

Analyzing cultural localization in online tourism promotion

A dissertation presented by
Emanuele Mele

Supervised by
Prof. Lorenzo Cantoni
Prof. Peter Kerkhof

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Prof. Dr. Lorenzo Cantoni, Università della Svizzera italiana, Switzerland

Prof. Dr. Peter Kerkhof, Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam, Netherlands

Prof. Dr. Maria Gravari Barbas, Université Paris 1 Panthéon-Sorbonne, France

Prof. Dr. Ulrike Gretzel, University of Southern California, United States

President of the Jury:

Prof. Dr. Luca Massimiliano Visconti, Università della Svizzera italiana, Switzerland

Abstract

Tourism and culture are strongly intertwined. People can experience culture before, during and after their journey, both in the offline and in the online world. Arguably, the internet is among the main sources of inspiration and information retrieval for tourists, who navigate social media and websites to know more about the destination, its products and services. Following the developments in tourism communication and marketing fostered by information and communication technologies, researchers as well as practitioners have been approaching the issue of cultural difference in multiple ways. Among them, localization describes the adaptation of online content and design to meet the culture-bound preferences of a specific international audience. While marketing studies argue for the benefits of this practice, there has been little research within the e-tourism domain.

Addressing this gap, the present PhD thesis examines the practice of localization and its implications from the perspective of the Online Communication Model (OCM) (Tardini & Cantoni, 2015), which is composed of four main pillars: web content, design, managers, and online visitors. More precisely, Chapter 2 aims at providing an overview of localization within the tourism domain, arguing on its advantages and limitations, along with its implications for web content and design. This objective was achieved by triangulating academic research and industry reports with examples of cultural adaptation from destination websites.

Chapter 3 investigates whether and how heritage tourism promotion on Instagram varies across cultures. This objective was achieved by performing both a manual and an automated content analysis of 1744 Instagram posts published by the national tourism organizations of four culturally different destinations: Chile, Portugal, USA, and Netherlands. Following this exploratory research, Chapter 4 explores the integration of localization practices within the online communication strategy developed by destination marketing organizations (DMOs), by interviewing 11 marketing managers and IT specialists from national tourism organizations – members of the European Travel Commission.

Addressing cultural adaptation from a demand perspective, Chapter 5 analyzes the effect of localizing cultural values on online visitor's perceived image and willingness to visit a heritage site, via two highly powered experiments with a total of 2039 participants from two culturally distant European countries: Portugal and United Kingdom. Lastly, the methodologies of both Chapter 3 (for

the analysis of cultural values) and Chapter 5 (for the creation of the stimuli) relied on a qualitative research ([Annex](#)) that investigated how cultural values were conveyed by visuals from European destination's websites.

Overall, findings show that localization extends to a wide spectrum of possible customizations in terms of content and design, which include the adaptation of cultural values (cultural cues) expressed by multimedia content. Even though the Internet has arguably erased geographical borders, cultural orientations appear to be largely reflected on Instagram, a popular social network for tourism promotion. In this regard, interviews reveal that DMOs are aware of cultural differences and cope with them by integrating localization activities within their online marketing strategy, with important consequences for content production and distribution. Finally, experimental findings show that, within the European context, the localization of cultural values for heritage tourism promotion leads to limited benefits (at best) in terms of online visitor's perceived image and willingness to visit – suggesting a high tolerance of participants toward incongruent cultural values.

Providing a substantial contribution to both theory and practice, this PhD thesis sheds light on cross-cultural differences in a globalized online world and how tourism destinations perform localization activities to tackle these issues. Lastly, findings pose critical questions regarding the benefits of localizing cultural values and its limitations in tourism promotion.

Keywords: Localization, Cultural Tourism, Cultural Values, Tourism Communication, Cultural Dimensions

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Chapter 1. General introduction

Localization consists in “taking a product and making it linguistically and culturally appropriate to the target locale (country/region and language) where it will be used and sold” (European Telecommunications Standards Institute, 2007, p. 12). According to a report by the Chief Marketing Office Council based on 150 responses, 63% of marketers – including participants from the hospitality and tourism industry – stated that their teams were not performing correctly or needed to improve at localizing branded content for different markets. On the other hand, 33% claimed to be satisfied with their performance or to be specialized in the area of cultural adaptation (Gesenhues, 2017).

