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TBEX Europe Costa Brava 2015: Effective Strategy for Branding Mature Tourist Destinations?

ABSTRACT

Travel bloggers are digital prescribers who help to construct the brand image of a tourist destination and whose posts are currently deemed more credible than communications emitted by companies and brands. This article presents the case of the World Congress of Travel Bloggers 'TBEX Europe Costa Brava 2015', co-organized by the Costa Brava Tourist Board as a promotional action to improve its 2.0 communication and harness the power of bloggers' prescriptions as destination ambassadors. In addition, a monitoring study was conducted during and after the event, which revealed that online conversations resulting from the event generated more than 186 million impressions in an audience of 11 million people, figures that far exceed those of earlier promotional actions carried out by the Board. The study also identified interactions between members of online communities, finding that 20 influential users generated more than half of the total number of potential impressions.

KEYWORDS

Travel bloggers; Branding; E-branding; TBEX; Costa Brava.

1. Introduction:

An important part of the work of Destination Management Organizations (DMOs), Tourism Boards and other agents responsible for managing a tourist destination is managing its brand image (i.e. the perceptions created in the mind of individuals (Huertas Roig, 2011) regarding that destination); that is, using various branding strategies to generate an induced image of the destination aimed at specific consumer segments in order to motivate a first or repeat visit.

This image is intended to generate dissemination, create a story, a narrative or an image strategically evoked in the target audience (San Eugenio Vela, 2013) to influence their decision-making process; it therefore constitutes a determining factor in the destination's degree of competitiveness (Camprubí Subirana, 2011).

As San Eugenio Vela (2010) explains, the *a priori* consumption of images represents a first symbolic journey prior to a real trip, and therefore plays a decisive role in consumers' interpretation of the destination and their decision regarding whether to visit it or not (Camprubí Subirana, 2011). Equally, the consolidation of these induced images represents a potent strategy for building territorial identity, which is reaffirmed when it becomes a city brand (Jiménez Morales & San Eugenio Vela, 2009).

However, with the increased access to Information and Communications Technology (ICT) and tourism 2.0 (Camprubí Subirana, 2011; Donaire Benito, 2011) new business models have emerged, forcing DMOs and other promotional organizations to adapt their strategies to this new digital context and evolve towards e-branding (San Eugenio Vela, 2011); that is, the use of Web-associated channels to reach new types of customers, whether digital natives (born after the spread of the Internet) or digital immigrants (those users who were born before the spread of the Internet but who wish to be part of the new digital context) (Marin, 2011; Territorio Creativo, 2013), so as to continue to compete with other destinations. A transformation has therefore taken place in the communications model traditionally used in tourism: from a purely informational/promotional format to new persuasive and/or emotional-type formats, resulting in new ways of working related to advertising language and destination branding (San Eugenio Vela, 2010).

In addition to the above, doors will also open to new challenges: with so much information and such ease of access to it, prior knowledge of the destination might influence an individual's information search behaviour and affect the credibility of sources used for information search processes (Marchiori & Cantoni, 2015). This will lead travelers to rely less and less on what brand communications say and increasingly more on people who visit the destinations and

then write about their experiences, as they identify with such people and believe in the impartiality of what they say, unmotivated as they are by economic interests (Lu & Stepchenkova, 2015). Marin (2010) reinforces this idea, pointing out that new customers/travelers prefer to listen to friends or communities with similar interests than watch an ad or heed a promotional action by an official body. Furthermore, studies conducted by De Bruyn & Lilien (2008) support the hypothesis that certain sources might have greater influence on consumers' decision-making process due to their perceptual affinity, tie strength, high perceived authority and/or social status. As stated by Sun, Ryan, & Pan (2014, p. 132):

> 'Since the peer group is by far the most significant determinant for the decision making process, electronic word of mouth (e-wom) has come to be considered as an important information source for destinations (Yao, Xu, Li, & Yang, 2011) … digital marketing is essential for marketers to promote destinations'.

In fact, regarding eWOM communication and experience sharing among people on social network sites, it is more acceptable to young people than general advertising information and often becomes a basis of reference for young people's attitudinal acceptance and purchase intention. The degree of taking pleasure in sharing information with others has a great impact on consumer acceptance (Sheu & Chu, 2017).

According to the study 'The Social Traveler in 2013. A Global Review' (Territorio Creativo, 2013), social networks are the absolute priority as a source of information for travelers between the ages of 18 and 34. Furthermore, 52% of travelers admit to feeling influenced by the photos their friends share when choosing a destination and 60% trust online videos posted by expert travelers over brand advertising videos.

This suggests that information production and dissemination has escalated beyond the reach and control of DMOs and that visitors' decision-making is no longer influenced by these organizations to the extent that they would like (Kladou & Mavragani, 2015). Although official websites are used as sources of reference and research, the seduction of and final decision regarding the destination usually comes from other sources, comments or recommendations by other travelers (Marin, 2010).

Thus, the main aim of this article is to present the advantages of two promotional actions carried out by the Costa Brava Girona Tourist Board - organizing an event of the magnitude of TBEX Europe Costa Brava 2015 and organizing blogtrips specially designed for those attending the event - as part of an online branding strategy to rejuvenate such a mature brand as 'Costa Brava Pirineu de Girona'. Furthermore, a pioneering study on the impact of different conversations on the social network Twitter, mainly, but also in blogs and online media, has

allowed us to assess the effectiveness of both actions in accordance with the objectives established by the Board and generate a theory based on a qualitative analysis of the numerical data obtained. Furthermore, it has also been possible to identify the key nodes for maintaining the information flow within the network and to determine which audiences were reached through certain users. The study not only measured the outcome of TBEX 2015's online activity but how this outcome was reached.

2. Theoretical framework:

2.1 Social Media and User Generated Content (UGC):

Social media comprise activities, practices and behaviours among communities of people who meet online to share information, knowledge and opinions using Web-based applications that make it possible to easily create and transmit content in the form of words, pictures, videos and audio (Safko, 2010). They can be classified as follows: blogs, review sites, media sharing, question/answer sites, social bookmarking, social networking, social news, wikis, etc. (Gandomi & Haider, 2015; Marine-Roig, 2014).

They are all forms of user-generated content or UGC (Marine-Roig & Anton Clavé, 2015), and are one of the main sources of information for prospective travelers (Marchiori & Cantoni, 2015). The Holmes Report (2012) states that: 'Social media plays the largest role in the first and last phases of a consumer's travel decision-cycle inspiration and experience, according to the Digital Index travel and tourism survey conducted by Text 100, which examined the increasing importance of social media and mobile technology during four major stages: inspiration, decision, purchase and experience. This correlates to the finding that 63 percent of survey respondents consider recommendations by friends and family the number one factor to inspire travel and social channels make sharing among friends and family easy.'

Thus, social media make it possible for those prospective travelers who must choose between different destinations and activities to compare this information and write comments related to their travels, opinions and personal experiences (Fotis, Buhalis, & Rossides, 2011; Míguez González, 2011). UGC allows post-tourists (those who have already traveled) to communicate with pre-tourists (those who are yet to travel) (Donaire Benito, 2011; San Eugenio Vela, 2014). As Bashar (2014, p. 8) noted:

'Researchers also found that it is usually user generated content (hereinafter UGC) such as travel reviews, that are generally considered very helpful in the travel planning process (Arsal, Backman, & Baldwin, 2008). The validity of this idea can be justified with the findings by Nielsen research from April, 2012, when 13.2 million users only in America acknowledged to visiting TripAdvisor to find information about their upcoming travels (Nielsen, 2014).'

In this respect, the main objective of a marketing (or branding) strategy based on social media is to encourage check-ins, 'likes', 'hauling' and 'reviews' so as to generate Word of Mouth (WOM) among customers (Marketing, 2012), or as Költringer & Dickinger (2015) call it in this case: Electronic Word of Mouth (e-WOM).

This is because 'In the field of tourism, most authors agree on the importance of UGC (Koltringer & Dickinger, 2015; Lu & Stepchenkova, 2015; Marine-Roig, 2015) in the construction of destination image through the e-WOM effect (Hidalgo, Sicilia, & Ruiz, 2014; Jalilvand, Samiei, Dini, &Manzari, 2012), and consider travel blogs, online travel reviews (OTRs), or online consumer reviews as rich sources of UGC data (Marine-Roig, 2014; Xiang et al., 2015)' (Marchiori & Cantoni, 2015, p. 187).

However, it is important to bear in mind that people do not always post positive WOM only:

'Tourists mention a wide range, and unexpected combinations, of emotions as they construct memories of their experiences; they write about sacred moments, awe inspiring people, personal pride as well as being scared, disappointed, disturbed and depressed… challenging the rather narrow view that tourists are predominantly concerned with pleasurable experiences and personal happiness. Meaning-based gratification can equally arise from events that provoke negative emotions' (Bosangit, Hibbert, & McCabe, 2015, p. 11).

On the other hand, Camprubí Subirana (2011), Kladou & Mavragani (2015) and Reza Jalilvand, Samiei, Dini, & Yaghoubi Manzari (2012) have posited that a visitor will only generate a positive WOM and/or e-WOM and recommend the destination to others if their quality standards have been met; that is, if the *a posteriori* image (embodied by the idealized image that the visitor takes from the destination) matches the image they had of the destination before visiting, as a result of the contrast between this previous image (*a priori*) and that actually experienced at the destination (*in situ*) (Galí Espelt & Donaire, 2006).

As noted by Buhalis & Foerste (2015), people who write about their travels become prescribers of the destination and undoubtedly influence the construction of its image as new unofficial sources of information. For what they write to be truly relevant, however, they must be influential people within the communities they belong to and have the content they post widely disseminated on the Internet (Marine-Roig & Anton Clavé, 2015).

