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Editors

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Editorial

The International Conference on Tourism, Technologies and Systems is an international forum for researchers and professionals in the tourism sector, which enables the discussion of the latest innovations, trends and concerns in several areas, in the tourism sector, associated with information technologies and systems. It is an event for professionals in the sector, in search of technology solutions, where academics, IT experts and business managers meet to discuss new ideas that help them maximize the potential of tourism business through technology.

The ICOTTS'20 Scientific Committee is composed of a multidisciplinary group of 137 experts who assessed some 190 papers from 28 countries, received for each of the main topics proposed for the conference: a) technology in tourism and tourism experience; b) smart destinations; c) digital marketing applied to tourism and travel; d) mobile technologies applied to sustainable tourism; e) research in the area of tourism to provide innovative solutions to social problems; f) tourism, well-being and hospitality; g) information technologies in tourism; h) digital transformation of tourism business; i) travel for health and well-being; j) information technologies in ecotourism and agrotourism; k) information technologies in food tourism; l) information technologies in education and educational tourism; m) e-tourism and tourism 2.0; n) big data and travel and tourism management; o) robotics in tourism; p) resilience and tourism; q) dark tourism; and r) military tourism.

The papers accepted for presentation and discussion at the conference are published by Springer and will be submitted for indexing by ISI, SCOPUS, EI-Compendex, Google Scholar and SpringerLink.

We thank all those who contributed to the ICOTTS'20 conference (authors, committees, workshop organizers and sponsors). We deeply appreciate your involvement and support, which were crucial to the success of the conference.

October 2020

António Abreu
Dália Liberato
Elisa Alén González
Juan Carlos Garcia Ojeda


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The Online Presence and Communication of a Destination by the Tourist Entities of the Terras de Trás-os-Montes

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Abstract. Local communities are taking an increasingly major role in communicating a destination in terms of contact with tourists. Based on the assumption that tourist entities and agents are part of this community, we can assume that it is necessary for the territorial marketing regulator to promote the involvement of this local community. This is even more justified by the ability of these communities to influence tourists, especially in terms of building the image of a destination. This communication is increasingly generated through information and communication technologies (ICT), namely social networks. To analyze the communication contribution of the tourist entities of the Trás-os-Montes lands, an analysis was carried out on the online presence and its way of communicating the region.

Keywords: Local community · Tourist entities · Communication · Destination · Information and communication technologies (ICT)

1 Introduction

If we consider the consumer society we live in and the information to which we are exposed, we can conclude that communication has become fundamental in promoting tourist destinations. Through communication, destinations can promote their tourist attractions, their identity, and their products. The communication that is made, arouses the consumer's curiosity and desire to know and explore the destination [19].

Communication in the tourism sector is made by the most diverse actors, from the local community, to tourists, and the public and private sectors [19]. The local community has taken on an increasingly active role in the communication of a destination, as it is in direct contact with the tourist, thus assuming the role of promoters of the territory [6]. The local community may also include the tourist agents and entities, which will be the target of the study.

Despite the undeniable relevance and potential of this tourist actor in promoting a destination, Aitken and Campelo [2] state that “often, residents and the local community are left out of the process of creating the brand (...)” and therefore, these do not participate in the implementation of the territorial marketing strategy as they should [11], nor, in turn, in the communication of the brand/destination.

New technologies and the internet are also considered essential tools for communication and information exchange between the different types of tourism agents [20]. Their use also allows a competitiveness increase in tourism entities [5].

The main objective of this article is to understand the online presence of tourist entities and how they communicate the destination where they are inserted. The destination chosen for this analysis comprises the municipalities attached to the Lands of Trás-os-Montes. In a first stage, it is important to understand the presence of various local tourist entities, on social networks and how they make use of their website. Then, analyze whether they communicate the destination and whether they do so effectively.

To achieve the proposed objective, the article is divided as follows: the subject is initially approached in a brief introduction, followed by a review of the literature, where it is important to know the role of the local community in the communication of a destination and the importance of online communication. After this point, the methodology used and its results are explained, and, at last, the final considerations, with the limitations of the study and the future lines of investigation.

