Communication, destination brands and mobile applications

Comunicación de destinos turísticos y aplicaciones móviles

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ABSTRACT: **Tourist communication and destination branding are professional and academic fields that are witnessing expansion. Aside from traditional media, destinations also use official websites, social networks and mobile applications for communication. This article examines a sample of Spanish destination applications along with two comparative samples comprised by international destinations and commercial brands.**
The results show there is a clear underuse of the resources afforded by mobile applications because, in most cases, they show unspecific content and lack interactive options.

RESUMEN: *La comunicación turística y la comunicación de marcas de destino son ámbitos profesionales y académicos en expansión. Aparte de los medios tradicionales,*

los destinos utilizan también portales oficiales en la web, redes sociales y aplicaciones para dispositivos móviles. En este artículo se analiza una muestra de aplicaciones de destinos españoles junto con dos muestras de contraste formadas por destinos internacionales y aplicaciones de marcas comerciales.
Los resultados revelan una clara infrautilización por parte de los destinos españoles de los recursos que las aplicaciones móviles proporcionan, ya que, en su mayoría, presentan contenidos no específicos y escasas opciones de interactividad.

Keywords: Tourist communication, destination brand, destination branding, mobile application.

Palabras clave: comunicación turística, marca de destino, destination branding, place branding, aplicación móvil.

Specialised communication in the tourist sector has transformed into a professional activity that is currently on the increase. Nations, cities, provinces and regions make use of a growing number of resources to appeal to potential visitors. Generally speaking, these territories organise promotion by creating and maintaining a tourist brand which is typically managed by the ministry, whether national or regional, the local council, the provincial government, or the respective public or semi-public organisation.

In this paper we will set out some of the theoretical foundations underpinning the communication of destination brands and we will detail the tools typically employed, which include the mass media, countless public relations techniques, official online websites, the social Web and mobile applications.

We will then explain the results of empirical research analysing a sample of official applications for mobile devices distributed by Spanish destinations and we will offer certain conclusions, reflections and recommendations.

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1. *Communication and destination brands*

Tourism is a major economic activity in many countries worldwide, both in nations having a high per capita GDP (i.e., Switzerland, USA, Australia and Singapore) and nations with a lower GDP (i.e., Morocco, Peru, Thailand and Croatia).

For all countries in the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), tourism accounted for an average 4.2% of GDP in 2010 (OECD, 2012). However, in certain nations, it accounted for a much larger share: Spain (10.2%), Portugal (9.2%), New Zealand (8.6%), Mexico (8%), France (7.1%) and Austria (5.6%). Throughout the recession, this economic relevance of the tourist industry has remained generally stable. Nevertheless, according to the WTO (WTO, 2010: 4), in the current context of crisis and competitiveness, tourist consumer habits change, last minute bookings become more commonplace, as do shorter trips to more local destinations, and there is greater demand for the money spent to go much further. Similarly, the Internet

is in greater demand when it comes to searching for information and making purchases online.

In the present day, most tourists from any part of the world plan their holidays, place their bookings and make their tourist service purchases online, where they also share their experiences. For instance, according to the IET (2010), "60% of tourists who visited Spain used the Internet to prepare their trips".

Indeed, tourist companies and organisations –including public or public and private institutions entrusted with promoting tourist destinations, known as destination marketing organisations (DMOs)– engage in a large part of their promotion and management activities using communication technologies. DMOs have made huge endeavours to gain presence on the World Wide Web by setting up official websites. However, evolution is a continuous phenomenon and the emergence of mobile applications and new social Web tools has broadened the scope of possibilities for online communication with tourists.

Competition among cities, regions and countries to appeal to travellers often culminates in the organisation and professionalization of this activity by creating and maintaining a destination brand. Such a brand may be exclusive or essentially tourism-based (hence the expression destination brand)[1] or it may have a more integral calling with the notion of being addressed to tourists and to all manner of external and internal publics (known as place brand)[2].

The notion that to promote places you can adopt similar procedures to those used by companies to promote their consumer products is directly linked to the popularisation of tourism as a leisure activity. Morgan and Pritchard pointed out that during the 1990s tourist managers began to question: "if branding works for consumer products, could it work for a destination?"[3].

In one of the pioneering works theorising this phenomenon, Philip Kotler stated that place marketing had become a prominent economic activity generating wealth[4]. Accordingly, an increasing number of countries, regions and cities use marketing and branding initiatives on a regular basis[5].

As indicated by Govers and Go[6], people who create place brands often work with or bear some form of involvement in tourist promotion institutions (DMOs), but in actual

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[1] For a general description of what is understood by destination brand, the following sources may be consulted: MORGAN, N., PRITCHARD, A. and PRIDE, R., *Destination Brands. Managing Place Reputation*, Butterworth-Heinemann, Oxford, 2011 (particularly pp. 3-19); WTO, *Handbook on Tourism Destination Branding*, Europe-World Tourism Organization, Madrid, 2009; BALAKRISHNAN, M. S., "Strategic branding of destinations: a framework", *European Journal of Marketing*, 43 (5/6), 2009, pp. 611-629; KONECNIK, M. and GARTNER, W. C., "Customer-based brand equity for a destination". *Annals of Tourism Research*, 34 (2), 2007, pp. 400-421.

