allows direct comparisons between different sources results.

meet.barcelona.cat   barcelonaturisme.com
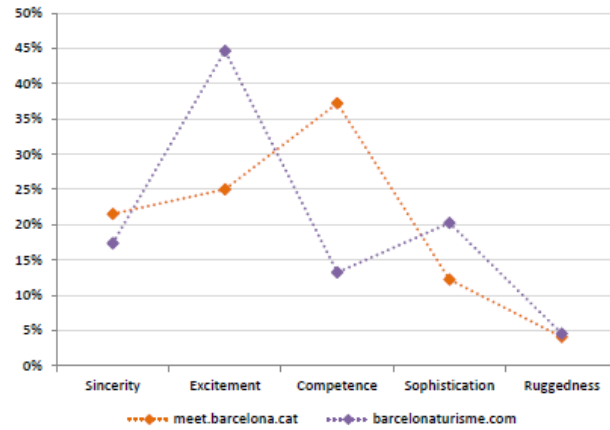
Accurate Coverage per dimension:

$$AC = OC + (PB*0.5)$$

	Sincerity	Excitement	Competence	Sophistication	Ruggedness	
	21,51%	25,00%	37,21%	12,21%	4,07%	W1
	17,36%	44,63%	13,22%	20,25%	4,55%	W2

Overall Coverage = OC
Proximity to Brand = PB
Accurate Cverage = AC

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Converting it into an index, a useful tool

By weighting the distance between dimensions a numerical index, indicating the congruence between brands' personality, can be obtained.

$$\sum_{i=1}^{n} D_i - (D_i < 10)$$

$D_i = D1a\ AC - D1b\ AC$

Barcelona's personality congruence = 44

Result go from 10 to 100, being 10 good congruence and 100 no congruence.

meet.barcelona.cat   barcelonaturisme.com

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