

# **Which emotional brand values do my followers want to hear about?**

## ***An investigation of popular European tourist destinations***

### **Abstract**

In this paper, the communication of destination brands through social media (Twitter and Facebook) is investigated with a focus on the use of emotional adjectives. Based on ten of the most popular destinations in Europe, more than 15,000 tweets and 6,000 Facebook posts and users' reactions to those messages were analysed. The study shows that DMOs are active and communicate using various emotional values about their brands on both platforms. The most popular emotional brand values for Twitter are 'glamorous' and 'happiness', while 'honest' and 'trendy' appear most frequently on Facebook. Interestingly, besides the fact that users actively engage on both platforms, significant differences were detected based on the values that users respond to as opposed to those that destinations use in their communication. Users respond much more strongly to messages that contain values related to the adjectives 'sentimental' and 'happiness' on Twitter, whereas on Facebook, adjectives such as 'getaway' and 'young' generate better responses. The study demonstrates that destinations can improve user reaction rates on social media and facilitate a positive destination brand image through the use of specific emotional brand values. Overall, the findings provide valuable as well as directly applicable implications for DMOs to use different values that align better with user expectations of the destination, which will ultimately lead to more effective online marketing strategies and stronger competitive profiles.

This is an extended version of a conference paper entitled "Do DMOs communicate their emotional brand values? A comparison between Twitter and Facebook", previously published in the proceedings of Information and Communication Technologies in Tourism 2018 Conference (ENTER 2018) held in Jönköping, Sweden, January 24-26, 2018

**Keywords:** emotional brand values, social media communication strategies, user engagement, DMOs

## **1. Introduction**

Social media allows users to interact with brands with the least amount of effort when compared to traditional marketing information outlets (Amaro et al. 2016; Li et al. 2017). Moreover, User Generated Content (UGC) has been shown to significantly influence the level of co-creation of destination images (Koltringer and Dickinger 2015; Lu and Stepchenkova 2015) and the decisions of other users in the network (Liu and Park 2015) as opposed to formal destination communication platforms (Litvin et al. 2008; Papathanassis and Knolle 2011). Hence, Destination Management Organizations (DMOs) have to respond quickly to these changing consumer trends. At the very least, they need to optimize their online social media communication and, at the same time, build strong emotional brands that stand out in the online world (Roque and Raposo 2015).

Various authors highlight the importance of developing online communication strategies that address the emotional component of brands and work on the visibility of the brand (Laroche et al. 2013). Gobe (2010), introducing the concept of emotional branding, refers to this as an opportunity for brands to focus on sensory experiences and imaginative ways to capture the attention of their users. Also, it allows brands to create stories and metaphors about their products and services, stimulate their users' sensors and trigger responses, ultimately establishing a relationship (Gobe 2010). In the case of destinations, emotions play a significant role in enhancing the experience (Bigné et al. 2003) and facilitating higher and better expectations of a destination, which has proven to lead to higher levels of satisfaction and destination attachment (Govers, Go and Kumar 2007; Schroeder and Pennington-Gray 2015). As a consequence, the increased awareness and brand engagement also leads to higher sales and competitive positioning of a given destination (Schroeder and Pennington-Gray 2015).

However, the critical question for DMOs is how to effectively communicate emotional brand values while positioning themselves online. Research shows that firms can manage online communication by focusing on the content of information and the style of writing (Mariani et al. 2016), even though the style appears to be more influential (Huertes and Mariné-Roig 2016a). Platforms, such as Facebook, can be very supportive environments, where DMOs can experiment with their various communication strategies (Munar and Jacobsen (2014). However, DMOs need to approach these platforms in a way that differs from traditional marketing strategies as the transfer of the creative appeal of a brand may not be so easy and effective among users (Moran and Gossieaux 2010).

However, those DMOs that attempt to communicate their brands in online spheres tend to mainly focus on the functional parts of their brands (i.e., communicate words related to basic sights and facilities) (Michaelidou et al. 2013; Huertas and Mariné-Roig 2016b). Conversely, the focus on the functional brand elements fails to provide a complete picture of what the destination has to offer and fails to create the right expectations for the users who follow the destination brand online (De Moya and Jain 2013; Stepchenkova and Zhan 2013; Míguez-González and Huertas 2015; Guerrero-Solé and Fernández-Cavia 2013). Other studies investigated if and how DMOs communicate the emotional components of their destinations brands (Jabreel et al. 2017; Moreno et al. 2015). Interestingly, those DMOs that communicate their emotional brand values also tend to generate a successful online image (Fernández-Cavia et al. 2014; Huertas and Mariné-Roig 2015) and even see higher levels of tourist arrivals (Uşakli et al. 2017). Recently, Lalicic et al. (2018) investigated DMOs' Facebook and Twitter communication, integrating Aakers' brand personality scale (1997) in order to show the distinct differences across the two platforms in terms

of intensity of emotional brand communication approaches. However, the user metrics, which are an indication of success online (Uşakli et al. 2017), have been left out of the analysis and would enhance our understanding of this subject (Lalicic et al. 2018).