[2] In order to understand what experts classify as a place brand, the following sources may be consulted: GOVERS, R. and GO, F., *Place Branding. Glocal, Virtual and Physical Identities, Constructed, Imagined and Experienced*, Palgrave Macmillan, Hampshire, 2009; ANHOLT, S., *Places. Identity, image and reputation*, Palgrave Macmillan, Hampshire, 2010; MOILANEN, T. and RAINISTO, S., *How to brand nations, cities and destinations. A planning book for place branding*, Palgrave-McMillan, Hampshire, 2009; KANEVA, N., "Nation Branding: Toward an Agenda for Critical Research", *International Journal of Communication*, 5, 2011, pp. 117-141; HANKINSON, G., "Place branding research: A cross-disciplinary agenda and the views of practitioners", *Place Branding and Public Diplomacy*, 6 (4), 2010, pp. 300-315.

[3] MORGAN, N. and PRITCHARD, A., *Tourism Promotion and Power*, John Wiley & Sons, New York, 1998, p. 146.

[4] KOTLER, P., HAIDER, D.H. and REIN, I., *Marketing places*, The Free Press, New York, 1993, p. 21.

[5] KAVARATZIS, M. and ASHWORTH, G.J., "City Branding: an Effective Assertion of Identity or a Transitory Marketing Trick?", *Tijdschrift voor Economische en Sociale Geografie*, 96, (5), 2005, p. 507.

[6] GOVERS, R. and GO, F., *op. cit.*, p. 14.

fact the "promise of value" and a "fulfilling experience" is forged by all the public and private players involved in the process of serving visitors of all kinds. As pointed out by Anholt[7], the problem involves public policies rather than merely image management.

In this respect, certain authors[8] sought to link destination brand management to the theory and practice of corporate communication because destination brands and corporate brands entail interaction with a wide range of varying public targets. However, other authors[9] tend to draw common ground between destination brands and the theory of public relations because the main goal of the latter is to create ties rather than to generate transactions, therefore meaning that the traditional marketing approach would end up falling patently short.

It may also be appropriate to link the management of destination brands to government communication because both areas bear a common problem: their long-term strategic vision is adversely affected by the duration of political terms of office[10].

2. *Online communication, social media and mobile applications*

The main changes introduced by information and communication technologies into the tourism sector are linked to the way in which services are offered, interaction between customers and suppliers and the manner in which the companies in the sector operate.

Buhalis and Law[11] highlight the fact that the advances witnessed in the fields of communication technology and tourism have developed in tandem from the outset since the implementation of booking systems in the 1970s to the current online developments which have led to the emergence of a "new tourist" who has greater authority, more information and is ever more demanding and can come into direct contact with suppliers and destinations. This casts doubt on the pertinence or added value hitherto offered by intermediaries. Indeed, Frías, Rodríguez and Castañeda[12] demonstrated how the Internet has to a large extent replaced travel agents as a source of information, a marketing agent and a tourist destination point of sale.

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[7] ANHOLT, S., *op. cit.*, p. 11.

[8] HANKINSON, G., "Place branding theory: a cross-domain literature review from a marketing perspective", in ASHWORTH, G. & KAVARATZIS, M. (ed.), *Towards Effective Place Brand Management*, Edward Elgar, Cheltenham (UK), 2010; KAVARATZIS, M. and ASHWORTH, G., "Place branding: where do we stand?", in ASHWORTH, G. & KAVARATZIS, M. (ed.), *Towards Effective Place Brand Management*, Edward Elgar, Cheltenham (UK), 2010.

[9] HUERTAS, A., "Public relations and tourism: Fighting for the role of public relations in tourism", *Public Relations Review*, 34, 2008, pp. 406-408; L'ETANG, J., FALKHEIMER, J. and LUGO, J., "Public relations and tourism: Critical reflections and a research agenda", *Public Relations Review*, 33, 2007, pp. 68-76.

[10] At this juncture, the comparison made by Canel and Sanders between government communication and corporate communication would be applicable: although a company should manage its corporate image considering the long-term, this is impossible in the political sphere where the government is chosen every four or five years. Similarly, destination brands, managed by local and provincial councils or national and autonomous community governments, tend to fall victim to visions based on the short-term. See CANEL, M. J. and SANDERS, K., "Para estudiar la comunicación de los gobiernos. Un análisis del estado de la cuestión", *Comunicación y sociedad*, XXIII (1), 2010, pp. 12-14.

[11] BUHALIS, D. and LAW, R., "Progress in Information Technology and Tourism Management: 20 years on and 10 years after Internet. The state of e-Tourism research", *Tourism Management*, 29(4), 2008, pp. 609-623.

[12] FRÍAS, D.M., RODRÍGUEZ, M.A. and CASTAÑEDA, J.A., "Internet vs. Travel Agencies on Pre-visit Destination Image Formation: An Information Processing View", *Tourism Management*, 29, 2008, pp. 163-179.

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In *Turismo 2020. Plan Operativo Turespaña[13]* it had already been noted that "the future management of the online channel in the tourist field is based on use of the Internet as a means for engaging with tourists. […] incorporating tourists as active surfers compared to the traditional model where they are passive surfers".

Web 2.0 enables users to become co-designers, co-marketers and co-distributors of tourist experiences[14]. Social media and, specifically, social networks, emerge as the primary mechanism used by travellers when sharing their experiences[15] (Xiang and Gretzel, 2010).

User-generated content (UGC) has a significant bearing on the decisions of Internet user travellers. Blogs, virtual communities, wikis, social networking sites (such as Facebook), multimedia channels (such as Youtube and Flickr), etc., enable travellers to share their voyage experiences whilst offering information for future travellers. Moreover, this influence extends to the online reputation of the destinations shown on these channels and, therefore, to their activity.