2 Literature Review

2.1 The Role of the Local Community (as a Tourist and/or Cultural Entity) in Communicating a Destination

When a tourist wants to visit a destination, he looks for information about it and it is through the different forms of communication that he will find it. The local community is one of the forms of communication of the destination, as it is part of the territory itself, its culture, and its image. But this is not where its importance ends. The process of building a destination brand becomes more effective with the involvement of this community [6, 7, 10, 11], and can be part of the demand (purchase of experiences, goods, etc.) and supply (e.g. owners of local businesses) and certainly has a great influence on the evolution of the tourism paradigm [6, 7]. One of the most effective ways to communicate a destination is through a wide range of local agents willing to be involved in the projects regarding local development [10].

However, the local community is not the only agent needed to reach this tourism development and if the objective is to make the most of the reality surrounding the territory, the entity responsible for territorial marketing must involve all possible actors responsible for local supply [6]. The local community “(...) may be very large, dispersed and made up of agents with multiple interests and different development perspectives” [7], these agents and entities communicate the territory on a daily basis and participate in the creation of its image. These entities can be identified as restaurants, hotels, shops, etc.

2.2 The Importance of Online Communication

Information and Communication Technology (ICT) allows tourists to access accurate and reliable information about the place they want to visit. They also allow reservations to be made more quickly, with easy comparison of costs and in a much more convenient physical and temporal way. In general, ICTs contribute to a higher quality of service and to a higher overall satisfaction of guests [4].

ICTs enables local people to become more involved in the dissemination of the destination brand, and they do so, in a more accessible way [12]. They facilitate the creation of contacts that help in the development of companies, in the acquisition of more capable and cheaper suppliers and even in the dissemination and delivery of products [5], [16].

Social networks have been an increasingly regular practice for the dissemination of the image that entities want to create around a destination brand. In addition, these networks are one of the most pivotal points in the online aspect of marketing management, helping to reach and interact with the target audience [13, 20]. The use of various digital platforms by stakeholders is extremely used and efficient, making “(...) network communication one of the main communication strategies” [17].

All of this highlights the importance of the ICTs in the ability to arouse the interest and desire of tourists in the face of a destination brand. In the same order, this offers a greater notoriety to the territory. Finally, ICTs are a breaking point in the financial and notoriety gap between tourism agents, facilitating contact with the market and providing higher quality of service to smaller companies. Through this greater competitiveness, the region ends up gaining more financial and social capacity [5].

Adapting this information to the Portuguese territory, the northern region of Portugal has the lowest internet penetration (69%), and the most purchased services online are accommodation (57%), transport tickets (44%) and entertainment tickets (37%) [1]. Taking these tourist services into account, it is important that the different tourist entities are present online and communicate the destination in order to attract tourists.

3 Methodology

To analyze the online presence of tourist entities and their communication of the destination, quantitative and qualitative approaches were used.

In a first stage, the presence of tourism agents on social networks was verified and they had a website. Regarding the quantitative analysis, it was ascertained how many followers and publications they had in each network. The social networks analyzed were Facebook, Instagram and Youtube, as they are the most used by internet users [15].

In a second phase, which corresponds to the qualitative approach, the objective was to understand if the entities communicated their destiny. In the case of communicating, an analysis was made that consisted in finding out on which platform they communicate, how they communicate, and which are the target themes of communication. The analysis comprises the periodic interval from January 1, 2020 to May 31, 2020.

3.1 Sample Selection Criteria

For the selection of the sample was considered the territorial unit NUT III, which corresponds to the Lands of Trás-os-Montes. This region in the north of Portugal is composed of nine municipalities: Alfândega da Fé, Bragança, Macedo de Cavaleiros, Miranda do Douro, Mirandela, Mogadouro, Vila Flor, Vimioso and Vinhais. The tourist entities of these counties were selected based on three categories: accommodation, catering, and activities. The accommodation and restaurants were taken from the book *Boa Cama, Boa Mesa 2020* [8] of the express network. This book contemplates several criteria for the selection of the spaces awarded with the reference, such as: considered ambassadors of the region's gastronomy; users and promoters of local products; recognized in the region for their active role. This book is also known to contain the best accommodation and restaurants in each region of Portugal. As far as tourist activities are concerned, these were chosen based on the website of each City Hall under analysis and the Tripadvisor platform.