> 'Today, travel bloggers are the go-to people when searching for information on tourist destinations, over guides and advertisements. This leads to them enjoying huge credibility among Internet users and being taken into account when promoting places of interest' (Torelló, 2015).

Travel bloggers write and share their experiences on destinations in the form of entries and posts (text, images, videos, etc.) in their online diaries (blogs), websites and social networks such as Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, Flickr, Pinterest, YouTube, etc. These posts also serve as a means of promotion, so that those who have access to them can find out about the destination *a priori* and/or share and compare experiences about their own visit, creating a database of opinions which can directly influence the end consumer/traveler.

In fact, Marin (2011) proposes defining bloggers as 'social travelers', due to the fact that what really matters is not the actual format used (blog) but the possibility of using any Internet-based tool to communicate and relate their story or experience in a context of 2.0 socialization and conversation.

Such is the influence of bloggers on the Net that a 2014 study conducted by SEGITTUR (2014) ('KAYAK-6to. Barómetro de Viajes Online') revealed that when choosing a destination 38% of Spanish users are inspired by travel blogs, 25% consult online versions of traditional media, 20% are inspired by social networks and 17% by social networks specifically related to travel.

This makes travel bloggers key players in a destination's marketing chain, and if DMOs understand this and know how to adapt to appropriate collaborative work strategies, they have in bloggers an opportunity to maximize their efforts in managing the destination's brand image.

As Buhalis & Foerste (2015) note, those DMOs who have already understood this harness the power of bloggers, photographers, and Instagrammers in the co-creation and management of their online reputation, seeking to construct brand value by effectively communicating the attributes and values associated with the destination (Fernández Cavia, 2011) through social media.

In addition, blogs and other forms of UGC reflect the views and attitudes of travelers in a less expensive, faster and less biased way than traditional methods of consumer research (Bulkeley, 2005; Donaire Benito, 2011; Pan, MacLaurin, & Crotts, 2007; Schmallegger & Carson, 2008). In fact, Sun et al. (2014, p. 26) state that tourists' real motives can be revealed through observation and reading their travel stories rather than depending on their responses to questions set by researchers. However, travel blogs are an underutilized resource for researchers of tourism experiences (Bosangit et al., 2015, p. 1).

In this respect, DMOs could use these sources to assess the destination's image among a particular group of travelers who would otherwise be difficult to reach (Choi, Lehto, & Morrison, 2007; Pan et al., 2007; Schmallegger & Carson, 2008; Wenger, 2008), or identify potential strengths and weaknesses of the tourist destination in question, which may lead to ideas and inspiration for developing and improving products (Schmallegger & Carson, 2008). Woodside, Cruickshank, & Dehuang (2007) also explain that this type of narrative (UGC) usually represent unique associations and emotional high points that visitor are likely to retrieve and report automatically, or in other words, that which they consider worth telling others, providing creative clues for positioning a destination uniquely and meaningfully in the minds of potential future visitors.

What is more, given that much of bloggers' reputation and credibility depends on their skills in producing narrative, images, audio, etc., in most cases the generated content tends to be of high quality. It is therefore a way of showing the destination in a 'professional' and 'honest' light, taking advantage of the credibility that information users (and potential consumers) attribute to this type of content, due to the fact that it is not generated directly by the DMOs themselves, but by people like them who travel to the destination and write about their experiences independently, owners of their own brand.

It is clear, then, that bloggers are prescribers of both the destination and the brands, organizations and businesses they interact with, for their respective countries of origin and/or their followers. However, it is worth identifying the individual leaders of different communities or groups in order to define which specific people to work with to reach the largest possible target audience via just a few prescribers and better target the efforts and resources of DMOs and other promotional organizations. The aim should be to work *through a few influential people* with a greater number of influential mid-level prescribers who also act as communication multipliers.

2.3 Blogtrips (Previous experiences on the Costa Brava).

Schmallegger & Carson (2008) refer to a strategy that has proven very successful: sponsoring professional bloggers to write about their travels, whether in company or destination blogs, or in their own personal blogs. According to these authors, several state and regional Tourism Organizations in the US started to use this blogging approach in 2005, inviting bloggers to tour the region and write about their trips and travel experiences with the aim of obtaining a variety of comments about the regions' attractions. These authors go on to explain that the benefits offered to the sponsored bloggers included covering all travel-related expenses (such as airfares, accommodation, entrance fees to attractions, etc.), and sometimes additional travel allowances. Subsequently, DMOs and promotional agencies from different destinations around the world began to organize trips aimed at these digital prescribers.

Although blogtrips and press trips are sometimes considered to be the same, they are in fact very different promotional activities. The fact that the people are different means that the media and goals for the activity change.

Traditional media look for very specific topics, sometimes determined by the editor of the medium, while bloggers are their own brand and need to create content in real time – or most do – as well as find stories that suit their audience. Therefore, bloggers/content creators are more focused on finding stories, and the DMOs have to provide more memorable experiences and unique opportunities for each of them. So the activity schedules are usually completely different from those of the traditional media.

Some characteristics that make bloggers or content creators different from traditional media are: aunthenticity, real time sharing and storytelling, personality, interaction and engagement, compelling meta story and global audience – in specific segments. These provide huge value for DMOs and brands, which other types of media or traditional marketing activities cannot, since the audience has lost faith in most official marketing communications.

For its part, in October 2010 the Costa Brava Tourist Board, which is responsible for marketing and promoting the Costa Brava (Girona, Catalonia) as a destination, first decided to commit to the innovative promotional action of the 'Blogtrip #InCostaBrava' project, with the tagline '16 bloggers, seven days, one destination', creating synergies between the territory, storytelling and online communication (Marin, 2011).

The aim of the project was to show bloggers from the United States the experiences, landscapes and products offered by the Costa Brava in order that they create stories and

narratives adapted to the interests of their demographically diverse readers and achieve a wide dissemination of the destination on social networks in real time (Marin, 2010).

Some months before the blogtrip took place, the company Playbrand was commissioned to conduct a study to monitor the 'Costa Brava' brand and highlight key elements and values of the brand worth taking into consideration. In addition, positive and negative aspects standing out from the bloggers' conversations were also to be identified. Taking into account the results of the study and the communication strategy and action taken by the destination reflected in the 2011-2015 Strategic Tourism Plan, the decision was taken to promote the themes of 'nature, culture and gastronomy'.

The blogtrip also had some specific objectives: to improve the presence of the brand on social media, generate quality and eye-catching content, associate the brand with current values and innovate promotional tools, improve awareness of the brand on social networks, increase traffic to the destination's website and improve its indexing and ranking on search engines.

Monitoring was carried out over five months, during and after the blogtrip, using tools such as TweetReach, SocialMention and OpenStreeMap. A total of 44 Web posts were analysed to determine the orientation, perception and image of the tourist destination generated by the bloggers' experiences on the trip.

By September 2011, the bloggers had published a total of 80 posts on their respective blogs, of which 23 were selected by the prestigious international travel guide Lonely Planet for publication on its website. Using data provided confidentially by the bloggers, it was estimated that more than 527,000 visits had been made to their different posts, while approximately 2 million visits were calculated to have been made to the posts published on Lonely Planet, according to traffic figures for the website. In addition, it was estimated that the more than 500 photographs posted on the Web by the bloggers received over 100,000 visits (Marin, 2010).

With regard to the hashtag #InCostaBrava, more than 17 million Twitter impressions were obtained and it was a worldwide TrendingTopic (#TT) for 4 of the 7 days of the blogtrip, reaching 27 countries. According to the organizers, this made it a highly significant action because a direct promotional action had never previously reached so many countries (Marin, 2010).

Furthermore, a study of the texts used in the posts revealed that they had promoted the values of 'nature, culture and gastronomy', as defined in the aims of the action, and mentions that stood out in the posts were: 'Dalí' (culture), 'Ferrán Adrià, Roca brothers' (gastronomy) and terms related to the beach, the coast and the inland region of the Costa Brava (nature).

Based on these results, it was concluded that the articles published by participants on the Blogtrip #InCostaBrava had a high degree of prescriptive power and used language very much linked to experience, emotions and feelings, as well as telling stories and giving micro-accounts of experiences at the destination. This contrasts with other travel blogs, which limit themselves to describing the chronology of the trip and do not delve into stories or relate to feelings of any kind.

3. Case Study: World Congress of Travel Bloggers 'TBEX Europe Costa Brava 2015'.

Organizing and hosting events has proven to be an effective branding strategy for countries, regions and/or destinations (Jiménez Morales, 2011). One example is the case of the 2010 Football World Cup (Knott, Fyall, & Jones, 2015): it not only raised awareness about the host country, South Africa, and changed the perception of it among the international community, but also positioned it as a tourist destination thanks to unprecedented media presence and coverage, through both the traditional and social media. As Knott et al. (2015) explain, this constituted brand development at a deeper level: from mere awareness to knowledge and understanding of the nation brand.

Bodies responsible for tourism destination management now make efforts and define strategies on the basis of this Public Relations technique, leading to cities with notable tourist attributes becoming common venues for conferences and conventions. It is clear that the main objective of this type of action is to generate attention and interest in the host destination and the brands involved in organizing the event both through direct communications and those generated by the media covering it (Míguez González, 2011).

However, if these communications are not only generated and disseminated by the traditional media (television, printed press, radio, etc.) but those attending the event are also people whose professional life involves writing about the different experiences offered by a destination, leaders of online communities who enjoy a high degree of credibility and whose posts are widely published on social media, then the benefits for the host country, region and/or destination will increase exponentially.