As a response to the aforementioned discussion, this paper aims to create a better understanding of how DMOs communicate their brands on social media platforms, placing a specific focus on the emotional brand experience. Furthermore, the paper aims to understand which specific emotional values used in DMOs' communication can explain user responses. In doing so, the paper also investigates which values tend to elicit stronger responses among users and whether there is a discrepancy between the intensity of DMOs' communication of these values and the frequency of user responses. If there is a high match, for example, between the intensity of DMOs' emotional communication and the number of responses, these values will be grouped as effective. As opposed to values that are hardly communicated by DMOs but receive a high level of response. Such values can be grouped as promising for a DMOs' future online communication. Thus, such insights can help DMOs to align their online presence with their audience and become more effective in their online social media communication.

In this case, the responses are recorded by the number of 'likes' and other reactions that Facebook provides and the number of retweets or tweets marked as 'favourite'. Using self-developed tools, Facebook posts, tweets and user metrics are retrieved based on data collected from the most popular destinations in Europe according to TripAdvisor (2017). In doing so, this paper sheds light on the current communication practices of highly visited destinations on the two most popular social media websites. Furthermore, destinations are assessed on whether they are successful in communicating their emotional brand elements. As online popularity is crucial for a DMOs' brand

appearance and recognition (De Vries et al. 2012), the outcomes of this study will also help DMOs to reconsider their communication strategies and what they want to be known for online. From a theoretical perspective, this paper enhances the discussion of DMOs' social media engagement (De Vries et al. 2012), their online successes (Uşakli et al. 2017; Mariani et al. 2017) as well as what can be improved to enhance user responses (Lalicic et al., 2018), thereby also providing some insight into relationship management (Roque and Raposo 2015).

The paper is structured as follows: firstly, the most important literature related to emotional branding for DMOs and online communication as well as social media engagement will be discussed. Then, the method and sample is introduced, followed by the findings, which illustrate DMOs' online communications techniques as well as the relationships between the communication and numbers of responses that are tested. Finally, a critical discussion and contributions to theory and practical implications are provided along with a set of limitations and future research avenues.

## **2. Theoretical framework**

### **2.1. Emotional branding and online communication**

According to Gobe (2010), emotional branding allows consumers to form emotional connections with brands in a hidden manner. Thus, emotional branding focuses on the various sensory experiences consumers can have with a brand (Gobe 2010). In tourism, emotional branding works well as the industry subsists largely on experience-based products. As a result, a large amount of tourism research has been devoted to the topic of emotional branding (Morgan et al. 2003; Morgan and Pritchard 2004; Blain et al. 2005; Govers et al. 2007; Huertas and Marine-Roig 2015). One significant observation is that communicating the emotional elements of a brand appear to

successfully enhance a destination's overall image among users as well as its strategic position (Bigné et al. 2009; Eckini and Hosany 2007; Huertas and Mariné-Roig 2015, 2016b). Many researchers reference the brand personality scale from Aaker (1997) in order to understand how tourists develop emotional connections with destinations and which specific values stand out (i.e., Ekinci and Hosany 2006; Pitt et al. 2007; De Moya and Jain 2013, Chaykina et al. 2014). For example, values related to the brand personality dimensions of *excitement* and *sophisticated* create much higher levels of satisfaction, brand attachment and purchase intention (Ekinci and Hosany 2006).

Also, those destinations that include brand personality values in their social media strategies mainly focus on words related to 'honesty', 'sincerity' and 'excitement' (De Moya and Jain 2013; Huertas and Mariné-Roig 2016b). Huertas and Mariné-Roig (2016b) demonstrate that this holds true regardless of the destination type. There still seems to be a difference between specific destinations and the use of emotional branding approaches. For example, Uşkali et al. (2017) show that mature destinations tend to focus more on emotional values, whereas immature destinations according to Uşkali et al. (2017), tend to emphasize functional-focus communication strategies more frequently at the start. Also, there are significant discrepancies between what users communicate about a destination brand compared to what a DMO communicates about itself. For example, De Moya and Jain (2013) compared the DMO Facebook fan pages of Brazil and Mexico in this manner. In this case, UGC coincided with Mexico's DMOs' emotional brand values, whereas Brazil's promotional messages did not coincide with the messages posted by its users. In analysing photo materials used by DMOs and those posted by users, Stepchenkova and Zhan (2013) also found differences. The DMO heavily focused on promoting Peruvian culture and art,

whereas the tourists displayed more interest in the Peruvian way of life. Also, significant differences in the emotional brand values across tourist services in Vienna (Austria) were observed on TripAdvisor (Dickinger and Lalicic 2016). The aforementioned examples all show a clear identity-image gap, where users perceive the destination differently than the DMOs wants them to experience, which hinders them in developing a closer connection with their users (Költringer and Dickinger 2015).