3.2 Sample

In total, 29 entities from the 9 municipalities were analyzed: 10 accommodations; 9 restaurants and 10 entities with tourist activities.

Table 1 shows the nine municipalities that correspond to the Lands of Trás-os-Montes, the data on the arrival of guests in 2018 [9], the tourist entities analyzed and the due designation of abbreviations in legend for better interpretation of the data. It is possible to observe that the municipality of Bragança presents a larger number of entities for analysis. This is justified because it is the capital of the district and the target of the demand for more tourists.

Table 1. Sample of tourist entities analyzed.

| Counties | Guest arrivals (2018) | Tourist entities | Denomination |
|----------------------|-----------------------|---------------------------|--------------|
| Alfândega da Fé | 7822 | Bela Vista Silo Housing | A1 |
| Bragança | 65243 | Pousada de Bragança | A2 |
| | | Bétula Studios | A3 |
| | | Quinta da Rica Fé | A4 |
| | | Restaurante G | R1 |
| | | D. Roberto | R2 |
| | | O Abel | R3 |
| | | O Geadas | R4 |
| | | Tasca Zé Tuga | R5 |
| | | Anda D'I | ATV1 |
| | | Nordeste Park | ATV2 |
| | | Montesinho Aventura | ATV3 |
| Macedo de Cavaleiros | 6411 | Solar do Morgado Oliveira | A5 |
| | | Brasa | R6 |
| Miranda do Douro | 25587 | Casa dos Edras | A6 |
| | | Casa Belharino | A7 |
| | | Douro Pula Canhada | ATV4 |

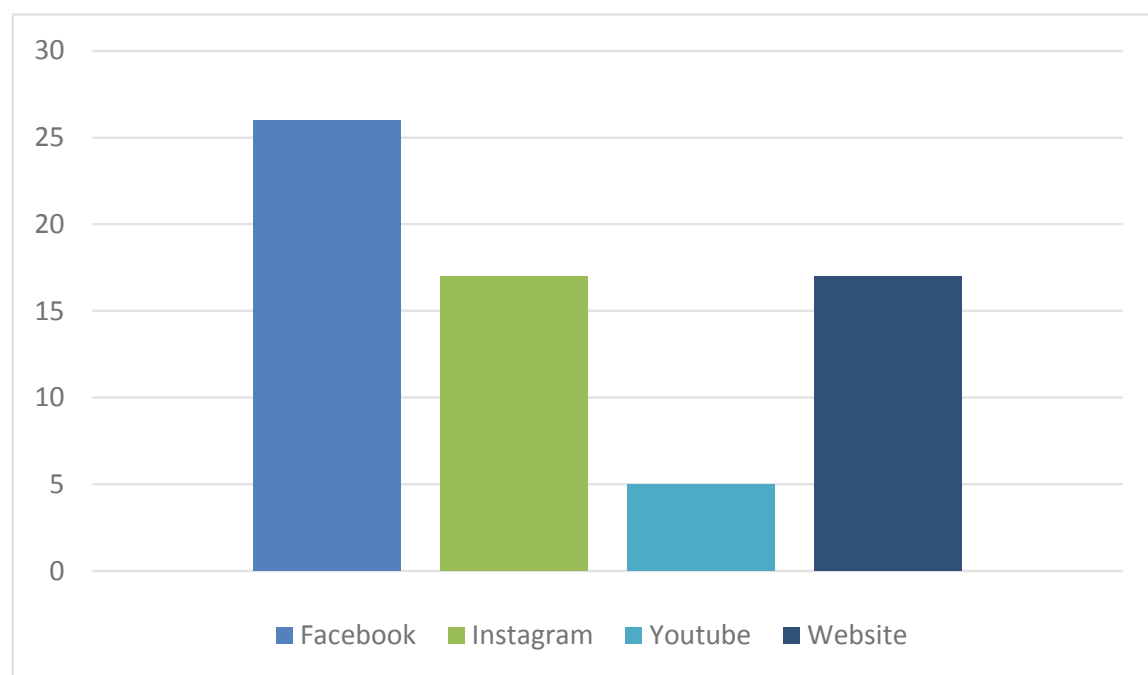
(continued)