Such is the case with the World Congress of Travel Bloggers TBEX (Travel Blog Exchange), which has grown to become the world's largest gathering of travel bloggers, writers, new media content creators, and social media savvy travel industry professionals. It also attracts some of

the world's most recognizable brands, as well as various tourist boards and sponsors looking to connect with bloggers and writers.

The aim of TBEX is to mobilize bloggers and help them promote themselves, monetize their media and improve their work, while also offering support to public relations firms and industry professionals to connect with content creators and obtain benefits for their brands and destinations (Patronat de Turisme Costa Brava Girona).

Each year, TBEX is associated with different destinations in North America, Europe and Asia Pacific, which host the Congress and provide space and facilities for talks and activities related to the event. One to three events are held per year, each in a different destination (Travel Blog Exchange, 2016).

3.1 Background: World Congress of Travel Bloggers 'TBEX Europe Girona 2012'.

In 2012, the Costa Brava Tourist Board and CatalanTourist Board signed an agreement with New Media Expo (the North American company responsible for organizing the TBEX Congress) to hold that year's European Congress in Girona, Catalonia, on 21 and 22 September (Costa Brava Girona Convention Bureau, 2012).

TBEX Europe Girona 2012 had 371 participants. A total of 7 day trips were conducted with 120 bloggers around the destination, and 6 blogtrips were organized, with the participation of 53 bloggers. In addition, 800 nights of free accommodation were made available to bloggers after the Congress.

The hashtags #TBEX, #InCostaBrava and #InPyrenees were used to monitor conversations, and the tools HASHTRACKINGbeta, TweetReach and TOPSYPRO were used to measure the impact on the Net and social media during the period analysed: from 8 August to 30 September 2012.

According to the results, 13,843 contributors posted 26,967 tweets on Twitter, generating a total of 147,280,979 impressions and reaching an audience of 28,563,676 people in 63 countries, the highest numbers being in the United States, Spain and the United Kingdom, respectively (Patronat de Turisme Costa Brava Girona).

3.2 World Congress of Travel Bloggers 'TBEX Europe Costa Brava 2015'.

The Costa Brava Tourist Board decided to apply to host the European edition of the World Congress of Travel Bloggers TBEX again in 2015, holding it from April 30 to May 2 at the Evenia Olympic Resort in Lloret de Mar, Costa Brava, Girona. The action specifically addressed one of the aims set out in the 2011-2015 Strategic Plan for Tourism, that of improving 2.0 communication (Marin, 2011) for the brand 'Costa Brava Pirineu de Girona' through online prescribers, including travel bloggers.

Although TBEX was the main focus of the strategy, other activities such as excursions and blogtrips were also organized, these being promotional activities that the Board has carried out before, but rarely together (the exception being TBEX Europe Girona 2012) and never on such a large scale.

On this occasion, more than 700 travel bloggers from different countries around the world participated in the Congress, some taking part in different blogtrips, excursions and other activities throughout Catalonia (mainly in Girona and Barcelona) before and after the Congress, organized by the respective tourism promotion organizations and 722 partner companies. This allowed bloggers to get to know the region and make the most of their trip, giving coverage to both the TBEX event and the destination.

A total of 16 excursions were undertaken with 151 participants in the province of Girona, 22 blogtrips were organized throughout Catalonia by the corresponding tourist boards, with 169 participants, and 11 blogtrips were conducted in the province of Girona, with 65 participants. Activities included the fourth edition of the Blogtrip #InPyrenees from 4 to 11 May, organized by the Costa Brava Tourist Board together with the regional councils, and during which the twelve guest bloggers were able to discover the Girona Pyrenees and different activities in the

region. In addition, during the ten days after the event, 3,200 nights of free accommodation were made available to participants around Catalonia to allow them to discover the destination for themselves and create quality content.

3.3 Research Design

3.3.1   Methodological considerations

For TBEX Europe Costa Brava 2015, a *pioneering* study was conducted of the conversations and impact on social networks generated by the Congress, activities, blogtrips and excursions; the hashtags #TBEX and #TBEX2015 (New Media Expo), #InCostaBrava and #InPyrenees (Costa Brava Tourist Board), #CatalunyaExperience (Catalan Tourist Board) and #LloretdeMar (Lloret Tourist Board, the Congress venue) were defined for this purpose. Monitoring took place between 11 March and 10 May, 2015.

The quantitative variables measured by La Magnética were studied qualitatively to assess the event's impact on social media. As Mishler (1990) points out, qualitative studies ultimately aim to describe and explain (at some level) a pattern of relationships. According to Huberman & Miles (1994), qualitative studies are especially well suited to finding causal relationships; they can look directly at the local processes underlying a temporal series of events and states, showing how these led to specific outcomes. In effect, this makes it possible to understand not just that a particular thing happened, but how and why it happened. This explanation can be achieved either deductively or inductively (Huberman & Miles, 1994). In the case of the data collected from online activity related to TBEX 2015, a mix of inductive and deductive analysis was used.

Since this is a case study, it was necessary to select online tools with features that would allow us to reliably measure (Huberman & Miles, 1994) the impressions, reach, daily tweets and web traffic on Twitter, but also on other social media for an event like TBEX 2015 (**see table 1**). In fact, similar variables were studied for TBEX 2012, but differences in the monitoring methods and tools used (due to availability at the time) do not allow for an exact comparison of data for the two events. However, it is possible to provide an overview and assessment of the findings for both editions.

Table 1
Online tools used to measure the diferent variables on Twitter and blogs and other media.

SOCIAL MEDIA	VARIABLES	TOOLS
Twitter	• Number of tweets • Potential impressions • Audience (Reach) • Countries • Tweets per country.	• Crowdbooster (discontinued Dec 31, 2016) • Twitter REST API
	• Number of tweets sent per hashtag from 3 May to 2 June 2015	Analytics by Topsy (discontinued)
	• Structure of the conversations on Twitter. (Interactions)	• Twitter REST API • Software developed by La Magnética for gathering information from Twitter API and processing it • Gephi for the visualizations
Blogs and other media	• Country of origin of the users who read the posts (Main Markets).	• SimilarWeb*

*Moz was used for variables related to the SEO importance of websites that have linked moz+SemRush+Google Search Console (formerly Google Webmaster Tools) to see which new links we have received, how important the websites that link to us are and which countries they are from.
Source: Authors' own using data supplied by La Magnética.

The monitoring work for TBEX Europe Costa Brava 2015 was conducted by the company 'La Magnética'. The results were compiled in the report 'TBEX Costa Brava Catalunya 2015: Analysis of the Impact on Social Networks' and presented to the Costa Brava Tourist Board. The most important findings are presented in this document.

As mentioned earlier in this article, our goal was to analyse how the content generated by travel bloggers and users attending TBEX Europe Costa Brava 2015 spread through the network. We analysed the whole structure of conversations around TBEX 2015 with graph theory tools and software.

There are several social media monitoring and analysis tools that can help a Tourist Board to build a base of influential and engaged followers. These followers' communities must be diverse enough to ensure a wide dissemination of the contents related to the destination or to choose a set of influencers that meets the requirements – influence, engagement, diversity – for a particular marketing action. Some of these tools provide an easy way to pick influencers focusing on their standard influence measure on social networks (i.e. klout) or their diversity and ability to disseminate the information (i.e. followerwonk). Some others provide lists of influencers based on keywords or hashtags and locations (i.e. Audiense, formerly SocialBro), which is a starting point to pick the more suitable ones for an especific marketing action.

We also made an effort to go beyond aggregated variables (followers, retweets, potential impressions) and include within our methodology an approach capable of coping with this 'social' or 'networked' structure of social media in order to detect the key nodes for maintaining the information flow, and to determine which audiences were reached through certain users. We measured not only the outcome of TBEX 2015 but how this outcome was reached.

It is important to mention that the online marketing department of the Costa Brava Girona Tourist Board kept an updated list of all tweets and Facebook and blog posts around TBEX 2015. An overwhelming majority of them were positive regarding the destination and the diversity of tourism products and services it offers. Having several hundreds of travel bloggers on our doorstep was an invaluable opportunity for reaching new audiences, and analysing 'reach' was therefore our foremost consideration. This is one of the reasons why this study focused on analysing quantitative variables.

As for the variables measured, we used 'reach' and 'potential impressions' mainly because they were the metric available. You can determine the actual impressions of the tweets published in your profile, but not in other people's profiles. However, this metric was not available back in May 2015 (not even for the tweets posted by the Convention Bureau account of the Costa Brava Girona Tourist Board).

We used state-of-the-art technology back in March - May 2015: SimilarWeb.com. This tool has proved a reliable source for assessing estimated website traffic (as well for other related variables) when applied to tourist websites with traffic from different countries (as opposed to tools mainly able to assess US traffic). We have tested it with tourist websites that have

provided data from their Google Analytics dashboard. On the other hand, at the time of TBEX 2015, SimilarWeb only provided an estimate of desktop visits (for their estimates to be calculated they need broader data from several sources: mobile ISP, Google mobile search – keyword monthly estimates, as well as data tools such as SEMrush – or similar capable of providing local mobile SEO results around the world). Nowadays SimilarWeb also provides an estimate of both mobile and desktop visits. A re-assessment of the estimated traffic of these websites is possible, but limited to a 6-month timespan.

3.4 Results and Analysis of the Impact on Social Networks - TBEX Europe Costa Brava 2015 (Source: La Magnética):

3.4.1   Twitter:

Twitter is the most important social network for measuring the impact of an event like TBEX, as the information it provides allows interactions among participants to be analysed and their audiences to be determined at a level of detail that is difficult to obtain with other networks.