Twitter has also been analysed in this fashion (Moreno et al. 2015; Lalicic et al. 2018). According to Moreno et al. (2015), European DMOs do not use specific adjectives and tend to prefer generic communication to promote their brands. Other studies demonstrate the lack of a coherent message or strategy across the different platforms (Huertas and Marine-Roig 2016b). Instead, research shows that DMOs exhibit high similarity and tangible elements in their communication styles, and, therefore, they do not distinguish themselves. Thus, for practitioners as well as for researchers, the question of what kind of emotional brand communication is needed online to engage with users remains unanswered. Therefore, this study will provide more insights into this issue.

## **2.1. Social media engagement**

The engagement with social media to communicate about the brand and build up a fan base can be challenging for many firms (Xiang and Gretzel 2010; Lovejoy and Saxton 2012; Saffer, Sommerfeldt and Taylor 2013; Wattanacharoensil and Schuckert 2015). Another challenge is the amplifying power of users, given that users can share their enthusiasm for brands on brand pages in addition to their own social media networks (Kabadayi and Price 2014). The transparency of social media easily visualizes the popularity of a brand post according to the volume of ‘likes’, shares, retweets and comments made by users (Oviedo-García et al. 2014; Míguez-González and

Huertas 2014). Thus, brands are encouraged to design activities and communication techniques that allow them to engage with as many users as possible on a continuous basis. In fact, if brands are successful, they can develop deeper relationships that go beyond acquiring the brand's offerings (Van Doorn et al. 2010; Nusair et al. 2013; Walther and Jang 2012). Su et al. (2015) suggest that firms need to help users find the brand's benefits and matches between their aspirations, insights and experiences they can/will have with the brand. Furthermore, Su et al. (2015) state that firms need to understand that if a message is highly emotional, the psychological characteristics of consumers can be addressed and, in doing so, this approach may be suitable for less involved consumers. Thus, elements like experiential appeals, animations and social causes can lead to a better performing brand online (Hassan, 2013; Su et al. 2015).

In the case of tourism, DMOs exhibit different online behaviour, depending on the platform with which they engage. For example, when compared to Instagram or Facebook, Twitter is used more interactively by DMOs (Uşakli et al. 2017). Lalicic and Gindl (2018) demonstrate that DMOs from popular destinations are either not active on Facebook or not active in a consistent manner. These DMOs posted irregularly and did not work towards building a loyal fan base. Interestingly, those that were successful demonstrated continuous engagement, good timing of posts to engage with their users and developed a loyal user base over time (Lalicic and Gindl 2018). Also, it has been proven that DMOs that post photos and videos on Facebook lead to a higher level of user reactions (Mariani et al. 2016; Lalicic and Gindl 2018). However, the question of what kind of communication, especially emotional brand communication, generates user engagement has not been answered fully (Huertas and Marine-Roig 2016a). According to Huertas and Marine-Roig (2016a), there is a lack of congruency between the most frequently communicated content and

emotional brand values shared by DMOs and those that trigger the most reactions among users. Therefore, in this paper, we aim to bolster practitioners' understanding of the use of emotional brand values and their effect on user engagement and, thus, effective relationship marketing tactics.

### **3. Method**

#### **3.1. Sample**

At first, the authors were interested in the top 25 European destinations in 2017 according to TripAdvisor (TripAdvisor 2017)<sup>1</sup>. However, due to a lack of online activity, we decided to include only those destinations that sent at least 3,000 English tweets between January 1, 2016 and December 31, 2016 on their official Twitter accounts. In addition, we also checked those that have an active Facebook account with English posts, which resulted in a final sample of the following destinations: *Amsterdam, Barcelona, Berlin, Budapest, Dublin, Edinburgh, London, Madeira, Paris and Tenerife*.

The self-developed system *twiQuery*<sup>2</sup> was used to collect the tweets for analysis. It is a crawler that enables users and developers to make advanced search actions in order to retrieve tweets that pinpoint distinct criteria, such as specific users, languages, regions (determined by the name of a city or a geolocation), periods of time, strings of communication or hashtags, etc. The Facebook posts were retrieved by using another self-developed tool that accesses Facebook's Graph API and collects information related to posting history as well as fan interactions (i.e. comments and reactions). All of the tweets and posts sent in 2016 were retrieved and analysed.

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<sup>1</sup> Paris, London, Rome, Crete, Barcelona, Prague, Istanbul, Lisbon, Majorca, Santorini, Florence, Venice, Rhodes, Tenerife, Amsterdam, Corsica, Budapest, Madeira, Berlin, Edinburgh, St. Petersburg, Vienna, Dublin, Krakow and Sochi.

<sup>2</sup> *TwQuery* may be downloaded on this web page: <https://github.com/mhjabreel/twiQuery>.