Table 1. (continued)

| Counties | Guest arrivals (2018) | Tourist entities | Denomination |
|-----------|-----------------------|-----------------------------|--------------|
| Mirandela | 22936 | Dona Fina Guest House | A8 |
| | | Flor de Sal | R7 |
| | | Maria Rita | R8 |
| | | Naturthoughts | ATV5 |
| | | Anitudes | ATV6 |
| Mogadouro | 1975 | Casa das Quintas | A9 |
| | | A Lareira | R9 |
| Vila Flor | 3136 | Quinta Barracão da Vilarça | A10 |
| Vimioso | 1366 | P.I.N.T.A | ATV8 |
| | | Coordenadas de aventura | ATV9 |
| Vinhais | 6712 | Parque Biológico de Vinhais | ATV10 |

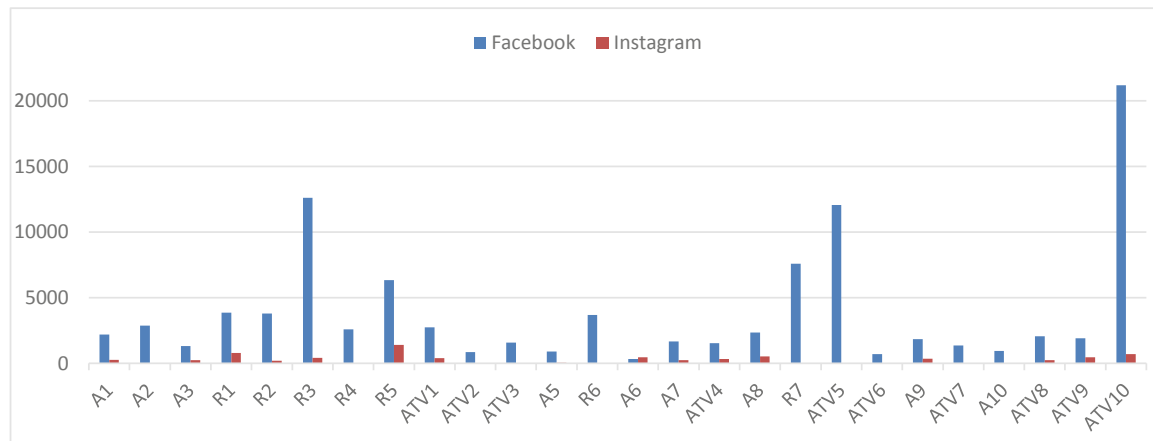
4 Results and Discussion

In a first phase, the analysis consisted in knowing the online presence of the selected tourist entities, and out of 29, only 2 do not have any online presence (2 restaurants). Regarding the most used platform, Facebook stands out (26 entities), 17 entities are present in Instagram and have a website (Graph 1).