3.4.1.1 Potential impressions, audience, number of tweets and countries reached in conversations about TBEX:

Table 2
Main hashtags used in Twitter conversations related to the Congress 'TBEX Europe Costa Brava 2015' between 11 March and 10 May 2015.

Hashtags	Tweets	Users Publishing	Tweets Per User	Potential Impressions	Reach[a]	Tweets Received Per Unique User	Countries
#TBEX	18,044	3,670	4.9	133,567,931	7,483,752	17.93	86
#InCostaBrava	11,077	2,567	4.3	53,035,786	4,246,413	12.5	73
#InPyrenees	1,355	464	2.9	10,792,873	1,559,250	6.9	28
#CatalunyaExperience	3,168	1,333	2.4	8,479,268	1,622,701	5.2	48
#LloretdeMar	4,716	1,463	3.2	13,174,122	4,208,858	3.1	54
#TBEX2015[b]	2,418	773	3.1	10,117,437	1,947,444	5.2	42
TODOS	**32,164**	**6,877**	**4.7**	**186,003,427[c]**	**11,221,225[c]**	**16.58**	**102**

[a]Number of unique users in audience.
[b]Monitoring began on April 29, the day before the Congress started.
[c]The difference between the sums and totals is due to the elimination of duplicate tweets which included several hashtags, reducing the number of potential impressions from 229 to 186 million and the reach from 21 million to half that amount.

The results shown in **Table 2** indicate that **6,877 users** posted **32,164 tweets** withat least one of the main hashtags, generating over **186 million total potential impressions** (the number of times the tweets were viewed) among an audience of **11,221,225 of users** who follow profiles related to travel and tourism. The impact of this variable, potential impressions, is especially beneficial for the destination. As Arnegger & Herz (2015) report in a study related to the impact of a mega-event on the image of Azerbaijan, repeated exposure to a destination inevitably raises awareness, creates higher general knowledge of the country and thus creates a more positive country image, which may influence future tourism revenues.

Of the tweets posted using the different hashtags, 56% (18,044) contained at least the hashtag #TBEX as the mainhashtag. It is also important to note that #InCostaBrava (the Costa Brava Tourist Board's hashtag) was used more than twice as much (11,077) as #LloretdeMar (Lloret Tourist Board's hashtag – used 4,716 times) and more than three timesas much as #CatalunyaExperience (that of the Catalan Tourist Board – used 3,168 times).

The analysis carried out by La Magnética on the Costa Brava Tourist Board's Twitter environment allowed for a better understanding of these data: although both of its profiles @costabrava (local) and @VisitCostaBrava (international) have fewer followers than the Catalan Tourist Boardprofile and others with a similar target audience and number of followers, the Costa Brava Tourist Board had more frequent interaction with a high percentage of its followers, as well as constant contact (bidirectional, not only mentions) with bloggers who had been invited on a blogtrip. Very few destinations have maintained the same strength of relationships as the Costa Brava Tourist Board (La Magnética).
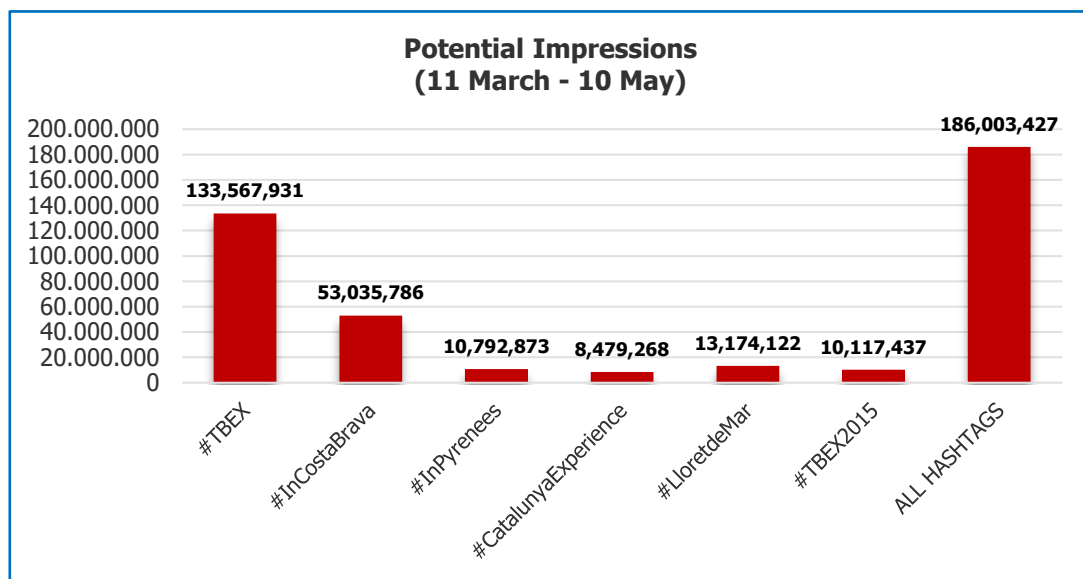

Fig. 1. Potential impressions generated on Twitter, between 11 March and 10 May 2015, by tweets posted by those attending the TBEX Europe Costa Brava 2015 Congress, for each of the main hashtags monitored.

As **Fig. 1** shows, 72% of the potential impressions (over 133.5 million) were generated by tweets containing at least the main hashtag #TBEX. This was therefore the main hashtag with the greatest repercussion on Twitter.

It is important to note that in addition to potential impressions, which represent the number of times the tweets have been seen by different users (a single user being able to receive several impressions via different tweets or retweets), there is another variable, referred to as 'reach', which considers the number of individual users reached by one or more tweets.
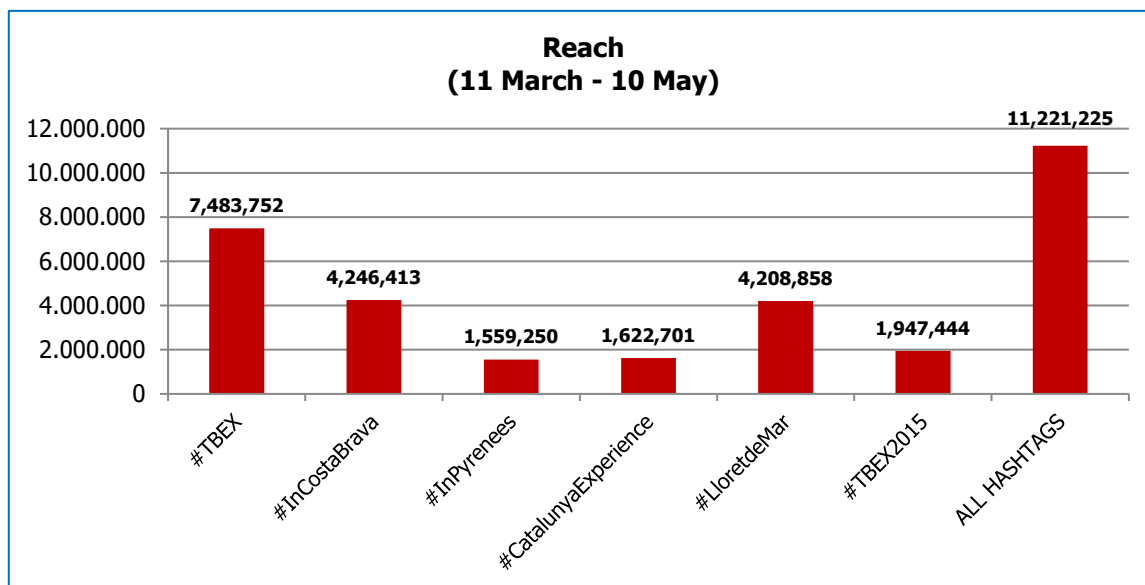
**Reach
(11 March - 10 May)**

Fig. 2. Number of 'individual' Twitter users reached by the tweets posted by those attending the TBEX Europe Costa Brava 2015 Congress between 11 March and 10 May 2015, for each of the main hashtags monitored.

The total audience for all hashtags without duplicates was estimated at more than 11 million users, of which two thirds (around 7.5 million) were potential readers of the main hashtag #TBEX (**Fig. 2**). By contrast, #InCostaBrava reached an audience of about 4,350,000 people (**Fig. 2**).
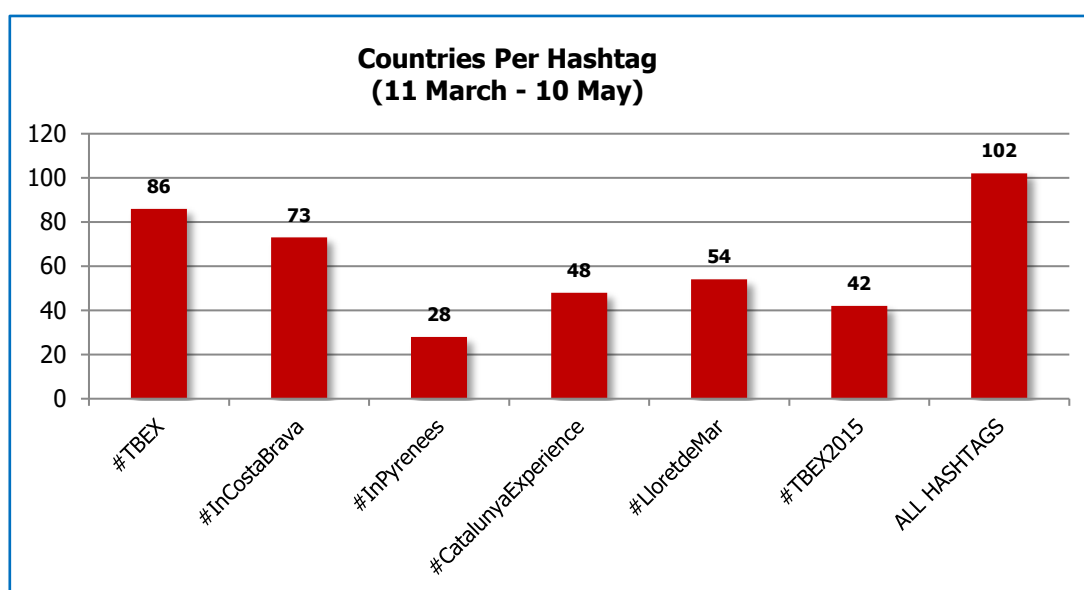
**Countries Per Hashtag
(11 March - 10 May)**

Fig. 3. Number of different countries represented by attendees who posted tweetsat Costa Brava TBEX Europe 2015 for each of the monitored hashtags, between 11 March and 10 May 2015.

