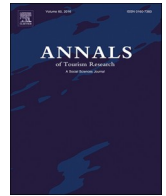


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Characterizing the location of tourist images in cities. Differences in user-generated images (Instagram), official tourist brochures and travel guides



Daniel Paül i Agustí

Universitat de Lleida, Plaça Víctor Siurana, 1, 25003 Lleida, Spain

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ABSTRACT

This study analyses the extent to which there is an overlap in the territorial distribution and attractiveness of tourism images distributed via three different media: official tourist brochures, travel guides and user-generated content (Instagram). We applied a mixed-method approach, which included spatial analyses and cartography, to study the promotion of tourism in Montevideo (Uruguay). The results indicated a partial overlap between the locations captured in user-generated images and those promoted by official tourist brochures and travel guides. The findings suggest a territorial distribution of tourism images that is clearly differentiated according to the source(s). This provides useful insights for applications of social media into future geographical and image management research.

Introduction

Tourists' behaviour in cities has a clear spatial component (Lee, Hitchcock, & Lei, 2017). Through the tourist's expectations, decisions and comments, he or she creates a series of interactions with the spaces visited (Larsen, Urry, & Axhausen, 2007; Katsoni, 2014; Marine-Roig & Anton Clavé, 2016). It is a behaviour that contributes to the modification of the image of urban spaces (Coleman & Crang, 2002; Stylianou-Lamber, 2012). The importance of these interrelationships has recently been boosted by the digitalisation of images and the popularisation of social media (Stepchenkova & Zhan, 2013). However, few studies have focused on identifying the spatial differences that the different representations of a place's image may have.

Phelps (1986) differentiates between primary and secondary images. Primary images (perceived) are those formed by the visitor's and residents' experiences (Hunter, 2016). They are usually subjective images (Wolcott, 1995). Given that they are generally produced by tourists who are unpaid, they tend to be seen as impartial and highly credible (Mak, 2017). Secondary images (projected) are created by the various tourist agents. These precede the visit and aim to be objective or to meet commercial criteria (MacKay & Fesenmaier, 1997). They synthesise the characteristics, concepts or values that the location wants to promote (Picazo & Moreno-Gil, 2017).

A comparison of both sources enables various attributes of the destination's tourist image to be identified (Stewart, 2005; Almeida Santos & Buzinde, 2007). However, the scholarly literature shows that they are often treated independently, and studies based on a single source are commonplace (Lodrà-Riera, Martínez-Ruiz, Jiménez-Zarco, & Izquierdo-Yusta, 2015). This situation pays very little attention to the potential differences between perceived images and projected images (Picazo & Moreno-Gil, 2017).

Cartography is one of the fields in which there is a shortage of studies. Despite the significant differences between projected and

E-mail address: dpaul@geosoc.udl.cat.

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perceived images, there is a lack of understanding of the territorial distribution of such images. Among existing studies, [Stepchenkova and Zhan \(2013\)](#) use geo-maps representing projected and perceived images of Peru. Or [Tammets, Luberg, and Järv \(2013\)](#), who used various geotagged databases to identify the main points of tourist interest. However, very few studies have sought to analyse the geographic locations of tourist attractions and the degree to which the projected and perceived images overlap ([Marine-Roig & Ferrer-Rosell, 2018](#)).

A partial study of image components may affect the representativeness of the results ([Stewart, 2005](#); [Almeida Santos & Buzinde, 2007](#)). If a study is based on one of the sources alone, it may disregard a significant part of a destination's image and offer a fragmented result. For example, it is broadly accepted that the greater the similarity between the projected image and the perceived image is, the better the marketing results will be ([Mackay & Fesenmaier, 1997](#)).

Applying the geographical location of tourist sights to ideas relating to perceived and projected images may serve as an important tool for analysing and improving a destination's image ([García-Palomares, Gutiérrez, & Mínguez, 2015](#)). Based on this premise, our research analyses how images can play a fundamental role in helping us to understand relationships between tourism and territories ([García-Palomares et al., 2015](#)).