**Graph 1.** Online presence of tourist entities.

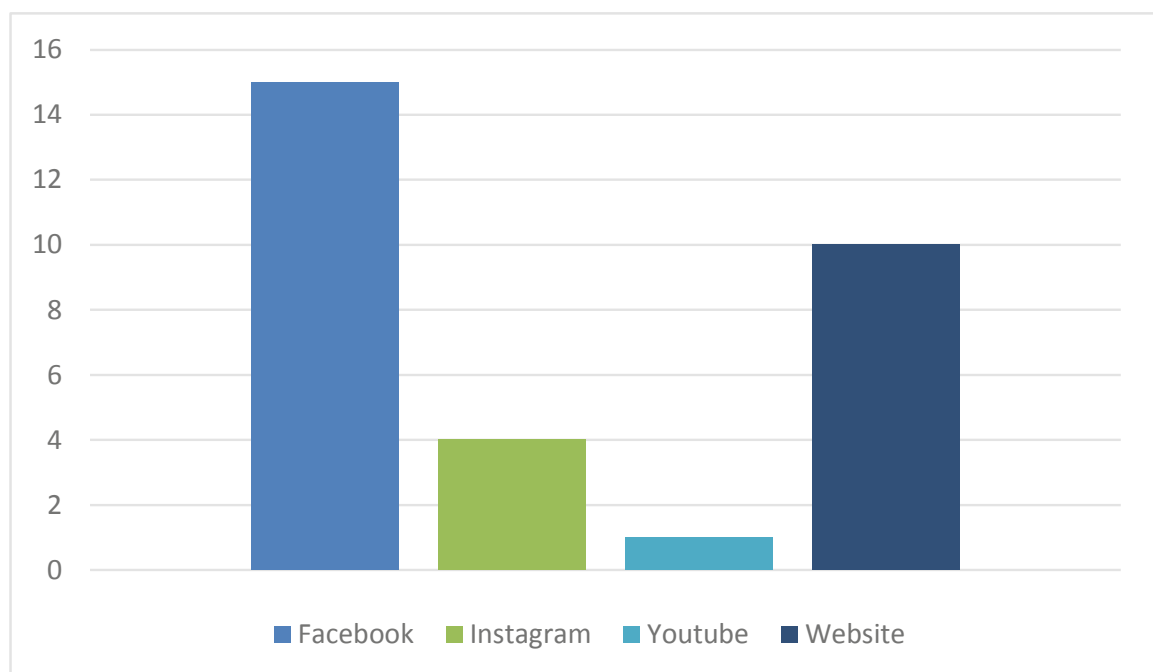
Although most of the entities are present on the platforms presented, many of them, during the analysis period, did not interact with their followers. We can also withdraw that 8 entities placed between 0 and 5 posts (in five months) on the Facebook social network, this being an extremely low number compared to other entities.

The followers of the two most used social networks (Facebook and Instagram) were also studied to know their impact on these same networks (Graph 2). The entities with more followers on Facebook correspond to restaurants (6 have more than 3000 followers) and activities (2 have more than 3000 followers).



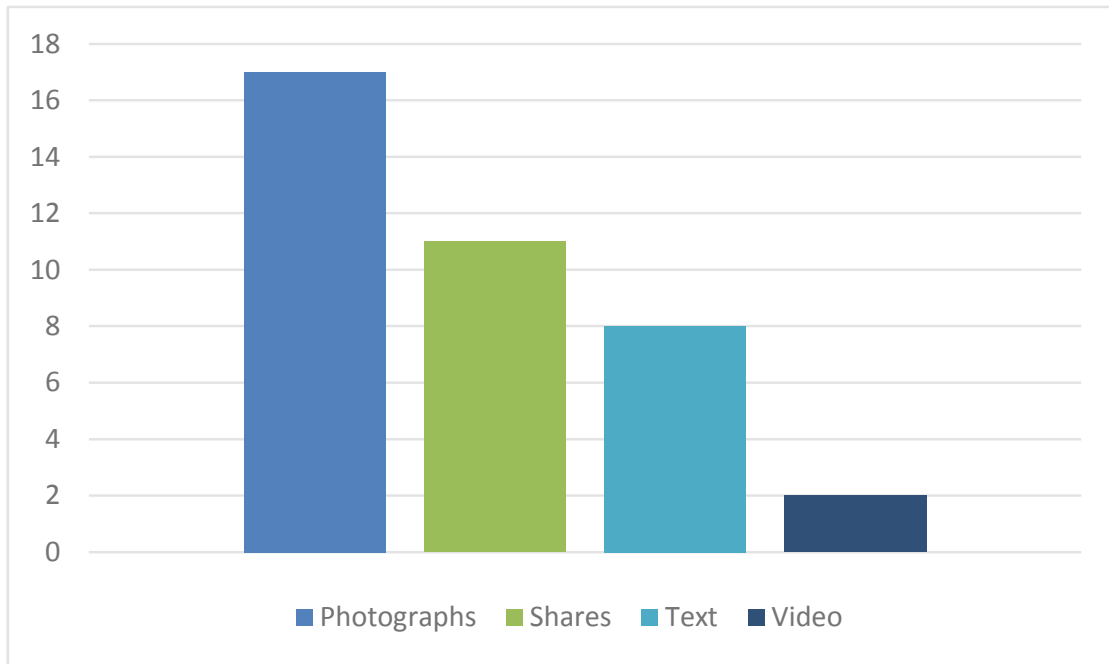
Graph 2. Followers of social networks of tourism entities.