To accommodate the features of a product or service to the culture of the reference market, adaptation activities can address both content and design. For example, websites can be customized in terms of themes, symbols, layout and navigation (Singh, Furrer, & Ostinelli, 2004). Considering these options, localization practices in online communication can be divided into two major themes: localization of multimedia content, which includes the adaptation of cultural values, and localization of (website) design, which comprises the customization of cultural markers according to a specific country (Tigre Moura, Singh, & Chun, 2016). Cultural values represent “broad tendencies to prefer certain states of affairs over others” (Hofstede, Hofstede, & Minkov, 2010, p. 9), which transposed to online communication refer, for example, to a preference for content emphasizing family experiences over feelings of independence and self-reliance (Tigre Moura, Gnoth, & Deans, 2014). Cultural markers consist of “interface design elements and features that are prevalent, and possibly preferred, within a particular cultural group” (Barber & Badre, 1998, p. 2). These include, for instance, the preference toward the amount and disposition of textual and visual elements within the webpage.

Despite the relevance of culture in tourism (Egberts & Bosma, 2014), there is a surprising lack of research investigating DMO online promotion from a cross-cultural perspective, especially on social media (Gretzel, Fesenmaier, Lee, & Tussyadiah, 2011). In addition, a considerable gap has been identified for what concerns the overall role of localization in tourism promotion and its effects on online visitors (Tigre Moura, Gnoth, & Deans, 2014). Consequently, with the aim of providing an important theoretical and managerial contribution to the e-tourism field, this PhD thesis examines

how to analyze and localize (cultural values) in online tourism promotion. The following subsections describe the main concepts and theories used in this dissertation project. The general introduction will then be concluded with an outline of the thesis chapters.

1.1 Culture and cultural tourism

The United Nation World Tourism Organization (UNWTO) defines tourism as “a social, cultural and economic phenomenon which entails the movement of people to countries or places outside their usual environment” (2008, p. 1) for leisure or business purposes (e.g., business tourism). Within the leisure spectrum, cultural tourism is a type of tourism activity in which travelers’ main motivation is to discover, experience and learn about the cultural attractions of a destination, such as museums, heritage sites, and festivals (Stebbins, 1996) – representing one of the first forms of tourism in the Western world (Gravari-Barbas, 2018).

From a supply perspective, cultural tourism is expected to remain one of the most important markets in the future, with an increase in number of visitors pursuing this activity and, in parallel, a wider range of stakeholders involved in the sustainable development of the experiences surrounding this unique resource (UNWTO, 2018). In this regard, it should be noted that while tourism flows certainly provide economic support for heritage preservation – be it tangible, intangible or natural – they do require proper management, especially in terms of sustainability, to avoid damaging local resources or affecting negatively residents’ perceptions of visitors (Rastegar, Zarezadeh, & Gretzel, 2020; Muler, Coromina, & Galí, 2018). In combination with strategic management of tourist flows, a proper marketing strategy should educate tourists about the value and uniqueness of cultural resources as well as promote heritage attractions in a way that resonates with their cultural background and preferences – providing meaningful and engaging contents (Egberts & Bosma, 2014).

The UNWTO defines cultural products as “a set of distinctive material, intellectual, spiritual and emotional features of a society” (2018, p. 13), which are so important to occupy a specific place within the marketing and promotional plan of 55 UNWTO Member States (corresponding to 84% of respondents to a UNWTO survey). These cultural products encompass tangible, intangible, and natural heritage (Bonn, Joseph-Mathews, Dai, Hayes, & Cave, 2007), along with contemporary art expressions and local lifestyle – offering visitors a wide range of intellectual and multisensory

experiences (Stebbins, 1996). In this regard, cultural tourism can be described as “special interest travel where the culture of a host country is an important factor in attracting tourists” (Reisinger, 1994, p. 24). Therefore, from a supply viewpoint and within the scope of this PhD thesis, cultural and heritage tourism will be used as interchangeable terms. In fact, even contemporary art and living cultures can arguably be considered constituents of heritage, as their foundations rely upon (recent or remote) past social values and they start belonging to “history” as soon as they are created (Timothy, 2011).

These resources or attractions – depending on the perspective – not only are the testimony of the past and present identity of any destination, but can also shape its values, living traditions and customs. Prototypical examples of such interdependency can be the influence of water (and water management) on the definition of the Netherlands and Dutch national identity (Terlouw, 2014); the instrumental role of the Alps in the construction of a Swiss identity and nation (Zimmer, 1998). In this regard, iconic sites include the Jungfrau-Aletsch in Switzerland (2020) and Kinderdijk in the Netherlands (2020), both natural heritage attractions with UNESCO status.

