



## RESEARCH/INVESTIGACIÓN

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# THE COMMUNICATION OF THE LARGE INTERNATIONAL URBAN DESTINATIONS IN TWITTER

*La comunicación de los grandes destinos urbanos internacionales en Twitter*

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### ABSTRACT

The study object of this work is to analyze the communication strategy applied by large urban tourist destinations through Twitter, considered one of the main microblogging tools in the world. For this, the activity, the most used topics, the formats, and the ability to generate interaction with users and potential visitors are examined. As a methodological technique, the content analysis of the official accounts of the destinations included in the study 'City Tourism Performance Research' is proposed, which includes success stories in urban tourism, to which is added Malaga, for having been chosen by the European Commission as the Capital of Intelligent Tourism. In total, 669 tweets published between the months of September and October 2019 in the official Twitter profiles of the following cities are analyzed: Berlin, Bogotá, Buenos Aires, Copenhagen, Cape Town, Hangzhou, Linz, Málaga, Marrakech, Beijing, Tianjin, Tokyo, and Turin. It is observed that the destinations studied interact little

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with their followers, and hardly generate conversation. Twitter continues to be used more as an information panel than as a channel for interaction with tourists. It is concluded that this network is in decline as a means of communication for tourist destinations since the territories maintain a more intuitive than strategic presence in this social network despite the possibilities that the network offers in active listening and for planning.

**KEYWORDS:** Twitter – Tourism – destinations – cities – interaction – communication – social network

## RESUMEN

El objetivo general de este trabajo es analizar la estrategia de comunicación que aplican grandes destinos turísticos de carácter urbano a través de Twitter, considerada como una de las principales herramientas de *microblogging*. Para ello, se examina la actividad, los temas más utilizados, los formatos y la capacidad para generar interacción con los usuarios y los potenciales visitantes. Como técnica metodológica, se propone el análisis de contenido de las cuentas oficiales de los destinos incluidos en el estudio 'City Tourism Performance Research', que recoge casos de éxito en el turismo urbano, a los que se suma Málaga, por haber sido elegida por la Comisión Europea como Capital de Turismo Inteligente. En total, se analizan 669 tuits publicados entre septiembre y octubre de 2019 en los perfiles oficiales de Twitter de Berlín, Bogotá, Buenos Aires, Copenhague, Ciudad del Cabo, Hangzhou, Linz, Málaga, Marrakech, Pekín, Tianjin, Tokio y Turín. Se observa que los destinos estudiados interaccionan poco con sus seguidores y apenas generan conversación. Twitter sigue siendo más utilizado como panel de información que como canal de interacción. Se concluye que esta red está en declive como vía de comunicación de los destinos turísticos, ya que los territorios mantienen en ella una presencia más intuitiva que estratégica pese a las posibilidades que ofrece en la escucha activa y la planificación.

**PALABRAS CLAVE:** Twitter – Turismo – destinos – ciudades – interacción – comunicación – redes sociales

## A COMUNICAÇÃO DOS GRANDES DESTINOS URBANOS INTERNACIONAIS NO TWITTER.

### RESUMO

O objetivo geral deste trabalho é analisar a estratégia de comunicação que aplicam grandes destinos turísticos de caráter urbano através do twitter, considerada uma das principais ferramentas de *microblogging*. Para isto, se analisa a atividade, os temas mais utilizados, os formatos e a capacidade para gerar interação com os usuários e os potenciais visitantes. Como técnica metodológica, se propõe a análise de conteúdo das contas oficiais dos destinos incluídos no estudo 'City Tourism Performance research'

que coleta os dados de sucesso no turismo urbano, aos que se soma a cidade de Málaga, por ter sido escolhida pela comissão Europeia como capital do turismo inteligente. No total, se analisam 669 tuits publicados entre setembro e outubro de 2019 nos perfis oficiais de Twitter de Berlin, Bogotá, Buenos Aires, Copenhague, Ciudad del Cabo, Hangzhou, Linz, Málaga, Marrakech, Pekín, Tianjin, Tokio e Turim. Se observa que os destinos estudados interagem pouco com seus seguidores e apenas geram conversações. O Twitter continua sendo mais utilizado como painel de informação que como canal de interação. Se conclui que esta rede está em declive como via de comunicação dos destinos turísticos, já que os territórios mantêm nela uma presença mais intuitiva que estratégica, mesmo com as possibilidades que oferecem na escuta ativa e no planejamento.

**PALAVRAS CHAVE:** Twitter - Turismo - destinos - cidades - interação - comunicação - redes sociais.

Translation by **Paula González** (Universidad Católica Andrés Bello, Venezuela)

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Tourist destinations comprise a combination of products and services that makes them attractive to certain travelers (Buhalis, 2000). Consequently, in marketing, promotion is essential, which must have the purpose of informing, persuading, influencing, remembering, communicating, and sensitizing current and future tourists, as well as attracting and winning their loyalty (Cruz, 2005). In achieving these objectives, communication and information technologies (ICT) play a determining role. Already Buhalis and Law (2008) explained that ICTs were responsible for the increase in interactions in the tourism sector since the beginning of the CRS (Computer Reservation Systems), although it was the appearance of the Internet that made communication technologies one of the main tools, both for companies and destinations.