### 3.2. Data analysis

First, the tweets and posts were pre-processed: all URLs, usernames, non-alphabetic symbols and stop words were removed, and the content was converted to lowercase letters. Words with repetitive letters were corrected by using a self-developed algorithm (the algorithm performs a breadth first search to analyze all possible ways of eliminating repetitive letters in a string and then cross-references those words in WordNet to verify if they are correct) (Lalicic et al. 2018). The second step was the analysis of the content of the tweets/posts. To do so, we employed a semantic analysis built on Aaker's brand personality scale (Aaker 1997), which provided us with a categorization of *emotional values*. *Sincerity* is expressed by adjectives, such as 'family-oriented', 'down-to-earth', 'sustainable', 'calm', 'real', 'traditional', 'honest', 'original', 'wholesome', 'quality of life', 'happiness', 'sentimental' and 'friendly'. The *excitement* category is represented by adjectives, like 'trendy', 'daring', 'exciting', 'exotic', 'fashionable', 'cool', 'spirited', 'dynamic', 'vital', 'fresh', 'young', 'sensorial', 'unique', 'imaginative', 'creative', 'up-to-date', 'independent', 'contemporary', 'cosmopolitan', 'tolerant', 'hospitable'. *Competence* is expressed by adjectives, such as 'reliable', 'hard-working', 'safe', 'rigorous', 'intelligent', 'technical', 'corporate', 'innovative', 'successful', 'leader', 'ambitious' and 'powerful'. *Sophistication* is represented by adjectives, like 'glamorous', 'luxurious', 'seductive', 'smooth', 'romantic', and 'magical'. The last dimension, *ruggedness*, includes adjectives like 'outdoorsy', 'get-away', 'recreational', 'tough' and 'ruggedness'.

The *adjectives* were then compared semantically with all of the categories of emotional values. Previous work (Stepchenkova et al 2009) on the analysis of content communicated by destinations on social media shows that adjectives are the words that tend to convey the greatest emotional

load. In this case, the standard natural language parser to retrieve the adjective was applied. The Wu-Palmer ontology-based semantic similarity measure was applied (Wu and Palmer, 1994) in order to compute the similarity between adjectives and emotional values. The Wu-Palmer similarity between two terms,  $c1$  and  $c2$ , is defined as  $sim_{WP}(c1, c2) = (2*N3) / (N1+N2+2*N3)$ , where  $N1$  and  $N2$  are the number of hypernym links from the terms  $c1$  and  $c2$  to their Least Common Subsumer (LCS) in WordNet, and  $N3$  is the number of hypernym links from the LCS to the root of the ontology. This measure ranges from 1 (for identical concepts) to 0 (when the LCS is the root of the ontology; for example, the similarity between 'love' and 'romantic' is 0.7619). However, the terms must be *nouns* in order to be compared using this measure. We manually translated emotional values into their equivalent nouns (e.g., 'ambitious' was transformed into 'ambition'), whereas the adjectives were automatically transformed into nouns based on their derivative form in WordNet. Only adjectives with a similarity higher than 0.7 to an emotional value (*emotional adjectives*) were considered in the final steps of the analysis (Lalicic et al. 2018). This analysis allowed us to assess if a destination communicates certain emotional values that distinguish it from other destinations and shows that there is a strategy behind the communication of the brand. Then, we collected all the engagement measures, which for Twitter were 'favourites' and retweets and for Facebook 'like', 'love', 'haha', 'sad' and 'anger'. Concerning, the collection of comments and re-shares, only a few DMOs in the sample received comments or a number of re-shares, thus we decided to not include this form of engagement as a part of the analysis. Through Chi-square analyses, significant relationships between the engagement metrics and brand emotional values were tested.

#### **4. Results**

#### 4.1. DMOs' emotional brand communication and user reactions – Twitter

This section illustrates the DMOs' tweet behaviour and responses. Hence, Table 1 shows, for each destination, the following data:

- Number of tweets sent by the destination in 2016 that contain at least one emotional value.
- Number of retweets of those tweets.
- Average number of retweets of each tweet (rate of the first two columns).
- Number of times that the tweets were marked as 'favourite' by the users.
- Average number of favourites of each tweet (rate of columns four and one).

In total, 13,477 tweets were analysed. As Table 1 shows, Paris was the most active DMO with 2,058 tweets, whereas the DMO of Budapest was the least active, exhibiting 159 tweets. However, observing the numbers of retweets (users re-sending the message sent by the DMO), which totals 269,532 retweets, we see a different order. Tenerife stands out significantly (142,830), followed by Paris with 51,900 retweets of the tweets containing emotional values ( $p < .001$ ). The ratio indicates how often a tweet has on average been retweeted, which ultimately gives an indication of the DMOs' ability to reach its audience. The DMO of Tenerife was very successful with a 129.61 retweet ratio, meaning that, on average, one tweet was retweeted by Twitter users 129.61 times. The DMO of Berlin was the least successful (0.31 ratio). The 'favourite' (heart icon, 'liking' the tweet), shows that, in total, DMOs' tweets received 187,729 'favourite' distinctions and is, thus, a less popular activity to do for users than retweeting. In this case, Paris stands out significantly with a total of 71,425 'favourites' ( $p < .001$ ), and the ratio as well (34.71). Again, the DMO of Berlin was the least successful in this case (ratio 0.50).