The analysis proceeded with the objective to find which of the 29 entities communicate the destination. In a first stage, the existence or not of some type of content on the platforms that portrayed the destination was verified. Of the 29 entities analyzed only 18 communicate the destination. The results obtained show that the most used platform to communicate is Facebook, and of the 18 that communicate, 15 use this social network (Graph 3). It can also be seen that 10 entities have information about the destination on the website, information that corresponds to static pages.



Graph 3. Platforms where tourist entities communicate the destination.

Should also be mentioned what form of sharing was chosen by the entities to communicate the destination. Four categories were considered: photos, sharing, text and videos. As for sharing, it is important to inform for consideration that these consist of shared content from other people, blogs, or news. Graph 4 shows that the most used way to communicate the destination are the photos. These represent the identity of a destination and can trigger emotions and desires to visit a destination [18]. Many of the photographs used are accompanied by explanatory text about the content that is the target of the communication.



Graph 4. Ways used by tourist entities to communicate the destination.

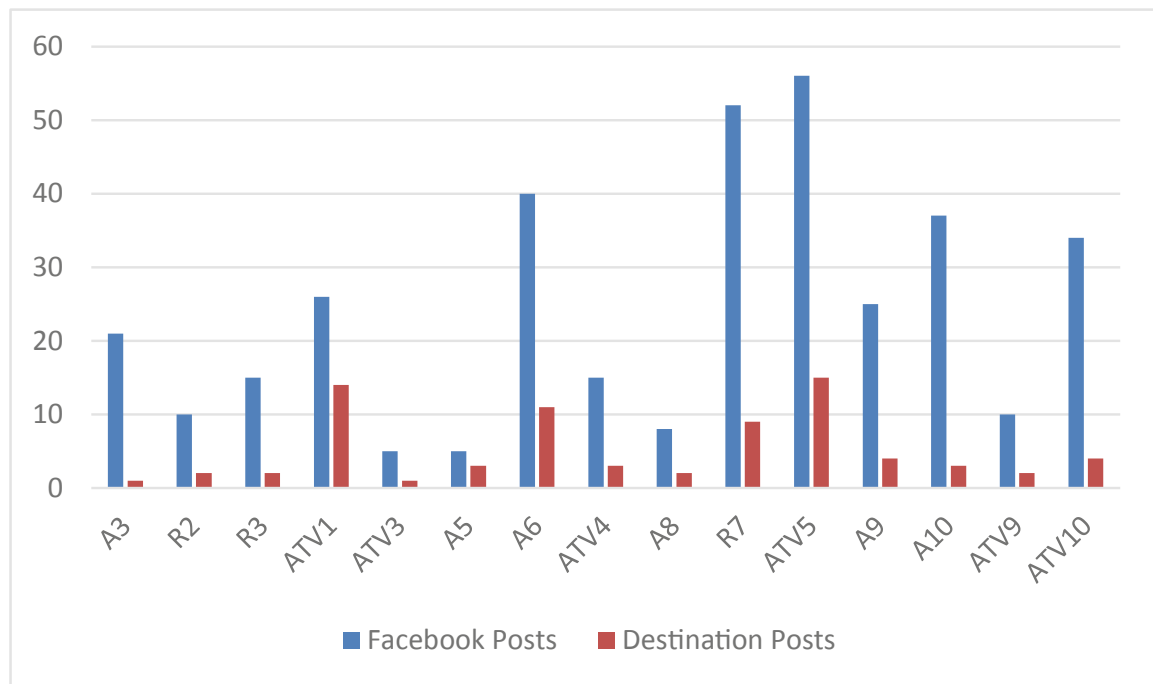
Regarding the themes addressed by the entities, these were categorized based on the nine dimensions/attributes of image perception of destiny, proposed by Beerli and Martín [3]. The categories are the following: natural resources; general infrastructure; tourist infrastructure; leisure and recreational tourism; culture, history, and heritage; natural environment; social environment; atmosphere of the place; political and economic factors. Despite the existence of 9 dimensions, for the following analysis only 4 categories were considered, since they are those related to the data under study.