The irruption of the Internet has changed the work of Destination Marketing Organizations (DMO) (Yayli, Bayram, and Bayram, 2011) and the habits of tourists when looking for information (Head and Arthur, 2002; Bekloma, 2005; Buhalis and Law, 2008; Xiang and Pan, 2011). Tourism is one of the categories most visited by Internet users (Heung, 2003; Lexhagen, 2008) because tourism products are intangible and, therefore, can hardly be evaluated before they are consumed (Rabanser and Ricci, 2005; Blain, Levy and Brent Richie, 2005). Its success depends on reliable information (Kaldis et al., 2003) so that travelers can minimize the risk of making decisions that may turn out to be wrong (Leung et al., 2013).

Social media has transformed tourism communication (Xiang and Gretzel, 2010; De San Eugenio, 2011; Martínez-Valerios, 2012; Míguez, Mariné-Roig, and Huertas, 2014; Munar and Jacobsen, 2014; Wilches, 2014; Paniagua and Huertas, 2018). Having a good presence on social media benefits destinations in the pre-trip phase, when tourists get

informed; during the trip itself, when they share information about their experience; and later, when they continue to share images, videos, or data (Chung and Buhalis, 2008). Thus, social media has become the main medium by which tourists share information (Carson, 2008). The risk that has always existed when choosing a tourist destination due to its intangibility can be minimized by the opinions of other travelers (Mill and Morrison, 2012; Mendes Thomas, Augusto Biz, and Gândara, 2013).

This is essential since users give greater importance to the opinions of third parties (Yoo and Gretzel, 2012; Holloway and Robinson, 1995; Shea et al., 2004; Kardon, 2007; Domínguez and Araújo, 2012). This is because the so-called electronic word of mouth (EWOM), which comes from friends and acquaintances, and the interpersonal relationships that are created, generate greater influence (Munar and Jacobsen, 2013; Ladhari and Michaud, 2015). In this way, social media has gained great prominence in recent years (Xiang and Gretzel, 2010) and offers an excellent opportunity to create moments of interaction, participation, and commitment (Da Cruz, Velozo, and Falcao Soares, 2014).

The DMOs, whose competencies include the promotion of the destination (Munar, 2012; Ritchie and Crouch, 2003), have been forced to integrate social media into their communication strategies (Milwood et al., 2013), since their use offers multiple advantages to destinations due to their capacity for interaction and dialogue creation (Lim, Chung, and A Weaver, 2012; Míguez et al., 2014; Altamirano and Túñez López, 2016). This is significant since, in a globalized world, destinations have increased their need to communicate to show what differentiates them (Fernández-Cavia, 2011). To this end, the DMOs have reinforced their policies to consolidate their brands – understood as a set of name, logo, symbols, and values that try to represent the identity of a territory- (Huertas, 2014). The territory-brand is now the best identification of a tourist destination (De San Eugenio, 2011).

Social media are also magnificent tools to contribute to the good image of a destination, since they allow dialogue with potential clients and open the door to future relationships (Wigley and Lewis, 2012; Fernández-Cavia and Huertas, 2014; Mariné-Roig and Huertas, 2016). The goal is for the brand to be fixed in the minds of tourists. The destination that has a strong brand will be more likely to be included in the travel plan of the potential traveler (Beerli and Martin, 2002).

In parallel, the increase in the number of social media has become one of the main challenges that destinations face (Sotiriadis and Van Zyl, 2013). *Microblogging* is a communication system that allows you to send short text messages through tools created specifically for this function. Its purpose is to discover what is happening at a given moment, share information with other users, and offer links to other websites (Yayli, Bayram, & Bayram, 2011). Among the entire collection of social platforms, Twitter is one of the most influential microblogging systems (Akehurst, 2009; Thelwall et al., 2011; Kirilenko and Stepchenkova, 2014; Krikorian, 2013). In fact, Twitter is among the three most used social media platforms by hotels in the US (Kim and Connolly, 2013).

Although in recent years it has registered some decline, Twitter, with 330 million active users, struggles to set trends (Fernández, 2019). To do this, it has recently included the possibility of inserting multiple photos or gifs in tweets, as well as the option of conducting surveys, the elimination of the character limit for private messages, or the extension of the character limit to 280. Although other social networks, like Facebook and Instagram, have a greater number of users, the virality that a comment can reach on Twitter still does not have direct competition (Naveira, 2020). In tourism, it has been shown that Twitter can be particularly susceptible to EWOM due to its viral nature. However, it is estimated that a tweet forwarded (retweeted) by a different user will reach an average of a thousand registered users (Kwak et al., 2010). Because of this, identifying and tracking customer feedback has become an especially valuable activity, although the massive volume and high variation of tweets in real-time make it a slow and expensive task (Chiu et al., 2015; Claster et al., 2013).

With its large user base and high engagement, Twitter has been increasingly used by the tourism sector for promotion, distribution, marketing management, communication, and market research (Leung et al., 2013). When studying the use of social media by the Hong Kong hotel industry, Chan and Guillet (2011) found that Twitter and Facebook were the most widely used social networks. Likewise, Twitter is one of the social media most used by DMOs in their marketing strategies. In fact, Hays et al. (2013) indicated that these organizations generally publish more frequently on Twitter than on Facebook.

These same researchers explained that the structure of Twitter was created for the transmission of massive information. Due to constant updates, tweets from any user can be quickly buried. Therefore, organizations need to constantly update their updates to remain visible. In the area of market research, data from Twitter tends to be used more than data from other social media platforms. This is partly due to the more liberal data availability of Twitter (Wang et al., 2013).