According to **Fig. 3**, the hashtags with the most international repercussion were #TBEX, with 86 countries, and #InCostaBrava, with 73. This provides an overview of the international scope of the Congress and its impact on the dissemination of Catalan brands. In total, taking into account all hashtags, users from 102 countries generated the 186 million potential impressions on Twitter.
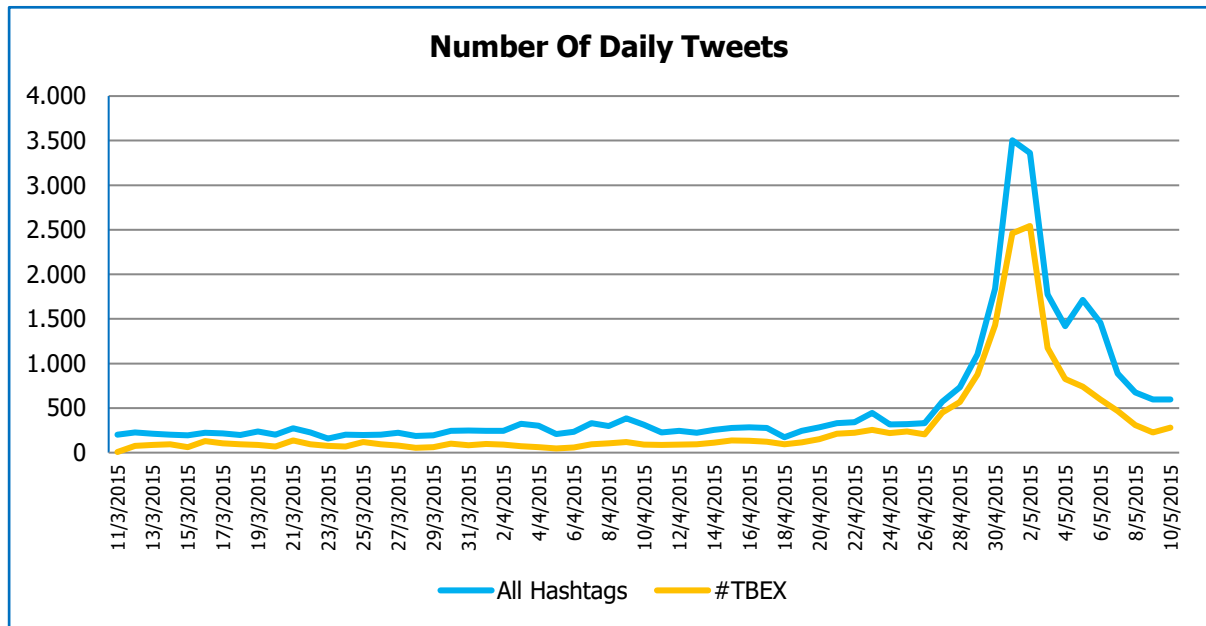

Fig. 4. Number of daily tweets sent by TBEX Europe Costa Brava 2015 Congress attendees prior to the event (from 11 March to 29 April), during the event (from April 30 to May 2) and after the event (from 3 to 10 May), comparing those tweets that included all hashtags and those which only included the #TBEX hashtag.

As **Fig. 4** shows, 43% of all tweets sent in the period studied were posted between April 28 and May 4, 2015, coinciding with the days when the Congress was held, with an average of nearly 2,000 tweets per day (including all hashtags).

In addition, by calculating the daily difference between the number of tweets with all hashtags (blue line) and the number of tweets with the #TBEX hashtag (orange line), we obtain the number of tweets without the #TBEX hashtag, which provides an overview of the additional publicity TBEX gave to the tourism institutions/brands involved in organizing the event.
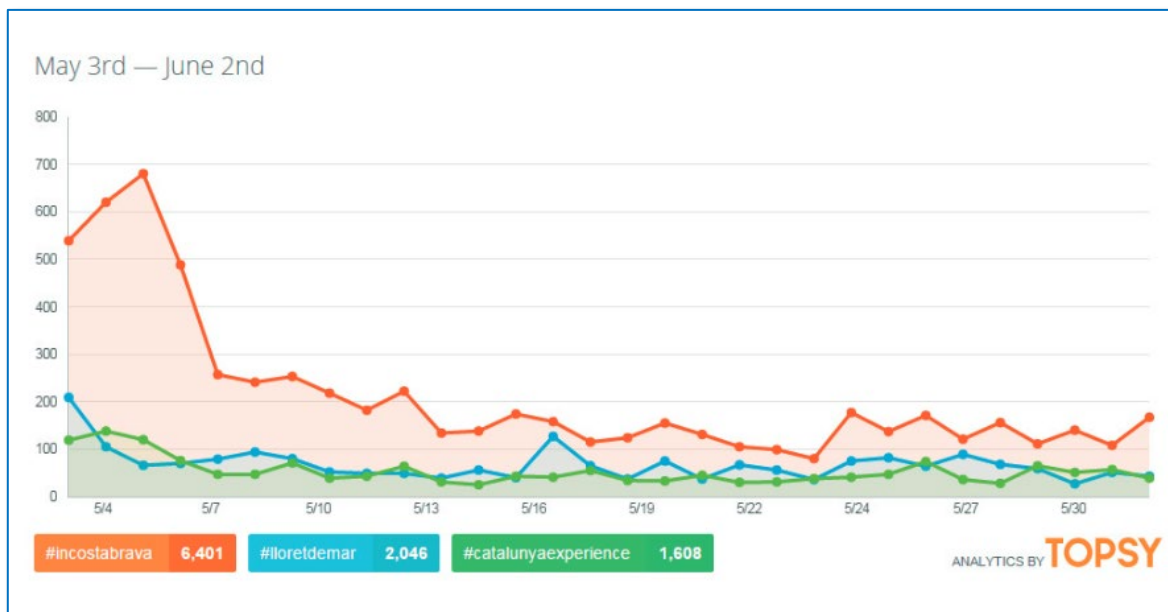
Fig. 5. Number of tweets sent by TBEX Europe Costa Brava 2015 Congress attendees per day with the hashtags #InCostaBrava, #LloretdeMar and #Catalunya Experience, during the period from 3 May to 2 June 2015.

Using the tool TopsyAnalytics, La Magnética analysed the hashtags #InCostaBrava, #LloretdeMar and #CatalunyaExperience, concluding that #InCostaBrava was most benefitted by the TBEX Congress.

As **Fig. 5** shows, during the Congress and in the following weeks, the three hashtags obtained between 900 and 1,000 tweets on three days (1, 5 and 6 May) and the figure remained above 250 daily tweets for two weeks (starting the day before the opening of TBEX and continuing until a week after its closure). Moreover, between 100 and 150 tweets were recorded with #InCostaBrava per day in late May and early June, while between 40 and 80 tweets were sent per day with the other hashtags.

As for #InPyrenees (which was left out of the comparison in **Fig. 5**), on the one hand it had fewer mentions in tweets, but on the other its use increased between 4 and 10 May, that is, after the Congress had finished and the blogtrip #InPyrenees had begun.
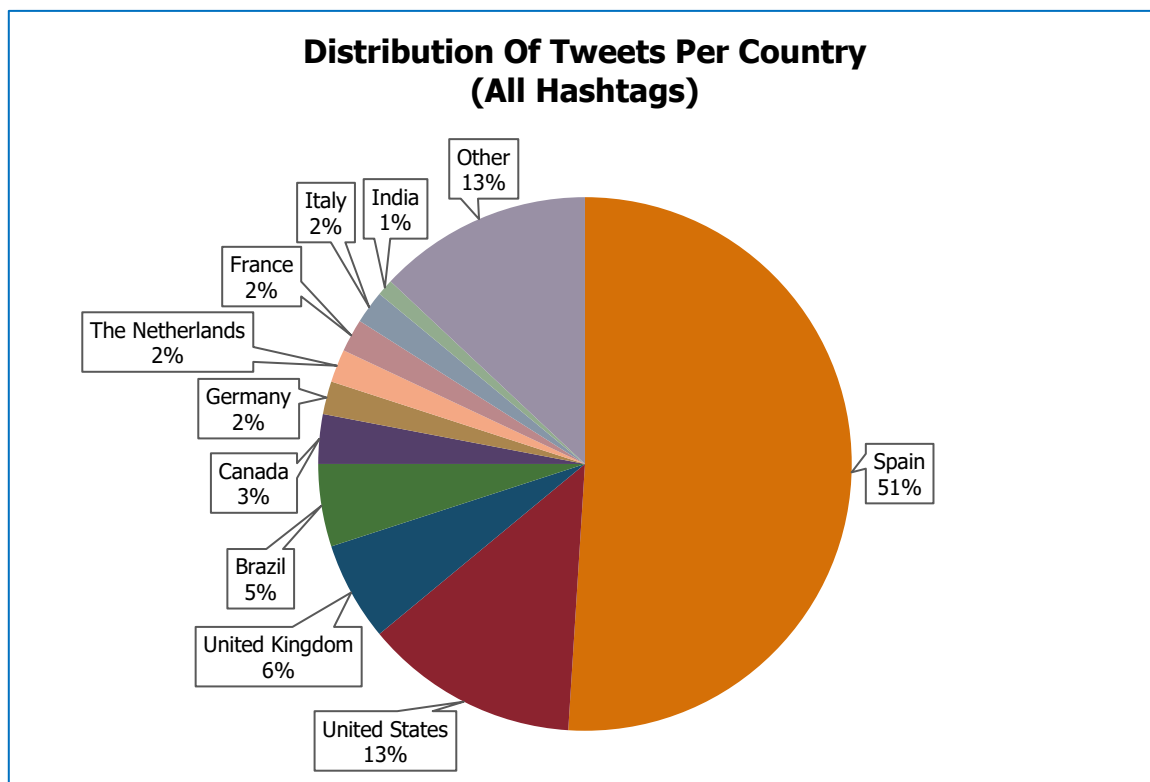
**Distribution Of Tweets Per Country
(All Hashtags)**

Fig. 6. Distribution of tweets sent by participants at TBEX Europe Costa Brava 2015 between 11 March and 10 May 2015, by country (taking into account all hashtags).