With regard to the use of mobile services, the tourist industry is beginning to exploit the potential offered by such omnipresent access and is developing products providing tourist information on cities, as well as commercial applications and booking and payment services, which have already been successfully implemented in several places[16]. The benefits of mobile marketing are especially notable for the tourist industry as shown in the following table:

Figure 1. Comparison of the characteristics of mass marketing and mobile marketing

Aspect	Mass marketing	Mobile marketing
Audience scope	All existing and potential product users	Current and potential users of products using mobile devices who choose to receive communication
Potential communication type	Text, voice and video	Text, voice and video in a reduced visual setting with transfer speed limitations
Typical communication route	Seller to consumer	Interactivity between seller and consumer
Capacity for message to reach target	Low	High
Capacity to monitor response	Low	High
Consumer targetability	Low	Medium
Cost per target audience	High	Low

Source: compiled by authors based on Shankar and Balasubramanian[17] (2009).

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[13] SEGITTUR, *Turismo 2020. Plan Operativo Turespaña*, 2008, p. 42. Available at: http://www.turismo2020.es/ (accessed on 7 January 2011).

[14] SIGALA, M., "Web 2.0, Social Marketing Strategies and Distribution Channels for City Destinations: Enhancing the Participatory Role of Travelers and Exploiting their Collective Intelligence", in GASCÓ, M. and TORRES, T., *Information Communication Technologies and City Marketing. Digital Opportunities for Cities around the World*, Information Science Reference, Hershey, 2009, p. 242.

[15] XIANG, Z. and GRETZEL, U., "Role of Social Media in Online Travel Information Search", *Tourism Management*, 31, 2010, pp. 179-188.

[16] CHUDALLA, J. and POUSTTCHI, K., "City Marketing Goes Mobile: Use of Mobile Commerce Techniques for City Marketing", in GASCÓ, M. and TORRES, T., *Information Communication Technologies and City Marketing. Digital Opportunities for Cities around the World*, Information Science Reference, Hershey, 2009.

[17] SHANKAR,V. and BALASUBRAMANIAN, S., "Mobile Marketing: A Synthesis and Prognosis", *Journal of Interactive Marketing*, 23, 2009, pp. 118-129.

There are numerous definitions of mobile marketing; however, we will set out two that may be considered particularly pertinent to this paper. Kaplan[18] describes mobile marketing as "any marketing activity conducted through a ubiquitous network to which consumers are constantly connected using a personal mobile device". Indeed, the Mobile Marketing Association[19] considers it to be "a set of practices that enables organizations to communicate and engage with their audience in an interactive and relevant manner through any mobile device or network".

Kaplan's definition contemplates two attributes that are vital to the interests of tourist activity: the omnipresent connection and the permanent connection. The Mobile Marketing Association insists on another essential factor: interactivity. Both definitions place similar attention to the type of device enabling communication, the design and features of which allow this new form of communication to exist.

During the past year, access to Internet via mobiles has skyrocketed and now extends to 71% of Spanish users, compared with only 29% of mobile users going online on their handsets according to 2010 figures (Orange, 2011).

According to a study conducted by the Observatory on Internet Trends of Travellers in Spain concerning the use of mobile Internet for travel, 81% of mobile Internet users make use of their mobile device during some stage of their travel (either relating to planning and/or during the trip), and 27% of travellers who use the Internet on their mobile devices downloaded travel-related applications[20].

For certain types of tourist companies, mobile marketing offers the perfect opportunity to engage with the demands of new consumers who nowadays are far more active and independent and welcome the benefits afforded by technologies, and who seek "the opinions of others and share information in order to make the most appropriate decision"[21].

The characteristics promoting the business of mobile marketing which tie in specifically with the marketing needs of the tourist sector are the following[22]:

Mobility, which relates to the capacity of users to utilise specific services in any place and at any time.

Localisation, which enables companies to offer products and services to potential customers depending on their location.

Convenience, size and user-friendliness are attributes making mobile devices a highly suitable tool in comparison with a desktop PC.

Personalisation, which when applied to mobile devices is a unique characteristic that differs from traditional home PCs or computers in public venues which could be used by numerous people.

All these particular features of mobile marketing are successfully adapting to tourist companies' promotion requirements and a host of products are being created which are highly interesting from the standpoint of the study of communication. According to a study by the advertising company Madvertise, in 2011 an average of 698 mobile

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[18] KAPLAN, A.M., "If you love something, let it go mobile: Mobile marketing and mobile social media 4x4". *Business Horizons*, 55 (2), 2012, p. 130.

[19] MOBILE MARKETING ASSOCIATION, *3er Estudio de Inversión en Marketing y Publicidad móvil en España 2010*. Available at: http://www.mmaspain.com/estudios/MMA_III_2010.pdf (accessed on 17 January 2012).

[20] Study prepared by *minube.com*, Turismo de Castilla La Mancha and *The Cocktail Analysis*, available at http://www.minube.com/observatorio (accessed on 10 September 2012).

[21] FERNÁNDEZ CAVIA, J. and SÁNCHEZ BLANCO, C., "Retos de la profesión publicitaria: aportaciones desde la planificación estratégica", *ZER*, 17 (32), 2012, p. 54.

[22] ALQATAN, S., SINGH, D. and AHMAD, K., "A Theoretic Discussion of Tourism M-commerce", *Journal of Convergence Information Technology*, 6 (12), 2011, p. 101.

applications were launched worldwide on a daily basis, that is, some 21,000 every month[23].

Mobile applications have become new communication channels, vital to the tourist industry, for hotel and restaurant businesses or transportation companies and indeed for the destinations themselves as they can use them to improve the travel experience and encourage tourist loyalty in an ever more competitive environment.