The high usefulness of Twitter data for research can also be attributed to its open network structure, which allows its users to choose who they want to follow without asking for permission (Kwak et al., 2010; Weng et al., 2010; Hargittai and Litt, 2012). In this way, Twitter has become a “global pipeline for sharing and transmitting information in real-time” (Wang et al., 2011, p. 34). Furthermore, Twitter is an appropriate social network for market research due to the internal architecture of the messages. The condensed structure of tweets and the unique functions of Twitter make its data a useful option for content analysis (Kirilenko and Stepchenkova, 2014). Among the benefits of Twitter are relationship building, networking, and marketing opportunities (Antoniadis, Vrana, & Zafiroopoulos, 2014). *Microblogging* is a potentially rich avenue for DMOs to explore their branding strategy, as customers can use Twitter to tell these agencies that they have had a great (or disappointing) experience (Yayli, Bayram, & Bayram, 2011).

However, some authors (Míguez et al., 2014; Martínez-Sala and Campillo-Alhama, 2018) understand that DMOs are not taking advantage of the potential that these media offer (Martínez-Valerio, 2012). In many cases, destinations use social media more intuitively than strategically (Hvass and Munar, 2012; Hays, Page, and Buhalis, 2013). Sevin (2013) researched the use of Twitter by some destinations in the US. The research concluded that Twitter tends to be used to share information about events and not for interpersonal communication.

## **2. OBJECTIVES**

In general, DMOs use Twitter to promote attractions and activities and report on events, but not so much to generate brand awareness (Guerrero-Solé and Fernández-Cavia, 2014). And this, even though since 2008, Portland (Oregon, USA) became the first tourist destination with a presence on Twitter (Hay, 2010), more and more destinations use this medium (Gibbs and Dancs, 2013; Sevin, 2013). In fact, even though it has always been in the shadow of Facebook, Twitter is still influential and trendsetting.

Precisely, the general objective of this work is to analyze whether the DMOs of large urban destinations are using Twitter as a tourist communication tool. Furthermore, it seeks to illustrate the various degrees of use of this social network, analyze what are the factors that contribute to the greater participation of tourists or potential visitors, and identify cases of good practices in the use of this tool by these destinations. We have decided to focus on Twitter because, as explained, this network is the microblog with the greatest influence potential. We start from the hypothesis that destinations are using this tool more than any other and they are doing it more intuitively than strategically, working on the interaction in an insignificant way, and more as a place for information than as a meeting point for dialogue.

## **3. METHODOLOGY**

To achieve the proposed objectives, the study proposes the analysis of the tweets of the official Twitter accounts of a sample of 16 urban destinations, published in September and October 2019. The original selection of the sample coincides with the 15 destinations of the study 'City Tourism Performance Research' (UNWTO and WTCE, 2017), which collects the success stories carried out in some of the main urban tourist destinations in the world (Antwerp, Berlin, Bogotá, Buenos Aires, Copenhagen, Cape Town, Hangzhou, Linz, Marrakech, Beijing, Seoul, Sapporo, Tianjin, Tokyo, and Turin), to which Malaga is added for being the fastest growing destination in Spain and for its innovation policy in tourism, which recently led the European Commission to designate it as Smart Tourism Capital. However, of the 16 destinations, only 13 were analyzed, since Sapporo never had an account on this social network, Antwerp closed it in March 2019, and Seoul did the same in August of that same year, despite having almost 25,000 followers, which shows that there is an open debate on the use of this network by tourist destinations.

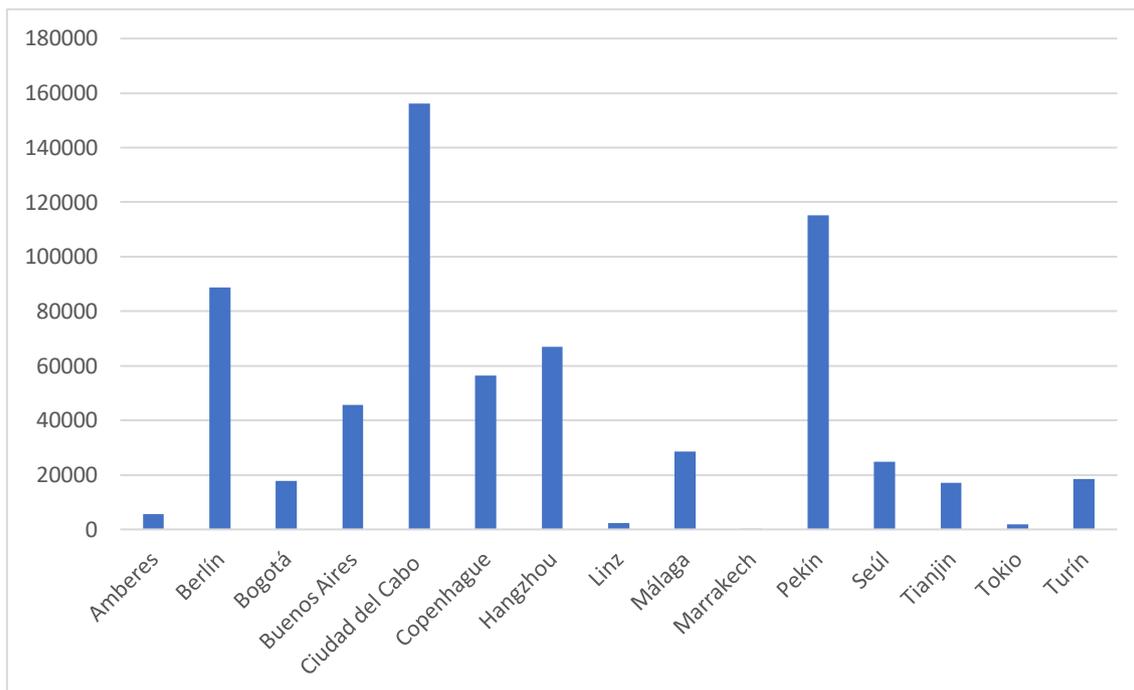
As a methodological technique, the content analysis of the official accounts of these destinations is proposed. It is an ideal technique to face quantitative and qualitative research on written texts, a practice with a long tradition in journalistic studies since it allows the establishment of reliable inferences about the context of the news (Krippendorff, 2002) and about their conditions of production and reception; and it is also considered more useful for collecting, processing, and evaluating large amounts of information (Orellana and Sánchez, 2006), hence its frequent use in the description of the components of media messages (Igartua, 2006). Castelló et al. (2014, p. 35) show that content analysis is an ideal tool to study and analyze the behavior and activity of social accounts on Twitter, as well as users' interaction with them.

