Chapter 14

“España Verde”: Tourism Destination Image among German Facebook Users

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ABSTRACT

This study aims at measuring the image of the tourism brand “España Verde” by using the social media platform Facebook. The ever-increasing competition within the tourism industry makes it vital for destinations to address their target group by tailored marketing measures. Furthermore social media channels are changing the interaction between Destination Management Organizations (DMOs) and customers. With the aim of exploring España Verde’s image, a three components approach—cognitive, affective and conative was applied. Related to the measurement of the cognitive component, the study also focuses on España Verde’s touristic potential ranging from a rich and diverse culture as well as a unique natural heritage to a suitable infrastructure for touristic purposes. Although the supply side seems to fit the target group’s desires when choosing a vacation destination, the exploratory results reveal that there is currently only little awareness for España Verde on the German market.

INTRODUCTION

The tourism brand España Verde was founded in 1989 and unites four Spanish autonomous communities - Galicia, Asturias, Cantabria and the Basque Country. The area ranges from the French border, along the northern Spanish coast until the western end of the Iberian Peninsula. The destination is characterized by a broad touristic supply and represents an alternative to the typical “sun and beach” vacations. The brand was founded in order to establish a strong brand image which clearly represents the characteristics
of the participating communities (Cano Fuentes, 2006). These autonomous communities consider tourism as an industry that supports mutually the economic development as well as the natural and cultural heritage of the region (Ivars Baidal, 2004).

Tourism destinations like España Verde are competing in an environment where it is vital to be differentiated from competition and to focus on unique selling points (Echtner & Ritchie, 1991). It is of increasing importance to attract the tourist's attention in order to be considered as a possible holiday location (Gartner, 1993). Hence, the destination image held by target markets is essential in order to build and manage a strong tourism brand (Bigné, Sánchez & Blas, 2009; Martín & Bosque, 2008). Additionally, new Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) are deeply affecting the tourism industry and changing the interaction between destinations and tourists (Buhalis & Law, 2008). New ICTs, as for instance Social Media, provide a broad range of possibilities for destinations such as countries, regions and cities to address customers and to influence their decision-making process by tailored marketing measures (Stepaniuk, 2015).

In the annual journal “España Hoy” (Spain Today) – published by the Ministry of Presidency – the Spanish State Secretariat for Communication gives a current overview of Spain including descriptions of the measures and decisions undertaken by the government such as the new policy for promoting tourism abroad as committed by the Spanish General Secretariat of Tourism TURESPAÑA. In Spain Today’s version of 2015, the first measure of this policy aims to apply new ICTs as well as Social Media, due to the technological advances, which are also affecting the tourism industry. The policy regarding mature markets, as for instance Germany, is to increase the tourist’s loyalty and to attract new demand segments demanding products towards art and culture, urban tourism, local gastronomy and nature (Ministry of the Presidency, 2015).

According to the ranking of international tourist arrivals by country of residence, as presented by the National Institute of Statistics (Instituto Nacional de Estadística, 2016), the incoming tourism from Germany to entire Spain amounts to 10,293,964 arrivals or about 15% of the total inbound tourism in 2015. Considering those numbers, Germany is ranked on the third position. Hence, the German market can be considered as a mature market. In view of the tourism supply of España Verde, as outlined at a later stage of this chapter, it becomes evident that its supply side is suitable for the attraction of new demand segments and the diversification of the array of products. Statistics, achieved from the tourism promotion board of Cantabria (CanTur – Sociedad Regional Cántabra de Promoción Turística) show that Germany was ranked on the fourth position regarding the number of tourists who visited España Verde in 2015 between January and September (IET Instituto de Estudios Turísticos, 2015)1, and can, therefore, be considered as a strategic market for this Spanish destination.

This study aims at analyzing the destination image of the tourism brand España Verde amongst the German market by using a Social Media channel. The results provide the groundwork for the development and application of suitable marketing measures for connecting the destination with its target audience.

This chapter follows the following structure: a) in the background section, a literature review on the destination image construct and related concepts is provided, as well as on the relationship between destination image and social media, which is followed by a summarized presentation of the tourism supply of España Verde; b) the section related to the methodology, presents the objectives and the research questions, followed by the design of the questionnaire, the process for data collection, and the summary of instruments for data analysis; c) in the section data analysis, the results for each of the research questions are depicted; d) in the discussion and conclusion section, the findings are discussed and the main contributions of this scientific work are presented.