The present work focuses on the application of a methodology that enables the spatial differences between the projected image and the perceived image to be identified. More specifically we will compare the territorial location of the images used in official tourist brochures and travel guides (projected image) and Instagram user-generated content (perceived image). However, the demonstrated methodological framework is not restricted to these source, and it can be applicable to others sources. The use of cartography to compare a city's various tourist attractions is one of the novelties of this research. Montevideo (Uruguay) was used as a case study destination. The main objective is to obtain urban cartography that visualises the spatial differences in the representation of projected and perceived images. This will enable the similarities and differences between the analysed sources to be identified.

Review of relevant literature

Tourism destination image

Destination image theory continues to stand as one of the basic modes of inquiry in tourism research ([Hunter, 2016](#)). It can be defined as “the sum of beliefs, ideas, and impressions that a person has of a destination” ([Crompton & Gitelson, 1979, 18](#)). A complex, individual representation created by organizations, local residents or anonymous agents ([Tasci & Gartner, 2007](#)). It is an individual's mental representation of the knowledge, feelings and overall perception of a destination ([Fakeye & Crompton, 1991](#)). Some authors believe that the image of the destination is a ‘nebulous concept’ ([Hughes & Allen, 2008, 30](#)). Others point out that the promotion of tourism does not play a key role in forming the image of the destination ([Govers & Go, 2005](#)). However, the majority of authors coincide in identifying this as a ‘multidimensional concept’ ([Gallarza, Saura, & Garcia, 2002](#)).

Imagery is a useful tool for examining the representation of a place ([Yan & Santos, 2009](#)). Visual elements, such as photography, are a significant part of projecting a strong destination image ([MacKay & Couldwell, 2004](#); [MacKay & Fesenmaier, 1997](#)). However, also have a component of being synecdochical representations. A part can represent the whole, or the whole can represent a part. The representation of a place by an image summarises the complexity of the city visited and makes it accessible to the tourist ([Smith, 2005](#)).

The act of fixing a certain image in the collective imagination therefore depends on a number of filters that may take the form of realities, experiences, or – as in the case of this article – specific urban spaces. Tourists interact with the image of the destination before, during, and after their visits ([Tasci & Gartner, 2007](#)). A widely accepted conceptualization divides tourist destination image in two interrelated components: cognitive and affective images ([Baloglu, 1997](#)). Cognitive image involving individuals' beliefs and knowledge about the destination. Affective, refers to emotions and feelings about this destination ([Deng & Li, 2018](#)). Some authors include a third filter, conative, derived from the previous two. This would include acting, doing or striving as a reaction to the previous inputs ([Marine-Roig & Ferrer-Rosell, 2018](#)).

Images reproduce symbols with meanings that have been socially constructed and disseminated. They are individual perceptions and subjective reflections that have been shaped in the mind ([Galí & Donaire, 2015](#)). The study of the image is therefore a complex one, with many intangible facets. The main difficulty lies in the fact that images cannot speak for themselves; instead, it is necessary to speak about and associate them ([Miossec, 1977](#)). This combination of factors complicates the interpretation of images, as we do not receive ‘the world as it is, but rather the world as it is perceived, experienced and enacted’ ([Staszak, 2014, 597](#)). As a result, comparing the image generated by a space and that reproduced in photographs taken by tourists can provide relevant information that can help us to understand the different ways in which a given image can be interpreted.

The user-generated content and the image of the destination

The difference between the projected image and the perceived image is not unanimously accepted. Some authors state that the boundaries “may be blurred” ([Stepchenkova & Zhan, 2013: 591](#)). They see the destination images and their circulation as one hermeneutic circle of representation ([Urry, 1990](#)). Destination marketing organizations convey images of a destination to potential tourists. Tourists are interested in the location and define their image of it, which has been acquired from other sources too ([Paül i Agustí, 2009](#)). At the time of the visit, this image guides tourist's gaze at a destination. When they take photos, tourists close the hermeneutic circle of destination representation: “consciously or unconsciously, tourists look for scenes and images that replicate their existing perceptions” ([Stepchenkova & Zhan, 2013: 591](#)). At a spatial level, this leads tourists to visit places that they have

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