First of all, aspects such as the number of followers and followed by the different accounts have been analyzed, as well as the influence potential of the official profiles of the destinations. Subsequently, data has been collected on the number of tweets published, used hashtags, and the performance index, besides the number of "likes" and the average of the retweets collected for each published tweet. Finally, the interaction of tweets, the percentage of conversations generated, or the index of user engagement with the accounts have been studied. For data monitoring, the Fanpage Karma tool ([www.fanpagekarma.com](http://www.fanpagekarma.com)) has been used, which has already been used in previous research (García Mogedas, 2015; Olabe and Márquez López, 2019) due to its ability to measure aspects in the use of social media, such as the presence and activity of the different accounts, the levels of interaction between profiles and users, and their reactions. In total, 669 tweets published between September 18<sup>th</sup> and October 18<sup>th</sup>, 2019 by the official Twitter accounts of the aforementioned destinations have been analyzed.

Subsequently, a content analysis was carried out of the tourist attractions and the emotional values of the brand (tangible heritage, landscape, agenda, climate, nature, services, leisure, institutional messages, intangible heritage, sport, business, non-tourist information, and technology) most mentioned or communicated by the destination marketing offices (DMO), linking them to the tweets that generated the most reactions.

#### **4. RESULTS**

The analyzed tourist destinations have an average of 42,863 followers on Twitter, although the differences between them are notable. Thus, at the top of the ranking is Cape Town, with a total of 156,257 followers. By contrast, Marrakech only has 325 followers. Between the two extremes are Beijing (115,089), Berlin (88,766), Hangzhou (66,934), Copenhagen (56,441), Buenos Aires (45,757), Malaga (25,529), Seoul (24,701, at the time of closing), Turin (18,567), Bogotá (17,725), Tianjin (17,000), Antwerp (5,702, until closing), Linz (2,255), and Tokyo (1,900).



**Graph 1.** Number of followers on Twitter  
**Source:** self-made.

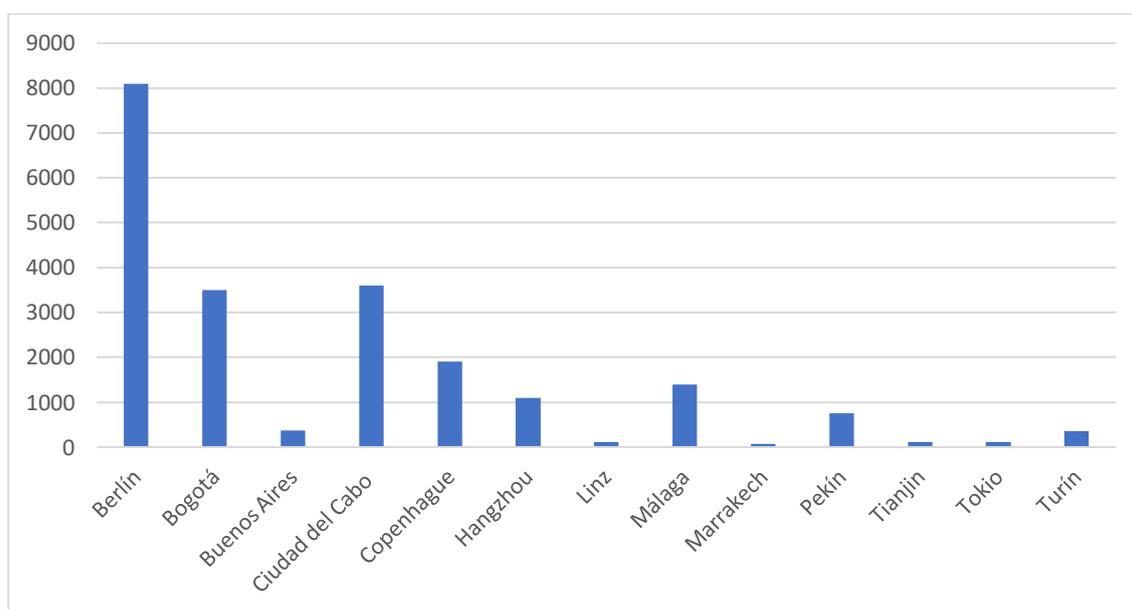
The average number of profiles followed by each destination is, however, much lower: 1,468 followed accounts. Also, in this regard, it is Cape Town that tops the ranking, with 9,828 followed accounts. At the time of closing its account, Seoul was only following two profiles. The rest of the analyzed destinations have a disparate behavior in this aspect: Hangzhou follows 4,486 accounts, Beijing 1,934, Berlin 1,730, Malaga 996, Bogotá 751, Linz 649, Antwerp 541, Turin 406, Marrakech 274, Copenhagen 228, Buenos Aires 128, Tianjin 50, and Tokyo 26.