Hence, retweeting seems to be a more common response to a DMO’s tweet than marking it as ‘favourite’ is, which also implies that users are sharing within their network, and, thus, a larger crowd is reached. This highlights the importance of effective communication even more.

**Table 1.** Destination overview of Twitter communication

	<b>Tweets</b>	<b>Retweets</b>	<b>RTs/tw</b>	<b>Favourites</b>	<b>Favs/tw</b>
Paris	2,058	51,900	25.22	71,425	34.71
Edinburgh	1,935	12,344	6.38	9,857	5.09
Barcelona	1,828	16,070	8.79	4,204	2.30
Berlin	1,797	553	0.31	892	0.50
Dublin	1,722	21,209	12.32	53,007	30.78
Madeira	1,273	2,252	1.77	1,299	1.02
Tenerife	1,102	14,2830	129.61	2,199	2.00
Amsterdam	940	14,291	15.20	24,329	25.88
London	633	7,800	12.32	19,960	31.53
Budapest	159	274	1.72	557	3.50

However, it is more interesting to understand which explicit adjectives DMOs communicated and which of those triggered user engagement, like retweets and ‘favourites’. Firstly, a general tendency to use the following emotional adjectives in tweets is observed: ‘honest’, ‘fresh’ and ‘glamorous’. Interestingly, there are also a set of adjectives that DMOs hardly used while tweeting, which included: ‘reliable’, ‘rigorous’ and ‘tolerant’.

Furthermore, the paper investigates which emotional brand values were retweeted by their users in their personal social networks. In general, tweets that predominantly included the adjectives of ‘happiness’, ‘real’ and ‘sentimental’ were highly retweeted by users. The emotional brand values that the DMOs hardly tweeted were rather similar to those once tweeted by DMOs (e.g., ‘rigorous’, ‘tolerant’).

Tweets that contained the following emotional brand values were among the highest marked with 'favourite': 'honest', 'glamorous' and 'down-to-earth' ( $p < .001$ ). Adjectives, such as 'rigorous', 'imaginative' and 'ambitious' were hardly marked as 'favourite'.

This study is also interested in which specific values triggered the most effective user reactions on Twitter. It may be of note that in order to create a successful impact, the following values in ratio to the use and number of retweets were calculated. In the case of retweet ratios, DMO messages that used the adjectives 'real', 'sentimental' and 'happiness' were most successful. Thus, the popularity of these three emotional brand values for Twitter users is clearly indicated. Interestingly, tweets containing adjectives related to 'ambitious', 'magical' and 'hospitable' appeared with a ratio lower than ten, which suggests that they are not well received by the audience and should be avoided in online communication, when aiming to engage effectively with a user base.

However, there is a different order of emotional values in ratio to the number of users marking the DMOs' message as 'favourite'. The most popular adjectives are as follows: 'charming', 'hardworking' and 'successful'. Thus, it is important that DMOs integrate these values into their communication strategies in order to engage with their users, create an impact online and create value for users to interact with them while discussing the destination. For 'favourite', tweets including adjectives such as 'rigorous', 'imaginative' and 'ambitious' are not well received.

Table 2 summarizes the values related to the frequency of the DMOs' communication, user responses and the level of impact that they generate as well as the Aakers' dimensions. As seen, DMOs tend to use a variety of adjectives that cover three dimensions (*sincerity*, *excitement* and

*sophistication*). Interestingly, the dimension of *competence* is neither used nor does it often generate a response among users. Considering the ratios with a high impact, these are the values that DMOs should continue to use. Users respond most strongly to ‘sincerity’-related adjectives in terms of re-tweet activity, whereas the words listed in Table 2 as ‘low’, in this case ‘competence’ and ‘sophistication’, receive hardly any responses. In terms of increasing the success of a tweet (i.e., getting many followers to mark it as ‘favourite’), the dimension of *competence* as Table 2 shows, works much better, whereas *excitement* does not lead to an increased effect of marking the tweet as ‘favourite’.