According to a recent study[24], 77% of the communication managers for the main Spanish destinations welcome the usefulness of mobile applications as being either "extremely useful" or "very useful", and they state that they use them to provide tourists with live information on the destination to improve the experience of the visit and to reach travellers with a technological profile. The study also mentions that services and leisure activities on offer are promoted using geolocalisation.

Nonetheless, in the tourist sector, the mobile applications most widely used are not the official applications set up by the destination promotion organisations; instead, they are the applications set up by private companies. According to the ranking published by The App Date in July 2012[25], the five best applications for travel belong to the private sector, with Minube holding the top position. It is a Spanish application characterised by original guides with user-generated content as well as theme-based guides prepared by experts. The popularity of the application sheds light on the reality concerning what today's tourist seeks: unique experiences and interactivity, aspects which, as we will exemplify herein, are lacking in most official destination applications.

3. *Methodology*

The main purpose of this empirical paper is to analyse and assess the mobile applications found on official websites from a sample of Spanish tourist destinations. This is an exploratory study which seeks to lay the foundations for future research along these lines.

To do so, six destinations, which are considered relevant on account of their tourist tradition and importance, have been chosen: Andalusia, Barcelona, Valencian Community, Madrid, Santiago de Compostela and Tenerife. Moreover, the sample combines cities and regions, destinations well-known for the sun and beach and others typically representing cultural and urban tourism, covering highly diverse areas from Spain at large.

The fieldwork –carried out between February and March 2012– entailed an analysis of the mobile applications these destinations offer tourists via their official tourism websites.

In addition, during April 2012, the mobile applications of another comparative sample were analysed. It comprised three international tourist destinations also prominent for their active engagement in the use of communication technologies (Thailand, Dublin

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[23] Madvertise (2012). *Madreport Enero 2012*, available at: http://madvertise.com/es/datos/mad-report-3/ (accessed on 13 March 2012).

[24] Online survey conducted with 56 Spanish destination communication managers (from cities, provinces and autonomous communities) in December 2012 as part of the CODETUR project, the result of which are yet to be published.

[25] The App Date, 2012, available at: http://madrid.theappdate.com/las-mejores-apps-para-viajar-top-apps/ (accessed on 4 January 2013).

and Toronto) and three commercial applications (Pizza Hut, Word Lens and Talk to Me) deemed as being particularly useful for a comparative analysis.

Figure 2. Group 1. Spanish destinations analysed and applications found

Destination	Destination URL	Number of applications found	Application names
Andalusia	http://www.andalucia.org/	1	Andalucía en Fitur 2012
Barcelona	http://barcelonaturisme.com/	2	Gaudí BCN / iBarcelona
Valencian Community	http://www.comunitatvalenciana.com/	1	Geoportal Comunitat Valenciana
Madrid (city)	http://www.esmadrid.com/es/portal.do	0	X
Santiago de Compostela	http://www.santiagoturismo.com/	1	Turismo de Santiago de Compostela
Tenerife	http://www.webtenerife.com/	1	Tenerife

Source: compiled by authors.

Figure 3. Group 2. Applications relating to international tourist destinations

Destination	Destination URL	Application names
Dublin	http://www.visitdublin.com/Downloads/Visit_Dublin_App	Visit Dublin – Official Mobile Guide
Thailand	http://mobile.tourismthailand.org/index.php	Amazing Thailand
Toronto	http://www.seetorontonow.com/	See Toronto – Official Visitors Guide

Source: compiled by authors.

Figure 4. Group 3. Applications relating to products and services

Product/Service	URL	Application names
Audio translation	http://www.flaviuapps.com/	Talk To Me
Pizza delivery	http://www.pizzahut.com/	Pizza Hut
Text translation	http://wordlens.com/	Word Lens

Source: compiled by authors.

In order to study the mobile applications found, a specific methodology was adopted, focussing on an analysis template formed using contributions from previous articles by

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other authors[26]. The template includes a host of indicators envisaging the following variables:

Figure 5. Variables analysed in mobile applications

No.	Variable	Description
1	Genre	Application type
2	Origin	Content source
3	Function	Capability of mobile applications
4	Link structure	Layout of links
5	Spaces	Interaction between user and application
6	Model author	Issuer of the information
7	Model user	Recipient of the information
8	Usability	User-friendliness of the application

Source: compiled by authors.

Genre refers to the type of application and our analysis encompasses the following categories: information, marketing, education, videogames, books, music and audiovisuals and others.

Origin refers to whether the content of mobile applications has been specifically developed and whether or not it has been adapted. In accordance with Scolari *et al.*, specific content is created especially for mobile devices, whereas adapted content stems from several media and has been altered for distribution over a new channel. Lastly, non-adapted content refers to information which reaches the mobile device without undergoing any transformation[27].

The *function* variable details the main uses offered by the mobile application and they are divided into ten categories: audio guide, sharing comments, photo gallery, geolocalisation, destination resource guide, information on what's on, promotions and discounts, augmented reality, valuation of places and video guide.

The *link structure* essentially indicates whether the applications can be deemed as *centrifugal* –that is, they tend to 'expel' the user from the application– of whether they can be deemed as *centripetal* –that is, they keep users within the application rather than leading them to browse outside the application itself.

Spaces refer to whether the application studied generates a setting essentially intended for providing information or whether the setting encourages interaction between the user and the destination or between the user and other users.

The *model author* variable seeks to identify the implicit issuer of the interface while the *model user* variable determines the ideal identity of the recipient to whom the application interface seems to be addressed.