To calculate the influence potential of the account on Twitter, the number of followers and followed has been divided. The average is 65.8. However, the difference between destinations is wide. Interestingly, Seoul (12,350.2), which was in the lead, decided to close the Twitter account and direct its communication efforts to other social media. After Seoul are Buenos Aires (357.4), Copenhagen (247.5), Beijing (59.5), Berlin (51.3), Turin (45.7), Malaga (25.6), Bogotá (23.6), Cape Town (15.8), Hangzhou (14.9), Antwerp (10.5), Linz (3.4), and Marrakech (1.1).

On the other hand, the results show that it is not the destinations that publish the most that have the highest number of followers on Twitter, nor do they have the highest performance index. In the period analyzed, the average number of publications by destinations was 56. Above this average were Bogotá (242), Malaga (164), Cape Town (104), Berlin (142), Tokyo (88), Linz (83), and Turin (62). On the contrary, Buenos Aires (53), Beijing (34), Hangzhou (32), Tianjin (30), Copenhagen (18), and Marrakech (17) have much lower activity.

In this way, the average number of publications per day on Twitter by the analyzed tourist destinations is 2.4 and, again, the differences between the different accounts are evident: Bogotá, with 8.6 publications per day, is located at the top; followed by Malaga (5.9), Berlin (5.1), Tokyo (3.1), Linz (3), Turin (2.2), Buenos Aires (1.9), Beijing (1.2), Hangzhou (1.1), Tianjin (1.1), Copenhagen (0.6), and Marrakech (0.6). The activity is very different depending on the day of the week. Sunday is, on average, the day with the lowest number of publications (93), followed by Tuesday (108), Monday (141), Saturday (144), Wednesday (144), Thursday (154), and Friday (160).

One of the most important aspects to check the results of a communication strategy in social media is engagement, linked to interaction. In fact, in the world of marketing, it is defined as the level of interaction and commitment that users have with brands on social media. For its measurement, different variables are considered, such as the number of 'likes', comments, and shared tweets, as well as the sum of all the variables (Ballesteros Herencia, 2018). In this case, the average of reactions, comments, and shared tweets is 1,200. The differences between destinations are enormous: Berlin (8,100), Cape Town (3,600), Bogotá (3,500), Copenhagen (1,900), and Malaga (1,400) are above average. In contrast, Hangzhou (1,100), Beijing (753), Buenos Aires (364), Turin (354), Linz (118), Tokyo (118), Tianjin (107), and Marrakech (66) are far behind.



**Graph 2.** Average of reactions and comments  
**Source:** self-made.

These differences are accentuated when each of the variables that are part of the degree of engagement is analyzed. Thus, the average number of 'likes' is 995. The ranking is uneven: Berlin (7,000) is at the top of the analyzed destinations, followed by Cape Town (2,900), Bogotá (2,300), Copenhagen (1,600), and Malaga (1,100). Below the average is Hangzhou (994), Beijing (587), Turin (249), Buenos Aires (274), Linz (93), Tokyo (82), Tianjin (63), and Marrakech (54).

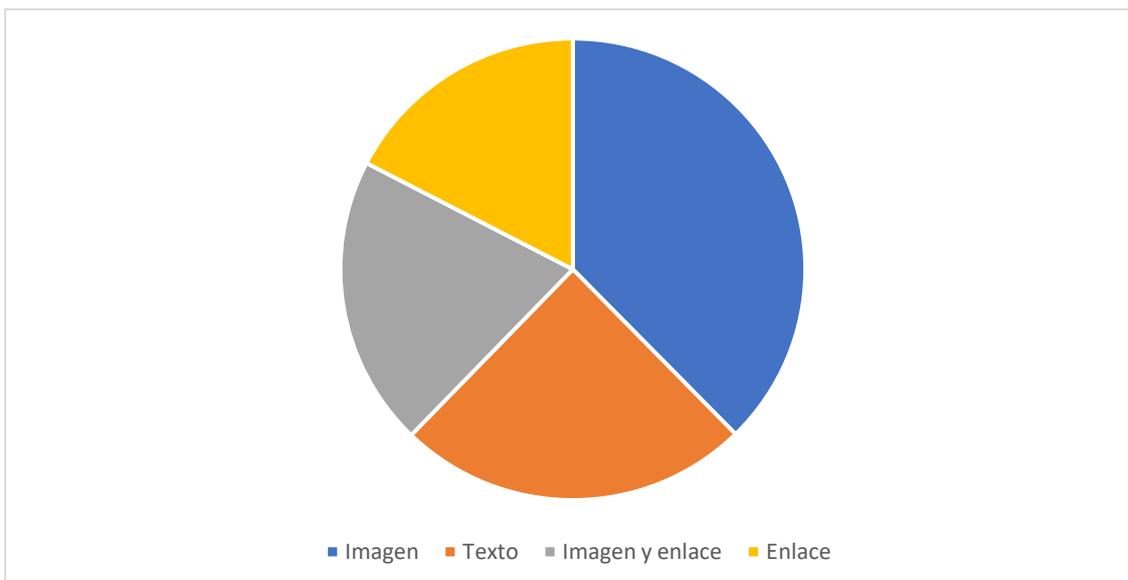
The average number of 'likes' per tweet is 18. Copenhagen is the destination that gets the most performance from each of the tweets, with an average of 87 'likes' for each post. It is followed by Berlin (49), Hangzhou (31), Cape Town (28), Beijing (17), Bogotá (9.1), Malaga (6.8), Buenos Aires (5.2), Marrakech (3, 2), Tianjin (2.1), Linz (1.1), Turin (4), and Tokyo (0.9).