**Table 2.** Communication and responses on Twitter – emotional brand values

<b>Communication &amp; responses</b>	<b>Emotional brand values</b>	<b>Aakers’ Dimensions</b>
DMO’s most communicated emotional value	<i>honest, fresh, glamorous</i>	<i>sincerity, excitement, sophistication</i>
DMO’s least communicated emotional value	<i>reliable, rigorous, tolerant</i>	<i>competence</i>
‘retweets’ (high)	<i>real, happiness, sentimental</i>	<i>sincerity</i>
‘retweets’ (low)	<i>ambitious, rigorous, tolerant</i>	<i>competence</i>
‘favourites’ (high)	<i>honest, glamorous, down-to-earth</i>	<i>sincerity, sophistication</i>
‘favourites’ (low)	<i>rigorous, imaginative, ambitious</i>	<i>ruggedness, competence</i>
Ratio- ‘retweets’ (high)	<i>real, sentimental, happiness</i>	<i>sincerity</i>
Ratio- ‘retweets’ (low)	<i>ambitious, hospital, magical</i>	<i>sophistication, competence</i>
Ratio- ‘favourites’ (high)	<i>charming, hard-working, successful</i>	<i>competence</i>
Ratio- ‘favourites’ (low)	<i>rigorous, imaginative, ambitious</i>	<i>excitement, competence</i>

## 2.2. DMOs’ emotional brand communication and user reactions – Facebook

In this section, Facebook is analysed based on DMOs’ communication and user reactions. Table 3 shows the following data of each destination:

- Number of posts sent in 2016 containing at least one emotional adjective.

- Columns 2, 3 and 4 show the number of user reactions to those posts ('likes', 'haha', 'laughter' and 'angry', respectively).
- Columns 5, 6 and 7 show the average number of each type of reaction per post.

**Table 3.** Facebook communication - user reactions

	<b>Posts</b>	<b>'Likes'</b>	<b>'Haha'</b>	<b>'Angry'</b>	<b>Likes/post</b>	<b>Haha/post</b>	<b>Angry/post</b>
Paris	229	65,502	1,099	68	286.03	4.80	0.30
Edinburgh	524	442,074	316	48	843.65	0.60	0.09
Barcelona	1,337	215,082	133	104	160.87	0.10	0.08
Berlin	42	5,044	4	1	120.10	0.10	0.02
Dublin	251	150,632	157	37	600.13	0.63	0.15
Madeira	1,936	98,957	112	18	51.11	0.06	0.01
Tenerife	637	44,261	9	7	69.48	0.01	0.01
Amsterdam	372	212,046	669	77	570.02	1.80	0.21
London	610	462,072	1,312	142	757.50	2.15	0.23
Budapest	197	6,305	1,918	1	32.01	9.74	0.01

In total, DMOs generated 6,135 Facebook posts. The DMO of Madeira (1,936 posts) was very active on Facebook, followed by the DMO of Barcelona (1,337 posts). Concerning user responses, the 'like' was the most popular one, followed by 'haha' at a considerable distance. In total 1,701,975 'likes' were given. In this case, the DMOs of London (462,072 likes) and Edinburgh (442,074) were rather successful in triggering responses from their posts that contained emotional values ( $p < .001$ ). The DMOs from Berlin and Budapest tended to be rather passive on Facebook, and yet they still generated more than 5,000 'likes' for their posts that contained emotional adjectives. It is remarkable that the number of 'haha' and 'angry' reactions is almost negligible. In total, 5,729 'haha' distinctions were made, primarily by users responding to the DMOs of Paris and London. The 'angry' responses were relatively infrequent (503), and the posts made by the DMOs of Barcelona and London DMOs received most of them.

Also where Facebook communication is concerned, adjectives used by DMOs in relation to user reactions were analysed. Overall, posts containing the following adjectives were the most successful in reaching their users: 'honest', 'traditional' and 'trendy'. Interestingly, some values were not used by DMOs at all in their posting communication, such as 'getaway', 'recreational', and 'tough'. The rest of the values exhibited rather equal use in DMOs' Facebook communication and its impact on user responses.

In analysing the posts that received the most reactions from users, we have three reactions to consider. Firstly, for the user reaction 'like', the following set of values stands out; 'honest', 'trendy' and 'vital' ( $p < .001$ ), whereas posts that merely contained words related to 'charming', 'recreational' and 'ambitious' did not receive many 'likes'. Secondly, the 'haha' icon was given to posts containing adjectives like 'exciting', 'daring' and 'vital' ( $p < .05$ ). Finally, the 'angry' user reaction was recorded most in posts that used the following adjectives: 'down-to-earth', 'calm' and 'family-oriented'. However, no significant differences ( $p = .251$ ) were identified.