- Natural resources: time, beaches, flora and fauna, parks, and natural reserves.
- Tourist infrastructures: hotels, restaurants, bars, discotheques, tourist office, etc.
- Leisure and recreational tourism: entertainment and sports activities.
- Culture, history, and art: museums, monuments, gastronomy, religion, customs, etc.

Therefore, of the communicated themes, the majority comprises the category natural resources, namely the theme Natural Park of Douro International. Soon after, the category corresponding to culture, history and art stands out, being the events of the region and local gastronomy the most communicated.

The Facebook platform was chosen for a more detailed analysis, as it is the most used by entities. The purpose of this analysis is to know the activity of the entities in this social network and the frequency of their communication of destination. The quantification of this frequency was made based on the total of publications in the period stipulated for analysis. From this we conclude that only 15 tourist entities communicate through this social network (Graph 5).

Although many entities communicate the destination, it is important to understand the number of posts registered during a period of five months and how many of these correspond to the communication of the destination.



Graph 5. Comparison between the total of facebook posts and the posts that communicate the destination

This importance is related to the idea that an entity that makes several posts but only communicates the destination once, is in a situation substantially different from another that communicates the territory weekly, which is here the intended objective to improve the capacity and notoriety of the destination brand. For Graph 5, only tourist entities that communicate the destination were considered.

You can see that the most active entities on the Facebook platform are respectively a restaurant and a tourist entertainment company in the municipality of Mirandela. It is also these two entities that most communicate the destination, followed by ATV1 and A6.

The analysis made shows that about 62% (18) of the tourist entities analyzed communicate the destination, but although this number represents more than half of the total sample we must take into account that 16.6% (3) of these entities communicate through a website, where the information is on a static page, not contributing so effectively. The remaining entities communicate through the Facebook and Instagram

platform, but during the five months analyzed only 4 entities communicated more than five times the destination.

5 Final Considerations

We must stress that, based on some studies [7, 12], we can conclude that uncontrolled sources, where tourist entities are included, are more significant and effective in communicating a destination. This is because the less controlled the information, the more credibility and influence it will have on the creation of the image of the destination, with consumers (tourists). As Correia and Brito [7] states “(...) the territorial offer is co-produced by a multiplicity of entities, each one of them will be able to function through their behaviors and activities as a communication element of the territory”.

The use of technologies has allowed the various entities a lower dependence on intermediary companies for the distribution and communication of their products [5], allowing a better interaction between the various tourism agents and an integral marketing communication.

The study made it possible to verify the complexity that involves the communication of a destination by local entities. We concluded then that it is not enough to sporadically communicate a destination to attract tourists' attention, the message communicated must be constant, clear, and attractive. However, most tourist entities in Trás-os-Montes do not communicate the destination regularly.

Most tourist entities are small and micro enterprises, a number that is even more intensified in the region under study. This type of entity suffers from a greater difficulty in accessing social capital and technological investments. However, according to Lee and Hallak [14] small and micro enterprises have the capacity to become competitive through the appropriate use of online platforms and the support of destination governments and tourism associations in connecting all these enterprises.

6 Study Limitations

This article presents some limitations, particularly regarding the selected sample. Not all the entities chosen matched the top demand in terms of tourism.

Another limitation in this study relates to the method of analysis - observation. This method when applied by different researchers may eventually generate different collected data, since different points of view may lead to the consideration of different types of posts as a form of communication. However, it should be made clear that there has been an effort for the analysis to be totally impartial and built from the position of the tourist. For example, some posts were not considered “communication” because the photographs were not visually perceptible.

7 Future Lines of Research

For a future line of research, it would be interesting to consider a larger sample of tourist entities in order to draw more assertive conclusions.

It would also be interesting to cover other types of tourist entities such as: museums, regional product shops, bars, tourist services etc.

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