The posts' interaction rate is quite low, which shows that destinations generally do not respond to their audiences. On average, this index stands at 0.15%. In this classification, Marrakech (1.3%) is ranked first, followed by Tokyo (0.72%), Copenhagen (0.19%), Bogotá (0.081%), Berlin (0.065%), Linz (0.063%), Hangzhou (0.054%), Turin (0.031%), Malaga (0.030%), Cape Town (0.022%), Tianjin (0.021%), Beijing (0.019%), and Buenos Aires (0.016%).

Engagement, on average, is 0.17%. Cape Town (0.082%), Marrakech (0.77%), Linz (0.19%), Copenhagen (0.12%), Berlin (0.33%), Beijing (0.023%), Turin (0.068%), Buenos Aires (0.031%), Malaga (0.18%), Hangzhou (0.061%), Tokyo (0.22%), Tianjin (0.023%), and Bogotá (0.70%). On average, in the analyzed period, the analyzed destinations have made 194 retweets. Berlin is, by far, the one that reproduces the most tweets from other profiles (1,200), followed by Bogotá (1,000) and Tokyo (710). At a much greater distance are Copenhagen (342), Malaga (310), Beijing (166), Turin (105), Hangzhou (103), Buenos Aires (90), Tianjin (44), Tokyo (36), Linz (25), and Marrakech (12).

On average, 3.5 retweets are made for each tweet: Copenhagen (19), Berlin (8.4), Cape Town (6.8), Beijing (4.9), Bogotá (4.4), Hangzhou (3. 2), Malaga (1.9), Turin (1.7), Buenos Aires (1.7), Tokyo (0.4), Tianjin (1.5), Marrakech (0.7), and Linz (0.7). The average is 0.82%. Cape Town (6.7%) and Berlin (6.3%) are the destinations that do it the most. Up to six destinations, however, do not participate at all in conversations with other users: Marrakech, Copenhagen, Beijing, Malaga, Hangzhou, and Tianjin. In between are Tokyo (2.3%), Buenos Aires (1.9%), Turin (1.6%), Linz (1.2%), and Bogotá (0.43%).

Regarding content, it is evident that most of the analyzed destinations make use of images to attract the attention of their audiences. In fact, most of the tweets published in this period are accompanied by an image (37.7% of the total), although there are notable differences between the different profiles, with Chinese destinations leading the way in this regard. Tianjin, for example, uses photos in 100% of its tweets, followed by Hangzhou (93.8%) and Beijing (93.6%). This is followed, at a great distance, by the rest of the destinations: Marrakech (58.8%), Linz (52.5%), Copenhagen (50%), Berlin (43.7%), Bogotá (41.7 %), Malaga (36.6%), Cape Town (36.5%), Turin (32.3%), and Buenos Aires (22.6%). Tokyo, however, only uses images in 1.1% of its tweets.



**Graph 3.** Content of the tweets

**Source:** self-made.

In the second place, are the tweets that only include text (24.6%). However, it should be noted that Marrakech, Copenhagen, Beijing, Hangzhou, and Tianjin never use this type of tweet. The rest is distributed as follows: Linz (63%), Turin (59.7%), Malaga (54.9%), Tokyo (46.6%), Cape Town (25%), Berlin (14.1%), Buenos Aires (9.4%).

Destinations use images and links in 20.4% of tweets. All destinations, except Tianjin, use this resource. The one that does it the most is Buenos Aires (67.9%), followed by Copenhagen (38.9%), Linz (36.3%), Bogotá (36%), Marrakech (35.3%), Cape Town (28.8%), Berlin (14.8%), Turin (4.8%), Malaga (4.3%), Hangzhou (3.1%), Beijing (3%), and Tokyo (2.3%).

Finally, 17.4% of tweets use a link to other information. Buenos Aires, Tianjin, and Turin do not use this type of resource and the rest do so unevenly: Tokyo (50%), Berlin (43.7%), Bogotá (14.5%), Copenhagen (11.1%), Cape Town (9.6%), Marrakech (5.9%), Linz (5%), Malaga (4.3%), Hangzhou (3.1%), and Beijing (3%).

Of the total tweets analyzed in this period, 71.1% correspond to new content (672), 26.3% are content shared with other accounts (249), and only 2.5% are responses (24). Marrakech, Beijing, Hangzhou, and Tianjin have 100% of their content new and, therefore, do not use shared content.