The ratio between the values mentioned in a post and user engagement was observed. This provides rather valuable insight for DMOs, as they are able to use this information to understand which values are best received by their respective audiences. The emotional values communicated in the messages that received the most 'likes' are 'getaway', 'tough' and 'young' ( $p < .001$ ), whereas adjectives like 'ambitious', 'reliable' and 'innovative' did not receive many 'likes', even though the DMOs communicated these words relatively frequently. The reaction of 'haha' is mostly in keeping with adjectives such as 'exotic', 'daring' and 'exciting' ( $p < .05$ ). For the 'angry' reaction, there is very little impact from the values related to the adjectives 'getaway', 'family-oriented' and

‘real’, however, it is not significant ( $p=.438$ ). Depending on the type of responses required, the use of values and the frequency of the values used may help to trigger the desired impact on the brand community. Table 4 summarizes these values in relation to the frequency of communication, user responses and the level of impact they generate. Once again, the values are linked to the Aakers’ dimensions, and in doing so, Facebook posts are dominantly communicating values related to the dimension of *sincerity* and the least related to the dimension of *ruggedness*. Users tend to respond to posts focusing on *excitement* much more. Thus, in terms of impact, those posts that receive a higher number of reactions tend to focus on *excitement* and *ruggedness*.

**Table 4.** Communication and responses on Facebook – emotional brand values

<b>Communication &amp; responses</b>	<b>Emotional brand values</b>	<b>Aakers’ Dimensions</b>
Dmos’ most communicated emotional value	<i>honest, traditional, trendy</i>	<i>sincerity</i>
Dmos’ least communicated emotional value	<i>getaway, recreational, tough</i>	<i>ruggedness</i>
‘likes’ (high)	<i>honest, trendy, vital</i>	<i>excitement</i>
‘likes’ (low)	<i>charming, recreational, ambitious</i>	<i>ruggedness, sophistication, competence</i>
‘haha’ (high)	<i>exciting, daring, vital</i>	<i>excitement</i>
‘haha’ (low)	<i>though, get-away, leader</i>	<i>ruggedness and competence</i>
‘angry’ (high)	<i>down-to-earth, calm, and family-oriented</i>	<i>sincerity</i>
‘angry’ (low)	<i>spirited, glamorous, creative</i>	<i>excitement</i>
ratio- ‘likes’ (high)	<i>get-away, tough, young</i>	<i>ruggedness, excitement</i>
ratio- ‘likes’ (low)	<i>ambitious, reliable, innovative</i>	<i>competence</i>
ratio- ‘haha’ (high)	<i>exotic, daring, exciting</i>	<i>excitement</i>
ratio- ‘haha’ (low)	<i>reliable, leader, rugged</i>	<i>ruggedness, competence</i>
ratio- ‘angry’ (high)	<i>get-away, family-oriented, real</i>	<i>ruggedness</i>
ratio- ‘angry’ (low)	<i>creative, spirited, dynamic</i>	<i>excitement</i>

## 5. Discussion

In conducting this research, we aimed to provide a more detailed analysis of brand emotional values used by DMOs and their effects on user engagement across Facebook and Twitter. This paper was interested in analysing the most popular destinations according to the TripAdvisor ranking from 2017, as those destinations are likely to have successful online profiles and strategies that stand out and engage with a large fan base. Lalicic et al. (2018) demonstrated that DMOs use the platforms in significantly different ways in terms of activity, but that they tend to use similar brand values. However, insight into which values are used precisely and can trigger users to engage with a DMO's posts or tweets remained unanswered.

This study has several interesting discussion points that enhance the current literature on DMO communication and user engagement in social media spheres. Firstly, the study shows that DMOs, even if they are not very active, have a significant amount of users responding to their activities on both platforms. However, the paper shows that DMOs are more successful with regards to receiving reactions on Facebook as opposed to Twitter. This is in line with Huertas and Marine-Roig's (2016) argument that Facebook is a very suitable platform for communicating DMO emotional brand values as well as generating user engagement.

Secondly, this study demonstrates similar to Lalicic et al. (2018), that DMOs use similar brand adjectives across the platforms, such as 'honest' and 'glamorous'. However, the study shows that the distribution of successful emotional brand values in terms of user reactions is significantly different. In doing so, new insights are provided. For example, on Twitter, users respond much more strongly to tweets containing adjectives related to 'happiness' and 'sentimental'. While on Facebook, users 'like' posts with adjectives related to 'honest' and 'vital' much more. Furthermore, the study calculated the ratio of emotional values and specific users' responses. This

demonstrates that for Twitter and Facebook, two different emotional brand communication styles are valued by the users (Twitter: ‘real’ and ‘happiness’ and Facebook: ‘tough’ and ‘young’). Thus, DMOs were successful in using the ‘right’ adjectives on Twitter, whereas on Facebook, new adjectives could be integrated to create more effective posts. Linking this back to the overall personality dimensions by Aaker, for Twitter, DMOs focus on the dimension of *excitement* and *sincerity*, whereas the most effective messages are focused on the *sincerity* and *competence* adjectives. We also see a variance on Facebook, where DMOs communicate about *sincerity* and users respond much more strongly to adjectives related to *excitement* and *ruggedness*. This is similar to other studies analysing DMOs’ communication and usage of brand personality values (Ekinici and Hosany 2007; De Moya and Jain 2013; Huertas and Marine-Roig 2016b; Dickinger and Lalicic 2016). In doing so, the study also implies that if DMOs communicate a wide range of brand values, users only respond to certain values that fit with their image as well as self-congruity with the destination.