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[26] Essentially based on the study by SCOLARI, C. A., AGUADO, J. M. and FEIJÓO, C., "Mobile Media: Towards a Definition and Taxonomy of Contents and Applications", *International Journal of Interactive Mobile Technologies*, 6 (2), 2012. The variables and indicators of the template were supplemented by contributions from articles by SHANKAR, V. and BALASUBRAMANIAN, S., "Mobile Marketing: A Synthesis and Prognosis", *Journal of Interactive Marketing*, 23, 2009, pp. 118-129; and by HYUN, M. Y., LEE, S. and HU, C., "Mobile-mediated virtual experience in tourism: concept, typology and applications", *Journal of Vacation Marketing*, 15 (2), 2009, pp. 149-164. Subsequent to the preparation of our fieldwork, the following brief study was published providing interesting aspects for consideration: KENNEDY-EDEN, H. and GRETZEL, U., "A taxonomy of mobile application in tourism", *E-review of Tourism Research*, 10 (2), 2012, pp. 47-50.

[27] SCOLARI, C. A., NAVARRO, H., GARCÍA, I., PARDO, H. and SORIANO, J., "The Barcelona Mobile Cluster: Actors, Contents and Trends", International Journal of Interactive Mobile Technologies, 3 (3), 2009, p. 48.

Lastly, the *usability* variable analyses the ease, security and convenience with which the mobile application can be used. To do so, we focus on seven indicators assessing whether each of the applications in the sample incorporates help systems and documentation, whether they allow the user control and freedom, whether there is flexibility and efficiency in use, whether the users are addressed in their own language, whether there is a bug fixing system, whether it is appropriate, and whether it visually indicates the system status.

4. *Results*

The results of the research show the current situation in terms of the development and implementation of mobile applications for tourist destination communication in Spain. In general, we can state that destinations are not fully exploiting this new channel of communication and the applications analysed are, by and large, adaptations of external content that do not suitably take advantage of the potential of this technology.

If we focus on *genre*, we can see that all applications analysed are categorised as information and marketing applications. Moreover, we have identified the applications *GaudíBCN*, *iBarcelona*, *Turismo de Santiago de Compostela* and *Tenerife* as also being educational applications because, aside from offering information and promoting the destination, they offer instructional information and detail typical traditions about the specific place. Likewise, *GaudíBCN*, *Turismo de Santiago de Compostela*, *iBarcelona* and, as an international tourist destination application, *Visit Dublin* all offer an audio guide and/or a video guide; consequently, they are additionally classified in the audiovisual category.

If we analyse the *origin* of the content of the applications included in the sample of Spanish destinations, we can see that *Gaudí BCN* and *iBarcelona* are the only applications that offer solely specific content, whereas *Andalucia en Fitur 2012* is characterised by specific and adapted content which is owing to the fact that part of the information found in the application is adapted from the official Andalusia tourism website. Another part of the information is exclusive to the application itself, particularly where it relates to the stand at Fitur 2012. *Turismo de Santiago de Compostela*, *Geoportal Comunitat Valenciana* and *Tenerife* are classified as applications with adapted content because the information offered by these three mobile applications stems entirely from a different medium: the official destination website.

The international destination applications analysed by way of reference also all show that the origin of their content is adapted. The content we found stems from the official websites of the destinations.

When we questioned the communication managers in a telephone conversation as to why there was a lack of specific content on the mobile applications for their destinations, the opinion of one manager was that the information the tourist required was always the same, meaning it is only necessary to adapt the presentation. Another manager pointed out that their destination was already developing an application with exclusive content.

If we turn our attention to the *functions* offered by the applications in the sample, in figure 6 we can see that the three most prominent functions are geolocalisation, the city resource guide and information on what's on. Other functions that may be deemed advanced, which are linked to interactivity between the user and the content, between

the user and the issuer and between several users[28], such as sharing comments, the valuation of places and augmented reality, do not frequently appear in the applications studied.

**Figure 6. Functions of the Spanish tourist destination applications**

	Gaudí BCN	**iBarcelona**	**Andalucía en Fitur 2012**	**Turismo de Santiago de Compostela**	**Geoportal Comunitat Valenciana**	**Tenerife**
Functions						
Audio guide	v			v		
Sharing comments		v			v	
Photo gallery	v					v
Geolocalisation	v	v		v	v	v
City resource guide	v	v		v	v	v
Information on what's on		v	v	v	v	v
Promotions and discounts		v				v
Augmented reality				v		
Valuation of places		v				
Video guide		v				

Source: compiled by authors

The table also shows that some applications offer a wider range of functionalities (for instance, *iBarcelona*), while others (such as *Andalucía en Fitur 2012*) have far more restricted utility to users.

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[28] CHO, C. H. and CHEON, H. J., "Cross-cultural comparisons of interactivity on corporate Web sites", *Journal of Advertising*, 43(2), 2005, pp. 99-115.