The destinations that respond the most are: Copenhagen (11.1%), Cape Town (6.7%), Berlin, (6.3%), Bogotá (3.7%), Tokyo (2.3%), Buenos Aires (1.9%), Turin (1.6%), and Linz (1.2%). In the analyzed period, Malaga, Hangzhou, Tianjin, Beijing, and Marrakech did not respond, which confirms the low level of interaction of destinations with their audiences. Furthermore, the results show that more than their potential clients, the destinations are fundamentally related to other accounts of institutions or

providers of tourist services. In fact, the profiles with which the analyzed destinations interact the most are the Bogotá City Hall (42), Apartamento El Dorado (9), Bogotá (8), IDT Bogotá (6), Poetic Kinetic (5), or Biff Festival (4), which correspond to tourist resources, events, or official profiles of Bogotá, Buenos Aires, Linz, or Berlin.

Hashtags are a good way to encourage active listening by users and contribute to the monitoring of the event, as argued by Estebaranz and Ramilo (2013), who defend the possibilities of interaction provided by the use of these tags. The average number of hashtags per destination in this period is 65.2. At the top is Malaga (206), followed by Bogotá (118), Cape Town (91), Buenos Aires (85), Berlin (85), Linz (76), Beijing (40), Turin (39), Hangzhou (35), Tianjin (31), Marrakech (16), Copenhagen (16), Tokyo (10).

The most used hashtags correspond to the names of the destinations themselves or their tourist brands: #buenosaires (63), #berlin (55), #visitlinz (53), #bicitravesiasbogota (41), #downhillenbogota (32), #malaga (31), #hangzhou (29), #costadesol (25), #malagaciudadgenial (23), and #malagaciudaddemuseos (22). Likewise, if we except adverbs and conjunctions, the words most used by tweets have to do with the names of the cities or refer to their tourist or defining resources: *Ciudad* (74), Bogotá (73), Malaga (64), tourism (47), festival (32), city (32), and Bolívar (30).

The average performance rate is 24%. The differences between destinations are wide: Marrakech (100%), Tokyo (52%), Bogotá (48%), Hangzhou (38%), Tianjin (26%), Berlin (21%), Malaga (17%), Copenhagen (14%), Linz (9%), Turin (9%), Cape Town (8%), Beijing (8%), and Buenos Aires (2%).

By content, the majority of the tweets analyzed (22.8% of the total) refer to topics related to the tangible heritage of destinations, followed by those related to intangible heritage (14.7%), and agenda issues (11.2%). Further away are tweets about institutional messages (8.6%), landscape (7.1%), services (6.7%), sports (6.7%), leisure (5.8%), nature (5.5%), non-tourist information (4.9%), climate (2.9%), business (1.8%), and technology (1.1%).

The differences between the destinations, however, are quite wide depending on the topics analyzed. In the case of tangible heritage, the values range between 3.9% in Bogotá and 37.9% in Tianjin. For its part, the destination with the most tweets dedicated to intangible heritage is Beijing (39.4% of the total) and the one with the least, Tokyo (2.2%). The agenda (especially of large scheduled events) is a recurring issue in all destinations, although Beijing only dedicates 2.6% of its tweets to these topics compared to 31.7% in Cape Town.

There are also some striking topics. In the analyzed period, Tokyo was the destination that more tweets dedicated to the weather (13.5%) and also the one that published the most about services (33.7% of all tweets). The explanation seems simple: in those days of September and October, a typhoon hit the Japanese capital with force.

Finally, the five tweets with the highest number of reactions ('likes', retweets, and comments) from each of the destinations were analyzed. The result is clear: the most 'successful' tweets have a tangible heritage as their main theme, which generally corresponds to the resources that make each of the destinations famous. Specifically, 36 of the 65 tweets with the highest number of reactions (55.3% of the total) have this theme. Next are the tweets about institutional messages (16), which represent 24.6%; and tweets on intangible heritage (7), which account for 10.7%. Further away are the tweets about sport (2), services (2), and nature (2), each representing 3%.

In absolute terms, the tweet with the highest number of followers is one posted by Berlin on September 27<sup>th</sup>, 2019, in which, with old photos of the Berlin Wall, followers were encouraged to share their experiences and memories of this historic moment with the hashtag #wallyourstory. This tweet had a total of 2,894 reactions. After this publication, one of Hangzhou is located, with photos of autumn in the city, which had 698 reactions.

## 5. DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

Although, as many authors have pointed out (Akehurst, 2009; Thelwall et al., 2011; Kirilenko and Stepchenkova, 2014; Krikorian, 2013), Twitter is one of the most used microblogs on the Internet and one of the most popular media, both for consumers as well as for companies, the results of this study conclude that for tourist destinations it is not the main information and communication channel with travelers.

In fact, of the 15 destinations included in the study 'City Tourism Performance Research' (UNWTO and WTCF, 2017), in which the World Tourism Organization (UNWTO) collects the success stories and good practices of some of the main urban tourism destinations in the world, in aspects such as the use of information and communication technologies and that form the universe of this research, only 12 use Twitter as an instrument of tourism communication.