Georeferencing was possible for 65% (21,120) of all tweets posted using any of the monitored hashtags (32,380). Thus, bloggers participating in the Congress were found to be representing 102 different countries (**Fig. 3 and Fig. 6**). Although the tweets were posted from the Costa Brava, bloggers were assigned a location based on their user profile, which they themselves had defined. This also revealed other valuable data, such as the fact that in most cases the bloggers' audience was related, but not linked, to their country of origin and native language. Specifically, Spain stood out with 51% of the tweets posted using any of the hashtags, then the US with 13% and the UK with 6% (**Fig. 6**).

The countries posting most tweets coincided with the main markets where the Costa Brava Girona Pyrenees brand is marketed: European markets, in addition to the United States and Canada. However, there was less repercussion in some European markets, such as France and Germany; with regard to this, it should be taken into account that a significant part of the British and American bloggers' audience is distributed throughout several European countries.

3.4.1.2 Users:

Table 3

Ranking of the 20 Twitter users who generated most **potential impressions** at TBEX Europe Costa Brava 2015, including all major hashtags. The most important data are highlighted in red.

User	Total Potential Impressions	Direct Potential Impressions[a]	Potential Impressions per RTs[b]	% of Potential Impressions per RTs received	Original Tweets Posted	RTs of other tweets[c]
theplanetd	1,1438,846	8,898,085	2,540,761	22.2%	77	8
MrScottEddy	1,0236,310	10,112,657	123,653	1.2%	7	10
VisitCostaBrava	7,883,801	3,616,737	4,267,064	54.1%	214	121
TBEXevents	7,631,903	5,173,517	2,458,386	32.2%	147	48
LandLopers	7,483,731	5,526,356	1,957,375	26.2%	76	0
momfluential	6,875,253	6,779,394	95,859	1.4%	34	7
costabrava	5,625,125	4,776,679	848,446	15.1%	161	49
exploretravel1	4,641,370	4,641,370	0	0.0%	0	22
HostelRocket	4,470,454	4,318,567	151,887	3.4%	5	36
CoachDeb	4,344,733	4,075,231	269,502	6.2%	71	75
EverywhereTrip	4,106,204	3,478,342	627,862	15.3%	16	7
HusbandInTow	4,074,391	1,996,728	2,077,663	51.0%	96	65
NormanBuffong	3,642,287	3,642,287	0	0.0%	0	8
redhunttravel	3,593,439	2,784,653	808,786	22.5%	365	5
Sihpromatum	3,448,511	3,160,109	288,402	8.4%	109	16
catexperience	3,264,336	2,930,146	334,190	10.2%	12	43
ottsworld	3,059,709	1,671,699	1,388,010	45.4%	47	8
TravelMedia_ie	2,805,063	1,642,760	1,162,303	41.4%	319	117
Travelogx	2,721,422	2,201,617	519,805	19.1%	364	3
jaumemarin	2,518,835	1,502,946	1,015,889	40.3%	96	202
TOTAL	10,3865,723	82,929,880	20,935,843	20.2%	2,216	850

[a] The potential direct impressions calculated in this table are the result of multiplying number of profile followers by number of tweets and re-tweets posted.
[b] Retweets by other users.
[c] Retweets of other users' tweets.

The **total potential impressions** are calculated by adding direct potential impressions (i.e. those generated directly in followers of the profile that posted the tweet or tweets) and potential impressions generated by Retweets (RTs) (i.e. in followers of the profile that has retweeted the original post). **This is the key variable reflecting the impact of each user in the conversation.**

To better understand the data shown in **Table 3**, we must bear in mind that:

- The Costa Brava Tourist Board's international profile (@VisitCostaBrava) comes in 3rd place for total potential impressions generated despite having only 11,000 followers, while the local profile (@costabrava), with 23,500 followers (at the time of monitoring), comes in only 7th place.

  This is not only due to the former profile posting more tweets (335 vs. 210 by @costabrava, taking into account original posts and RTs by both profiles to other publications), but also to it having more RTs thanks to it being the English language profile which interacted more with those attending TBEX.

- If we analyse the direct potential impressions, i.e. potential impressions generated only by the number of followers, without taking into account possible RTs and mentions, it is clear that the @costabrava profile (with nearly twice as many followers) would be better positioned in the ranking than @VisitCostaBrava.

- The first two profiles in the ranking (@theplanetd and @MrScottEddy) have over 100,000 and 600,000 followers, respectively, and therefore start from a much larger base of total potential impressions. This means the third position of @VisitCostaBrava is even more significant.

The above demonstrates the importance of knowing how to manoeuvre on the Net: it is important to be active not only posting tweets but also receiving RTs and/or mentions, especially from influential users (Khan et al., 2017). This leads to a higher number of potential impressions and therefore number of potential readers of the tweet. We might even talk about a 'multiplier effect' for tweets posted by a profile depending on the potential impressions they obtain through RTs (**Table 3**) (La Magnética).

On the other hand, these **20 profiles generated 56% of total potential impressions** (103.8 million). Of these, 80% (around 83 million) were direct potential impressions and 20% (around 21 million) were achieved through RTs received (**Table 3**).

3.4.1.3 Interactions:

One of the most valuable contributions of this study is having been able to monitor online conversations for the first time, although it has been equally valuable to identify and analyse interactions between the different users involved in those conversations. Interactions are considered to be mentions in other users' tweets, i.e. a user's profile name (e.g. @VisitCostaBrava) being added to a tweet or being retweeted (RT) (La Magnética).

Detecting repeat interactions has also allowed us to understand the structure of the relationships existing around TBEX, identify influencers and different communities within the network and detect underlying structures.

This structure of interactions has been represented in a graph (**Fig. 7**) which, although using a mathematical structure, provides a graphical representation that facilitates analysis.

In this case, the graph consists of a series of objects called **nodes**, **which represent the profiles of users** (and whose size is proportional to the profile's relevance within the conversation) and arrows (whose thickness depends on the number of interactions that occurred) between pairs of nodes, called **edges**, which **represent different mentions and RTs among these users**. Colour has also been added to the graph in order to identify the different communities, also called 'clusters'.
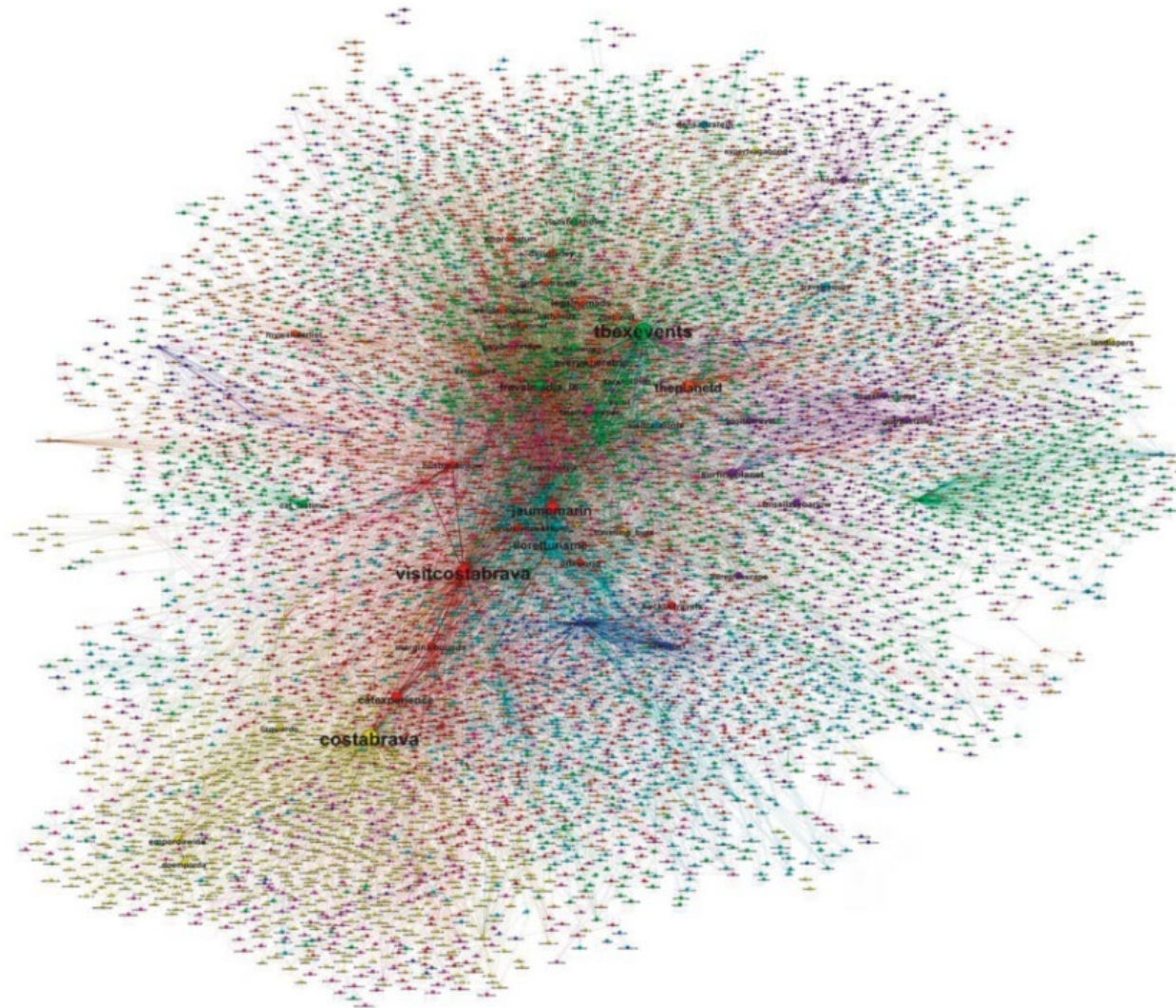
Fig. 7. Complete graph with all hashtags. Graphical representation of users who participated in conversations about TBEX Europe Costa Brava 2015 during the period analysed (11 March to 10 May 2015), and the relationships between them (mentions and RTs).