Image 1. Example of geolocalisation in the *Turismo de Santiago de Compostela* and *Gaudi BCN* applications
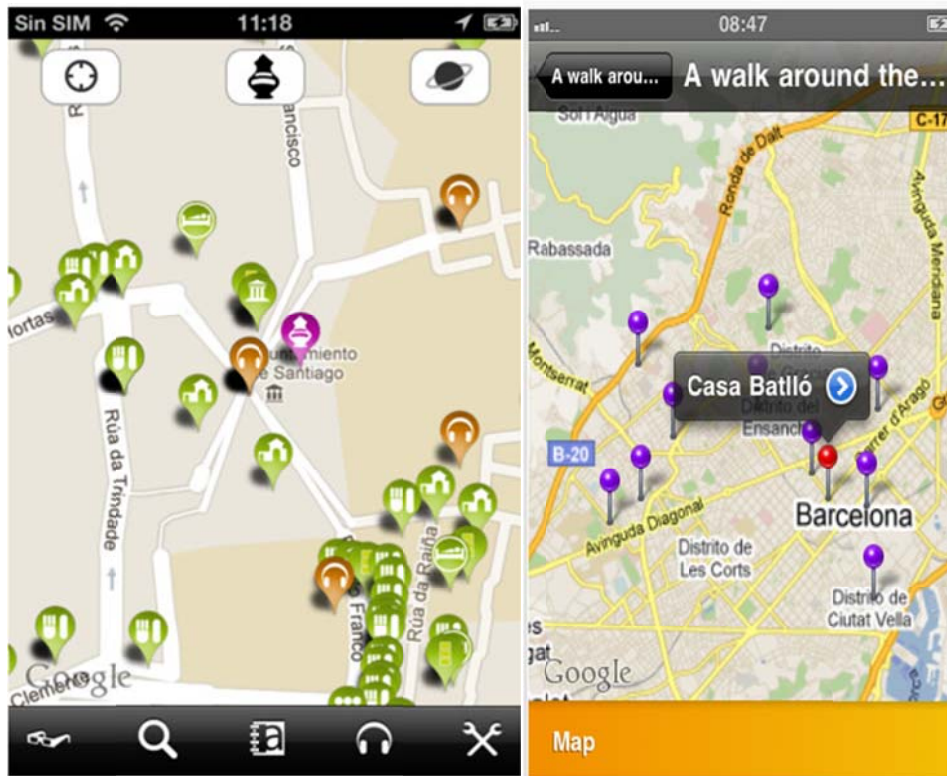

Turismo de Santiago de Compostela iPhone application screenshot (March 2012)
Gaudi BCN iPhone application screenshot (March 2012)

By making comparisons with international destination applications we can see that the augmented reality function does appear in the *Visit Dublin* and *Amazing Thailand* applications. Moreover, both incorporate a photo gallery, an option that is basic when it comes to promoting a destination to tourists.

Image 2. Example of augmented reality in the *Amazing Thailand* application
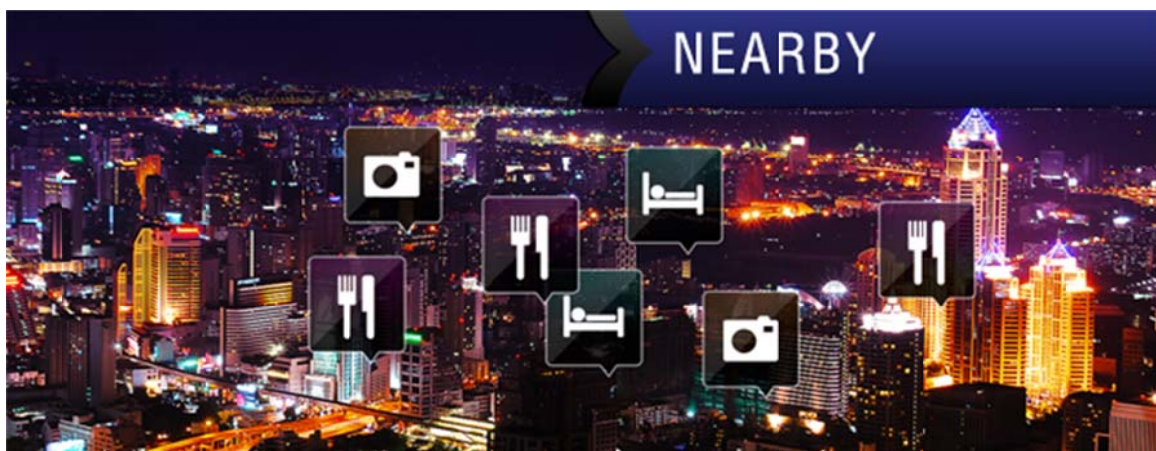
Amazing Thailand iPhone application screenshot (May 2012).

What is more, applications relating to products and services bear highly different functions to those for tourist destinations, but they are indeed applicable to the tourist

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sector. For instance, the *Talk To Me* application focuses on an instant text and audio translation function and has characteristics such as voice recognition in fifteen languages. The *Word Lens* application similarly operates as a simultaneous translator for printed text from one language rendering it in another.

These private commercial applications can be extremely useful when travelling to countries with a different language, thereby making them a highly advantageous complement to the various official applications developed for tourist destinations as this would provide tourists with a highly practical functionality.

Another application relating to products and services is the *Pizza Hut* app which allows users to order food to be delivered to their home addresses. This application offers customers a highly novel system of interaction: an order can be placed using a mobile device interacting with the application, "creating" your food as if it were a game (shaking the mobile and playing with the touchscreen, etc.).

With regard to *link structure*, three of the Spanish destination applications analysed may be considered centripetal, two can be classed as centrifugal and one, namely the *Turismo de Santiago de Compostela* application, can be deemed mixed. This application combines two link structures, meaning that to see destination images the application redirects us to the location website, while general information is incorporated into the application itself.

Gaudí BCN, *iBarcelona* and *Tenerife* are solely centripetal applications, as are the three international destination applications examined. An Internet connection is not even required in order to use the *Visit Dublin* app, offering a clear advantage welcomed by many tourists, which they consider fundamental to avoid roaming data usage.

If we look at the communication *spaces* created by these applications, *Andalucía en Fitur 2012*, *Gaudí BCN* and *Turismo de Santiago de Compostela* only communicate with users via informative text and images. The *Geoportal Comunitat Valenciana* application reserves a virtual space for interaction between the user and the application, as well as having information spaces. *iBarcelona* and *Tenerife* are the only applications analysed that allow for interaction via social networks such as *Facebook*, *Twitter* and *Flickr*.