Sapporo never had a Twitter profile for tourist use, but Antwerp and Seoul, which did, ended up shutting it down. The South Korean case is especially significant since at the time of closure the account had almost 25,000 followers, who were referred to obtain the information they needed through other profiles opened on different social networks. These decisions show that, despite the importance that Twitter may have in setting trends, its use as a tourism communication tool by Destination Marketing Offices (DMOs) suffers a certain decline.

The results show, on the other hand, that the number of followers on Twitter is more linked to the size of the destination than to the activity it has through the social network. In fact, it is not the destinations that publish the most that have the largest number of followers on Twitter, nor do they have the highest performance index. In this sense, we agree with Gibbs and Dancs (2013) that the destinations with the most followers are not the most valued on Twitter. Furthermore, although the great advantages of Twitter are networking and the establishment of contacts, as indicated

by Antoniadis, Vrana, and Zafiroopoulos (2014), the results reflect that there is a great difference between the number of followers that each of the destinations has and the number of followed profiles.

This study also concludes that the level of response to users by destinations is low. However, it is confirmed that the performance of tweets is closely linked to the interaction that destinations have with their users. Of all the destinations analyzed, Berlin is the one with the highest number of reactions, shared tweets, and comments, and it is also, together with Copenhagen, the destination that obtains the highest performance from its tweets. Similarly, Berlin, along with Cape Town, is one of the destinations that most participates in the conversations.

In any case, the initial hypothesis that destinations work little on interaction with their audiences is confirmed. In fact, the results show that, in general, destinations barely talk to their users and respond little to the interactions that they may make. Furthermore, it is shown that interactions occur more with other institutional profiles than with tourists or potential tourists. In this way, it is also confirmed, as stated in the previous hypotheses, that destinations use Twitter in a much more intuitive than strategic way, working very little on interaction with their audiences, and more as a place of tourist information than as a meeting point for dialogue, and this although, as Yayli, Bayram, and Bayram (2011) pointed out, Twitter, like microblogs in general, is a potentially rich avenue for DMOs to explore their brand strategy since customers can use Twitter to tell these organizations how their experience with the tourist destination in question has been.

Likewise, the study shows that, even though in 2013 Hays et al. established that organizations saw in Twitter a new and innovative way of approaching, interacting, and understanding the behavior of millions of people around the world, tourist destinations still do not take full advantage of this tool for interaction with potential users, which contradicts the results of previous studies, such as that of Da Cruz, Velozo, and Falcão Soares (2011), who indicate that social media is being used in a significant way by providing content capable of generating interactions between the actors involved in tourism.

On the contrary, we agree with Hassan (2013) that social media is not being used well by DMOs, although these organizations tend to admit the importance of this tool for marketing. Likewise, the results confirm, as Sevin (2013) and Antoniadis et al. (2015) did, that destinations tend to use Twitter mainly to share information and not so much as an interpersonal communication tool, more as an information panel than as communities with connected actors. This could be explained by the fact that Twitter is considered more as an information network than a social network by many of its users, while Facebook is understood more as a social network than an informative one. In short, despite the time that has elapsed since its study, as Hay (2010) indicated, destinations continue to use Twitter as a communication and information tool rather than as a marketing tool.

On the other hand, it is evident that much progress can still be made in the use of photography as a means to strengthen the message. In a study on Facebook, White (2010) had established that the use of images reinforces the travel experience for tourists and can influence travelers' decisions when planning their vacations. The results of our research conclude that most destinations make use of images to attract the attention of their audiences, although the percentage of tweets with photos still seems quite low (37.7%). Chinese destinations occupy the first positions in the use of the image of their tourist destinations in the tweets they publish, ranking in the following order: Tianjin (100%), Hangzhou (93.8%), and Beijing (93.6%).

In any case, despite the great capacity that images have to communicate emotional values, as indicated by Míguez-González and Huertas (2015), destinations continue to use them mainly to present their heritage or tourist attractions. In fact, it has been verified that in many of the destinations there is still a lack of strategy in the use of these images, showing instead a clear lack of criteria. This, although, as Crompton (1992) explained, the image is a fundamental element when choosing a tourist destination.

However, there seems to have been an advance in the use of elements that help communicate the brand. Thus, the results of our content analysis have shown that the majority of the tweets published by tourist destinations refer to tangible heritage, which is usually linked to the representative elements of the destination and the identifying values of the brand. These topics are also the ones that generate the most reactions from users, so destinations should make a greater effort to communicate the values that differentiate them from their competitors. The publication of heritage through tweets with images contributes to the preservation and dissemination of the identity of each tourist destination.

In the same way, since hashtags are a good way to encourage active listening by users, as Estebaranz and Ramilo (2013) explained, it is concluded that destinations are not making correct use of this important element of interaction since the results confirm that the most used hashtags correspond to the names of the destinations themselves. In this sense, we conclude that DMOs should always use these tags to identify their main elements of tangible heritage, which, as indicated, help to more easily identify destinations compared to their competitors and are linked to the values that identify the respective brands.

Through tweets, users also determine a large part of the image of a tourist destination. For this reason, it is concluded that it is essential that DMOs have to be prepared to listen and talk with their potential tourists, something that has not happened so far, thus avoiding interaction, which is one of the great values of social media. It is essential, therefore, that the official profiles of the destinations participate in the conversations, answer the questions that users may have, promote the brand values of their respective destinations, get involved in the work of building user loyalty, and avoid turning a tool as important as Twitter only into a channel of information and not of true communication.

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