Thirdly, the study demonstrates compared to other studies (Huertas and Marine-Roig 2016b), that some emotional values can trigger different responses from users. For example, if a tweet includes adjectives related to *honesty*, followers tend to re-share this much more as opposed to marking it as ‘favourite’. For Facebook, the type of response also tells us something about user opinions about the post. Thus, words related to ‘daring’ and ‘exciting’ seem to create a laughter response among users rather than just a ‘like’. In doing so, the study adds new insights to existing studies capturing user engagement of tourism brands (Su et al 2015; Uşakli et al., 2017).

Fourthly, the study’s observations allow us to speculate about so called ‘effective values’ that DMOs should continue to use in order to effectively reach out to their users (those with high ratio values). Compared to other studies, such practical recommendations is new (Jabreel et al., 2017).

In addition, the study also identified some ‘ineffective values’, meaning that DMOs used specific adjectives (e.g., ‘tough’ and ‘sentimental’ on Twitter), but did not seem to spark any significant responses from the user base. This would link to the dimension of *ruggedness*, which collides with the preferred (emotional) destination experiences users have in mind, following Ekinci and Hosany’s 2006 line of reasoning.

Overall, and in contrast to other studies, which have analysed DMOs’ communication on a general level (Huertas and Marine-Roig 2016) or integrated the concept of Aakers’ online brand personality (Dickinger and Lalicic 2016), this study provides new insights for theories explaining DMOs’ online successes but also detailed and hands-on implications are given. In fact, the study enhances the understanding of how to tactically use platforms, like Facebook or Twitter, to successfully implement emotional branding strategies while reaching out to a large group of followers.

Thus, with regards to the practical implications, DMOs are provided with a better idea of how to communicate their destination brands online while attempting to integrate the emotional brand experience. The concept of brand personality has proven to be a successful approach to connect with travellers and enhance the overall experience. However, the formation of an image, which nowadays is merely done online, should not be underestimated (Amaro et al. 2016). The power of social media and the tools available to stand as a brand are enormous (De Vries et al. 2012). It is, however, important to observe which elements of the brand communication users respond to. The suggested ‘effective and ineffective values’ is a first attempt to support practitioners in understanding and designing their communication strategies carefully. As seen, some values might trigger different responses than others. For example, retweeting behaviour has a much wider impact as opposed to users who mark posts as a ‘like’ or ‘favourite’. Such engagement metrics

need to be understood in relationship to the effect of brand awareness and also the brand popularity online in a larger network (Su et al. 2015). The paper mainly focuses on general words and provides examples of specific values per destination. Hence, DMOs are also advised to verify whether the values correspond to their brand and brand experience, and if users tend to like a specific value more than a DMO communicates it, which might also help them to consider a repositioning of their brand to specific consumers to some extent. If the values do not correspond with the DMO's brand at all, DMOs can consider investigating why consumers tend to respond to those values, and whether there are new ways to offer the destination brand experience. Of course, this type of discussion opens up many new thoughts and avenues for future research.

For example, destinations are advised to take a more longitudinal approach, which would allow them to understand the possible effects of specific marketing tactics on revenue or other metrics of success. Furthermore, there is much more to explore. In order to create a holistic understanding, one could analyse how values co-occur, and which co-occurrences of values are successful in terms of consumer engagement. In addition, besides focusing solely on communication, future studies should also include other elements, such as whether a photo, video or link was included in the messages. This will also provide more insight into designing effective messages (Mariani et al. 2017). Information on the characteristics of the users could also further enhance our understanding. In particular, if DMOs wish to address specific segments, more interaction among users needs to be investigated. Lastly, the use of experiments to control for various variables and their effects on user behaviour in specific segments can be integrated in order to generate a better understanding of user segmentation techniques in an online setting.

This study also acknowledges a set of limitations. Firstly, in terms of Facebook, the metric of likes and likewise emotional responses have been recorded, but no comments or shares were analysed.

This form of engagement is more active and could be integrated by future research as well. Another issue with social media is the existence of possible bots. Thus, such issues could be considered more carefully. The present study also only collected messages exclusively in English, not in other languages. Furthermore, only the textual content of the message was considered, meaning that other important sources of information (e.g. attached pictures) were not considered, despite the fact that they would provide more insights into the effectiveness of the overall presentation of DMOs' online presence. Also, the manual translation of Aaker's emotional values to WordNet nouns is entirely subjective, and it may lead to errors and unexpected results, especially where polysemic words are considered. The automatic translation of adjectives into nouns can also suffer from the same problem. Lastly, a full semantic analysis of the sentences has not been undertaken nor were linguistic issues, such as the detection of irony in statements (quite common in Twitter in general, although probably not in DMOs' messages), considered.

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