With regard to the *model author*, the mobile applications we reviewed are created by official tourist organisations from each of the destinations featured; therefore, they are the parties addressing the user. In *Gaudí BCN* and *iBarcelona* the party with the voice is *Turisme de Barcelona*, in *Andalucía en Fitur 2012* it is *Turismo Andalucía*, in *Turismo de Santiago de Compostela* the organisation responsible is *Turismo de Santiago de Compostela* and *Turismo de Tenerife* has the voice for the *Tenerife* application. The exception in this variable is given by the *Geoportal Comunitat Valenciana* app which has forty categories positioned on *Google Maps*. Although the content is official, it is user-generated. These users have businesses which they geolocate and advertise on a map incorporating the information they deem most suitable. In other words, the regional tourist ministry grants the companies in the sector their own voice.

When it comes to the *model user*, the expected addressee would of course be a tourist. However, the analysis shows that this is simply not always the case. Some applications studied are also addressed to local citizens and, in the case of *Andalucía en Fitur 2012*, to visitors to the exhibition. The results can be seen in figure 7:

Figure 7. Model user of tourist destination mobile applications analysed

No.	Application	Model user
1	Gaudí BCN	Tourists
2	iBarcelona	Tourists
3	Andalucía en Fitur 2012	Exhibition visitors and tourists
4	Turismo de Santiago de Compostela	Citizens and tourists
5	Geoportal Comunitat Valenciana	Citizens and tourists
6	Tenerife	Citizens and tourists
7	Visit Dublin	Tourists
8	Amazing Thailand	Citizens and tourists
9	See Toronto	Tourists

Source: compiled by authors.

The main purpose of all the applications analysed is clearly to engage with the tourist and provide him with everything he may require relating to the destination, tourist trails, information on monuments, photo galleries, audio guides, and so on. As a result, the tourist plays a leading role as the recipient of the application and, accordingly, the content thereof. However, certain applications such as *Turismo de Santiago de Compostela*, *Geoportal Comunitat Valenciana* and *Tenerife* –and in the international tourist sphere *Amazing Thailand*– are addressed to local citizens, providing them with a communicative tool that will be of use for their everyday lives in the city, offering information on what's on, promotions, geolocation, etc.

Image 3. Example of citizen model user of the *Tenerife, Turismo de Santiago de Compostela* and *Geoportal Comunitat Valenciana* applications
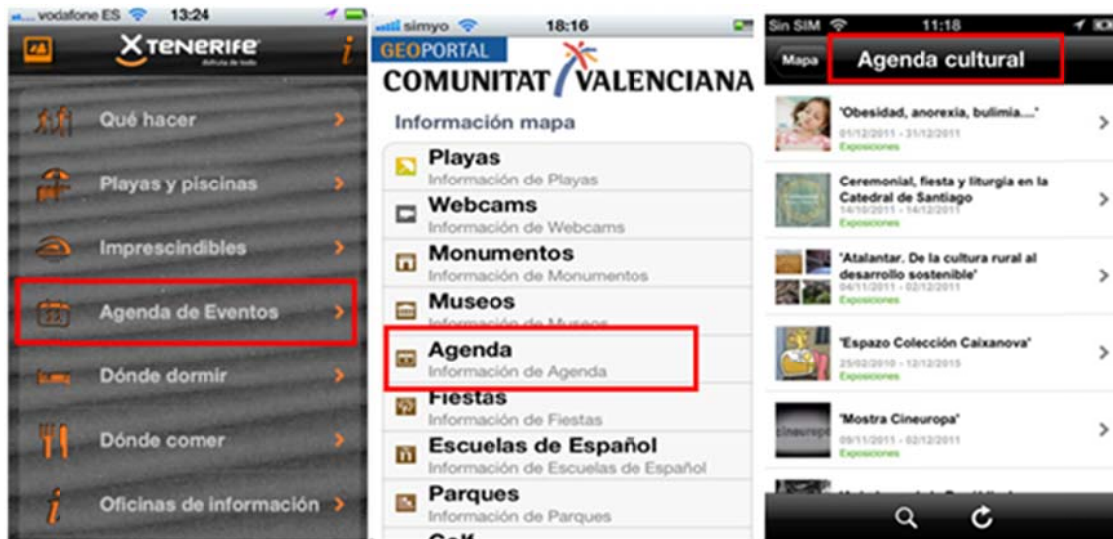
Tenerife iPhone application screenshot (May 2012).
Geoportal Comunitat Valenciana iPhone application screenshot (March 2012).
Turismo de Santiago de Compostela iPhone application screenshot (March 2012).

Since we are dealing with mobile applications, *user-friendliness* takes on a vital role in their communicative success due to many factors such as the smaller screen size on these devices and the method of use which does not typically entail a high level of concentration on the part of users.

If we analyse the sample, we can see that the *user language* is the only user-friendly standard met by all mobile applications, which tells us that the language used by the application systems is based on words, sentences and familiar concepts (figure 8).

The *iBarcelona* application meets all user-friendly standards envisaged in the study. As a result, we can describe it as an application with which users can interact easily, conveniently and in a secure manner. On the other hand, the *Turismo de Santiago de Compostela* application fulfils the least number of heuristic rules and offers no support function or documentation, nor does it allow the user control and freedom or system status visibility. If a user becomes lost during browsing, this means it is impossible to choose an "emergency exit" to undo an unwanted status (undo/redo).