For this graph, only **6,000 nodes** (fewer than the total of 6,877 users who posted a tweet with one of the hashtags - **Table 1**) and **20,243 edges** or interactions were considered. This indicates that a percentage of users did not mention or retweet any other profile, and/or did not have their posted tweets retweeted.

Table 4
The 10 most influential Twitter profiles in conversations related to TBEX Europe Costa Brava2015.

Profiles with most influence	
1	tbexevents
2	costabrava
3	visitcostabrava
4	jaumemarin
5	theplanetd
6	lloretturisme
7	catexperience
8	travelmedia_ie
9	Everywheretrip
10	surfingplanet

As **Fig. 7** and **Table 4** show, the profiles @TBEXevents, @costabrava and @VisitCostaBrava stood out as being the most important in the conversation in terms of centrality, that is, due to their contribution to the total graph structure. Naturally, this is because these profiles belong to the institutions that jointly organized the Congress: the Costa Brava Tourist Board and New Media Expo (TBEX).

It should be noted that in this case, profiles' influence was determined by the number of mentions and RTs they received as well as the influence of other profiles that mentioned and retweeted their posts, not by the number of followers.

In order to visualize and better understand the relationship between these profiles and others within the network,the data were filtered considering only those profiles with the greatest relevance in the conversations to obtain a 'coregraph' (**Fig. 8**). **This graph comprises less than a ninth (515 profiles) of the total number of initial users (6,000), but represents more than a quarter (5,590) of all interactions (20,243)**; in other words, a very large part of the conversations related to TBEX occurred in this nucleus.

Fig. 8. Coregraphwith all hashtags. Graphical representation of the 515 users of most relevance in discussions about TBEX Europe Costa Brava 2015 during the period analysed (11 March to 10 May 2015), and the relationships between them (mentions and RTs).

3.4.2 Blogs and other media (on-line version):

Unlike social network posts, blogs and publications in other online media occur on a broader timescale, some even months after visiting the destination. They have the advantage of being available on the Net for years and some take on such significance that they are positioned high in the ranking of Googlesearch results, particularly those in influential blogs that attract a high number of links to a website. In addition, some publications of this type contain links to the official websites of the Costa Brava Tourist Board, the Catalan Tourist Board or the Lloret Tourist Board, which contributes to increasing visitor flows (Search Engine Optimization) to these sites (La Magnética).

For this study, monitoring was carried out using competitive intelligence tools, SEO tools and data from Google Web Master Tools. The results were as follows: **368 posts were published related to TBEX and blogtrips** conducted around Catalonia on **128 different blogs and websites between April 30 and August 5, 2015**.

It was also possible to determine the country of origin of visitors to blogs and websites that mentioned TBEX, thus providing an overview of the international reach achieved by the Costa Brava TBEX.
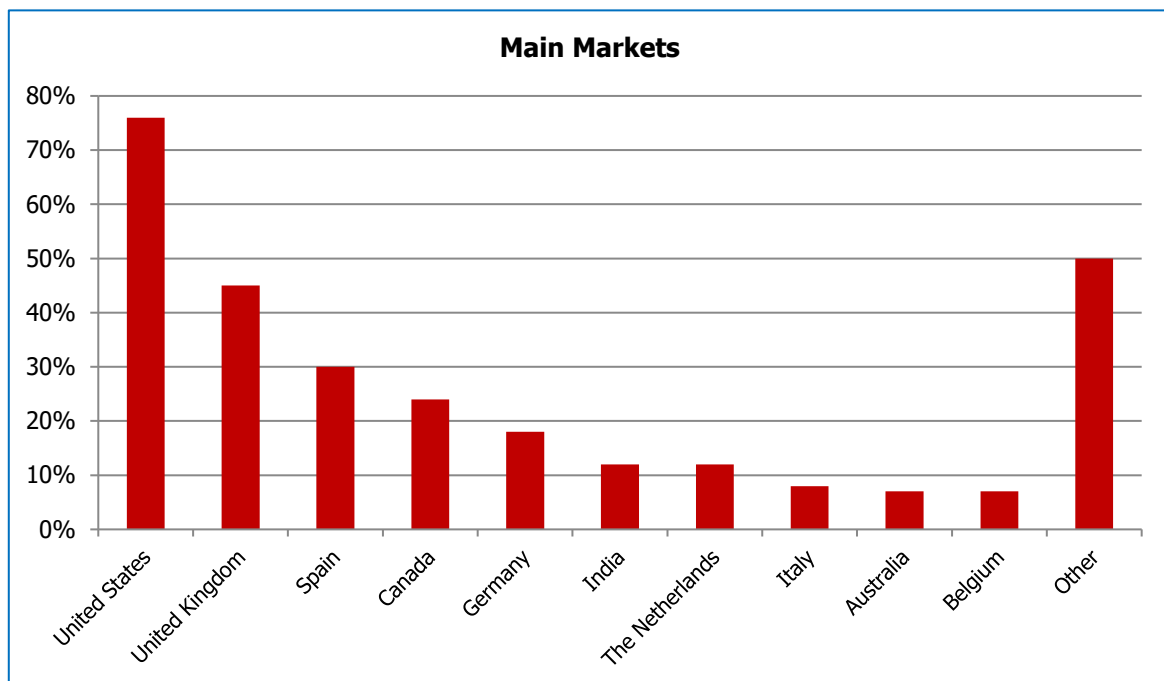

Fig. 9. Estimated percentage of total blogs and websites that mentioned TBEX Europe Costa Brava 2015 read by users in each country.

The most relevant markets were the US (76%) and the UK (45%), probably because most publications were written in English. In general, the markets with the highest impact coincided with the Costa Brava and Girona Pyrenees' main consumer markets (La Magnética).

3.5 Conclusions:

To succeed on social media, any DMO needs influential and engaged followers whose communities are diverse enough to ensure a wide dissemination for the destinations' posts and events such as blogtrips or product trips. This is precisely what the study and the tools used allowed us to identify: the list of influential users that helped us to widely disseminate the contents related to TBEX and the local tourism brands, and to reach new audiences.

From the qualitative analysis of the results of the study conducted by La Magnética it was possible to identify the leaders or influencers that allowed certain communities to be reached (**Fig. 8**). We could also see which bloggers could have been left out without a significant loss of 'reach'. This is especially relevant when planning the list of bloggers that meet the criteria – influence, engagement, diversity – for future blogtrips in accordance with their particular interests (and those of their audiences) and the values of the brand we want to communicate. Furthermore, we can also analyse audience overlap beforehand and improve planning of the blogtrip.

It is important to note that many studies have analysed the outcome of a social media action or campaign involving travel bloggers and the extent to which they influence the target audience when spreading their message (Khan et al., 2017). In fact, Weimann (1983) posits that WOM plays a role not only in the flow of information but also in the flow of influence. Accordingly, awareness, interest and action towards a destination brand may be influenced by source characteristics (De Bruyn & Lilien, 2008), like their position within the structure of the network and the quality of the contents they produce. Additionally, although most of these studies rely on aggregated variables –followers, impressions and so on- we have not focused on the outcome alone (reach, tweets, impressions) but have tried to understand how we have reached this outcome. This kind of analysis helps to establish better data-informed tourism marketing strategies, which will likely result in future marketing actions with greater impact that reach the targeted online communities.

Therefore, the findings in this study provide valuable insight for the Costa Brava Girona Tourist Board and other DMOs on the identity of the ten or twenty people to work with so as to reach

the largest audience in the main or developing markets of the destination Costa Brava and Girona Pyrenees (**Fig. 8**). This will help DMOs to better target future promotional activities (events, workshops, presstrips, famtrips, blogtrips, presentation of clubs/products in new markets, etc.) and/or establish new strategic alliances.

In addition, it was possible to confirm that most of the main conversations generated online around TBEX 2015 were determined by these leading content creators (travel bloggers) and not necessarily by the organizations involved in organizing TBEX. Therefore the contents enjoy a much greater degree of credibility and diffusion than if they had been generated directly by the DMO; every action therefore has a greater impact locally, nationally and internationally, generating a higher return on investment and therefore proving more effective.

Moreover, the event proved an excellent showcase to show off the production and management capacity of the Costa Brava Tourist Board and the other organizations that collaborated on organizing such a huge event as TBEX. In respect of this, TBEX 2015 was a means of bringing the world's largest community of travel bloggers to the destination. They were able to consume and try out the experiences it had to offer (Jiménez Morales & San Eugenio Vela, 2009) through various specialized excursions and blogtrips aimed at communicating the values, culture and essence of the destination and generate an *in situ* image (Galí Espelt & Donaire, 2006), providing them with input with which to write stories capable of capturing the attention of their audience and exciting them, encouraging future visits. Therefore, the word of mouth produced by these digital prescribers on social media generated an *a priori* image of the Costa Brava, Girona Pyrenees and other sites visited around Catalonia among their followers and community members.

In addition, by monitoring results we were able to confirm that the event served as a means of boosting the internationalization of small and medium-sized tourism brands (Costa Brava Pirineu de Girona, Lloret de Mar, Catalunya Experience) by giving them broad exposure on social media; this, in turn, led to an unprecedented impact for the destination among online communities: taking only the results presented in this article for Twitter and websites, by May 10, 2015 there had been over 186 million potential impressions on 11 million users from 102 countries via 32,532 posts (including tweets and blog posts, news, etc.) (**Table 5**), figures that far exceed those achieved by prior promotional activities and marketing campaigns conducted by the Costa Brava Tourist Board.

Table 5
Consolidation of results for the impact of TBEX Europe Costa Brava 2015 on the most relevant social media networks and websites during the monitored periods.

	Potential impressions	Users who posted	Number of posts	Reach	Countries
Twitter (11 March – 10 May 2015)	186,003,427	6,877	32,164	11,221,225	102
Blogs and Other (30 April – 5 August 2015)	-	133	368	-	102
TOTAL	_a	_b	32,532	_c	_d

ᵃ **Data traffic to blogs and other websites are needed to calculate the total figure for potential impressions, therefore the number of impressions generated only on Twitter is taken as a reference, as this provides an overview of the importance TBEX has had with regard to promoting the destination.**
ᵇ **A more detailed analysis is needed to determine the actual number of *unique* users who made posts related to TBEX, as in many cases bloggers may have used the same post on Twitter and on their blog.**
ᶜ **In the case of *unique* number of users (reach), theTwitter results have been taken as a reference (11 million users), as we do not have the data traffic for blogs and other websites.**
ᵈ**With regard to countries reached, data from Twitter and blogs are taken as a reference (102 countries), as this information was not available for other social networks.**

Moreover, the content and posts related to TBEX and the blogtrips and excursions undertaken can be classified into two types: posts on social networks that have immediate impact and dissemination; and posts on blogs and websites that take place in the medium term, but tend to remain available for consultation for some time, meaning their impact on social media takes place over a much broader time frame. In this respect, it is important to note how the nature of the activities carried out during and after the Congress affected the generated content: for example, during the Congress itself, posts tended to be composed more of text and very few videos, while posts from the blogtrips and excursions after the Congress had similar amounts of text but with more and better quality videos.

These posts created by travel bloggers (UGC) constitute quality content that brings credibility not only to information regarding the brand but also the brand image of the destination. It also serves as input for creating new promotional tools and materials; for example, for the anniversary of TBEX, the Costa Brava Tourism Board launched a project to create a digital map of the province of Girona by geo-locating the most relevant content created by bloggers. This had a dual objective: to give visibility to and disseminate their work a year on from the Congress, and to generate a reference tool for future visitors, made available on the Board's official website (tbex.costabrava.org).

Huang, Chou, & Lin (2010) argue that whenever financial gain is involved, information posted in blogs may be deceitful, causing the information-sharing benefit among blogs to diminish or even disappear. However, it is worth noting that a huge part of travel bloggers' credibility relies on them managing their own brand and opinion, this being one of the factors that make them leaders and trendsetters within the communties they form part of.

Finally, travel bloggers are allies who help tell and convey stories regarding the destination – its essence, values and culture. Huang et al. (2010) also imply that high-involvement travel bloggers are more likely to form favourable impressions. Hence the importance of promoting more personal, more fluid and more reliable channels of communication, so that those people who represent the DMO can transmit to bloggers the essence of the destination reflected in the brand, generating in them a sense of commitment as they discover and understand its values, and 'make them their own', before sharing them with their followers. This will bring authenticity to the stories told by bloggers, who ultimately have an effect on how the public sees and perceives the brand image and therefore the destination. Thus, the main objective of such a strategy is to establish long-term relationships with bloggers so as to obtain not only a return on investment (ROI) but also a return on engagement (ROE) that benefits the brand.

3.5.1 *Limitations and new lines of research:*

As with any research, this study has a number of limitations. Firstly, this is a case study focused on a specific action conducted by the Costa Brava Tourist Board and its impact on social media, and findings cannot therefore be assumed to be generalizable to other destinations or branding actions conducted by other DMOs.

Secondly, despite having proved to be very reliable resources, the tools used to measure different variables on Twitter, blogs and other social media were the only ones available – tecnologically - at the time the study was conducted (May 2015). Thus, technological limitations included the impossibility of measuring all visits to blogs (from both desktops and mobile devices).

Thirdly, the analysis presented in this document focuses on how the information and contents posted by TBEX 2015 attendees and online users spread throughout the network, the relationships existing between said users and how the different audiences were reached. Further research should be conducted to assess the impact of posts related to TBEX 2015 (e-WOM and WOM) on the process of decision-making and choosing the destination Costa Brava and Girona Pyrenees over others, focusing on visitor arrivals. We also recommend evaluating changes in the image of the Costa Brava and Girona Pyrenees perceived by those end consumers reached through the different posts, and/or the type of image perceived by those who did not know the destination beforehand (*a priori* image).

Glossary:

Blogtrip: an event for travel bloggers organized by tourist offices and marketing and promotion companies within the industry to promote their destination or services online.

Electronic word of mouth: a marketing technique based on one or more users making recommendations to other users regarding a particular product, company or brand via digital media such as blogs, websites, social networks, etc.

Brand image: perceptions created in the minds of individuals as a result of a branding process.

Branding: the process of creating and marketing a brand.

Conversation 2.0: that which takes place using social media technology, that is, using tools associated with the Web 2.0.

Destination branding: the process of creating value for a tourist destination via strategic communication of the brand it represents.

Digital immigrants: those users who were born before the spread of the Internet but who wish to be part of the new digital context.

Digital natives: those users born after the spread of the Internet.

Digital prescriber: influential people targeted by brands in their online communication efforts in order to reach more potential consumers through them.

Direct potential impressions: the number of potential impressions a profile has generated in their followers; that is, if a user has a thousand followers, then it is estimated that a thousand users will have viewed any tweet they publish.

E-branding: the use of Web-associated channels to reach new types of digital customers.

Follower: user who has subscribed to the Twitter profile of another user.

Hashtag: on Twitter, words preceded by the '#' symbol, which are used to differentiate, highlight and group conversations related to a specific topic.

A priori image: image of the tourist destination existing in the mind of the consumer before visiting.

A posteriori image: idealized image the consumer takes from the tourist destination after visiting.

Induced image: that which has been promoted through marketing activities (brochures, websites, public relations, etc.) by promoters of the tourist destination or tour operators in order to influence the tourist's decision process when selecting a destination for their holiday.

In situ image: image generated in the mind of the consumer when visiting and consuming a tourist destination; that is, when having the tourist experience.

Interactions: on Twitter, one user interacts with another when mentioning them in a tweet, or when retweeting tweets posted by that user.

Mentions: on Twitter, when a user posts a tweet mentioning another user's profile name preceded by the '@' symbol.

Post: text published on the Internet, or on social media such as forums, blogs, social networks, etc.

Potential impressions: the number of times a specific tweet may have been viewed. Calculated by adding the impressions generated by followers of the profile who posted the tweet (direct potential impressions) plus the number of followers of users who have retweeted the original tweet.

Reach: number of unique users who have been reached by posted tweets.

Repercussion: influence, echo or effect on audience achieved on the Web, in this case by the different content related to TBEX posted on social media.

Retweet: when a Twitter user shares a tweet posted by another profile on their own profile with their own followers.

SEO (Search Engine Optimization): technical process by means of which information on a website is improved to achieve the best possible positioning on the various search engines available on the Web.

Social media: activities, practices and behaviours among communities of people who meet online to share information, knowledge and opinions using Web-based applications, making it possible to easily create and transmit content in the form of words, images, video and audio.

Total potential impressions: calculated by adding the number of direct potential impressions (those generated in followers of the Twitter profile that made the post) plus potential impressions generated in more followers of the profile or profiles who have retweeted the original post.

Tourism 2.0: network of relationships between the various agents operating in the tourism industry, which allows users to actively participate in the creation and consumption of central information flows available on the Web 2.0.

Travel bloggers: people who write about and share their experiences in tourist destinations in the form of entries and posts (text, images, videos, etc.) in their online diaries (blogs), websites and social networks such as Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, Flickr, Pinterest, YouTube, etc.

Tweet: a post on the social network Twitter.

Twitter profile: Twitter account created by a user which contains the user's personal data, such as the profile name, URL, contact information, biography, profile picture, posted tweets, retweets, etc.

Word of mouth: a marketing technique based on verbal recommendations that one or more users make to others regarding a specific product, company or brand.

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