Figure 8. User-friendliness of Spanish tourist destination applications analysed

	Gaudí BCN	**iBarcelona**	**Andalucía en Fitur 2012**	**Turismo de Santiago de Compostela**	**Geoportal Comunitat Valenciana**	**Tenerife**
User-friendliness						
Support and documentation	v	v			v	v
User control and freedom	v	v	v		v	v
Flexibility and efficiency of use		v	v	v	v	v
User languages	v	v	v	v	v	v
Bug fixing		v	v	v	v	
Relevance	v	v		v		v
System status visibility	v	v	v			v

Source: compiled by authors.

Lastly, an interesting detail we gleaned from consultations with two communication managers from the destinations in the sample was that their applications had been available to the public since 2011, in other words, both had been recently implemented.

5. *Conclusions*

An initial conclusion drawn from the study is that, despite the popularity mobile applications have among experts as a current and future tool for communication, the reality concerning Spanish destinations seems to differ from this ideal scenario. There are currently very few Spanish destinations using official applications, and if we consider the result of this research on a specific sample, the destinations that do have official applications often only have one and, even then, they may not be regularly updated (*Andalucía en Fitur 2012*, for example).

Despite their recent implementation (2011 in the case of the destinations whose managers we spoke to), most of these applications, with certain exceptions (such as *Gaudí BCN* and *iBarcelona*), do not incorporate specific content and are essentially based on adapting content already found on their official websites for the purposes of mobile devices.

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This shows that the commitment to creating specific applications providing genuine added value is highly slim, at least in relation to the sample chosen, which includes some of Spain's foremost destinations for tourists. The development of these specific applications may undoubtedly become an expanding sphere in the future for destination brand communication.

Moreover, very few genuinely interactive functionalities are observed –indeed, the valuation of places and the video guide function are the only ones available in the applications analysed–, illustrating the fact that there is very little relationship between the mobile applications and social networks and, accordingly, scant interaction between application and user and, in particular, among users. In actual fact, of the six applications considered, only two (*iBarcelona* y *Tenerife*) provide interactive communication spaces.

The predominant genre in all the mobile applications assessed is information and marketing; thus, tourist destinations convey all information available about the local area whilst promoting it. To all intents and purposes, they are "paper" tourist guides extrapolated to the realm of online applications, albeit failing to exhaustively take advantage of the potential offered by this channel. In addition, audiovisual content is only found in three of the Spanish destinations in the sample (*Gaudí BCN, iBarcelona* and *Turismo de Santiago de Compostela*). We believe this feature provides a distinguishing value compared with the rest of the offline and online tourist guides, since it makes it possible to view a tourist trail and also provides a detailed explanation.

Indeed, it appears to be the case that the "technological" potential of the medium is well ahead of the "strategic" decisions of the communication managers of the destination brands whether due to conceptual factors, time or resources.

Another point of interest to take into account following this research may be the extent to which tourist destinations depend on the operating platforms of mobile devices. When analysing the applications, one drawback was ensuring the devices incorporated the operating systems required by the applications (*Android*, *iOS*) and this was reflected on, whereby when launching an application a destination should value the following aspects:

-According to the profile of visiting tourists, ¿which type of operating system is most common?

-According to the geographical area of origin of the tourists, ¿which type of operating system is most common?

In the national mobile applications examined, the platform covering all destinations is *iOS* (Apple's mobile operating system). Next, *Android* covers four of the six destinations analysed (*iBarcelona*, *Andalucia en Fitur 2012*, *Turismo de Santiago de Compostela* and *Geoportal Comunitat Valenciana*).

Unlike the Spanish applications, Toronto and Thailand, as tourist destinations, offer a wider range of platforms; the application *See Toronto* operates on *iOS*, *Android* and *Windows Phone*, while the application *Amazing Thailand* operates on *iOS*, *Android*, *BlackBerry* and *Nokia*. This guarantees they can cover a must larger market share.

The product and service applications viewed enabled us to see which types of (non-tourist) functions are used by other companies from a general standpoint. In this case, based on the applications *Talk to me*, *Pizza Hut* and *Word Lens*, we have observed that these applications do communicate with users via interaction to a greater extent.

Indeed, we could apply several functionalities used on these product and service applications to tourist destinations. One example would be to adapt the video game function incorporated by *Pizza Hut* to a destination such as Barcelona: just as you can create your own pizza by "shaking" and "moving" your mobile, we could be able to

move around Barcelona city using the same movements so that, instead of merely using the audio guide or geolocation, users could "stroll" along Las Ramblas in a virtual setting, interacting with a seller or peddler who would tell them about part of the history of Las Ramblas and even suggest a test that they could do within the video game. This would be a fun, original way of discovering the city whilst being an element making it stand out from other applications and destinations.

Lastly, we consider that having completed the research it would be appropriate to make certain recommendations for promoting tourist destinations. Firstly, it is necessary to recall that providing information will not suffice; destination applications must allow for the creation and pooling of user-generated content, making it possible to share photographs, experiences and recommendations. Only then will users perceive the application as being useful, lending the destination greater scope to secure tourist loyalty.

Secondly, it is important to highlight the significance of creating exclusive content specifically for mobile applications so users can see the unique added value offered by the application, regardless of its nature.

Thirdly, it is similarly necessary to take into account the fact that these applications are useful for local residents and not just for tourists, as the former may reap benefits from such functions as geolocation, recommendations for restaurants, leisure alternatives and suggestions for events taking place.

Finally, it is worthwhile highlighting the usefulness of the methodology proposed for future research both in analysing tourist destination applications and mobile applications in general. Indeed, we at the CODETUR project will continue to work on reviewing and updating our template and on applying it to a much broader sample of destinations.

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