1.2 Measuring culture and cultural values online

Culture is a challenging concept that has more than one hundred definitions (Wallerstein, 1990). This PhD thesis adopts the one provided by Hofstede et al. (2010), who define culture as “the collective programming of the mind that distinguishes the members of one group or category of people from another” (p. 6). According to these scholars, cultures are observable and comparable at the national level along cultural dimensions: constructs that serve to measure the relative distance of countries in terms of cultural values. Hofstede’s et al. (2010) theories have been widely used (and criticized) by scholars in the field of cross-cultural communication (Ess & Sudweeks, 2006) and international marketing (de Mooij, 2019; Samaha, Beck, & Palmatier, 2014). This PhD thesis focuses on three dimensions of national cultures: Individualism vs. Collectivism (COL-IND), Power Distance (PD), and High-Context vs. Low-Context communication (HC-LC) – the latter being, in fact, developed by the American anthropologist Edward Hall (1976). The arguments behind the choice of these dimensions will be presented in the concerned thesis chapters. The cultural dimensions are outlined as follows.

The dimension of COL vs. IND refers to the degree of interconnectivity among people. Societies with a more individualist culture are characterized by looser ties among individuals, who assign a higher value to self-reliance and independence (as “I”); while more collectivist cultures privilege a higher degree of interdependence among people, who are part of a stronger in-group and identify themselves with it (as “we”) (Hofstede, Hofstede, & Minkov, 2010). From a tourism perspective, COL can be associated with family-and-friends experiences (“we” centered), whereas IND can be reflected by feelings of escape and freedom (“I” centered) (Tigre Moura, Gnoth, & Deans, 2014).

The dimension of PD describes the extent to which a society accepts and expects power inequalities: the higher the score on this dimension, the more individuals prefer to depend on authorities – avoiding contradicting their views (Hofstede, Hofstede, & Minkov, 2010). From a tourism perspective, following the literature on the operationalization of this dimension (e.g., Winterich, Gangwar, & Grewal, 2018; de Mooij, 2017; Zhu, Anagondahalli, & Zhang, 2017), high PD can be associated with content emphasizing status, power and authority’s recommendations; whereas, low PD can be expressed by highlightings on peer-to-peer communication with “fellow tourists.” The dimension of PD is also negatively correlated with COL-IND – that is, countries that score high on PD are also likely to be more collectivist, while individualist countries are typically closer to the low PD pole (Hofstede, Hofstede, & Minkov, 2010).

The dimension of HC-LC describes the extent to which societies assign importance to non-verbal cues in their messages. Cultures with a stronger HC orientation privilege more indirect messages, where most of the information is left to the physical context or internalized by the speaker, whereas LC cultures prefer direct, explicit communication (Hall, 1976). From a tourism perspective, LC messages can be operationalized as a focus on tangible attributes of a product or service, such as quality and price; whereas HC communication can be translated into emphasis on intangible aspects, such as entertainment and socialization (Tigre Moura, Gnoth, & Deans, 2014). The dimension of HC-LC is strongly connected with COL-IND – in the sense that collectivist cultures tend to engage in HC communication, whereas individualist societies prefer LC styles (Kitirattarkarn, Araujo, & Neijens, 2019). For this reason, in Chapter 5, it was decided to integrate HC and LC within the COL-IND dimension to create the experimental stimuli.

Communication and marketing research indicates that such cultural orientations are also reflected online, influencing the choice of content published by companies (e.g., Singh, Zhao, & Hu, 2005) as well as the behavior of online visitors or potential customers (e.g., de Mooij, 2019). Surprisingly, little research has addressed tourism promotion from a cross-cultural perspective (Tigre Moura, Gnoth, & Deans, 2014). In addition, no studies have been found for what concerns the analysis of (heritage) tourism promotion on social media. Addressing this gap would be particularly relevant given the intercultural nature of international travel and the frequent online touchpoints between the destination (the sender of the message) and the wannabe traveler (the receiver) – taking place on social media and other platforms. Addressing this topic, researchers advocate that a better knowledge of the receiver’s cultural background can make communication and marketing strategies more effective (Amaro & Duarte, 2017) – adapting content in a way that resonates with the cultural orientation of the addressed audience.

In conclusion, addressing this untapped research opportunity, Chapter 2 provides an overview on culture and localization in tourism promotion, while Chapter 3 investigates the expression of cultural values within the context of social media marketing – which arguably represents the most important reason to use localization in tourism promotion.

1.3 Localizing tourism promotion

Within the context of online communication, the localization of cultural values generally consists of tailoring the values conveyed by website or social media content to match those of online visitors from a specific country. In other words, the values expressed by the online outlet become congruent with those of the public of interest (Singh & Matsuo, 2004).

The supporting argument for localized (vs. standardized) promotion is that as people grow up in a certain culture, they accustom themselves to a specific system of values, beliefs and perceptions. Consequently, they tend to respond positively to advertising messages that are congruent with their own culture and value system (Zhang & Gelb, 1996). This dynamic is connected with the theory of the self, whereby products or services that reflect values that are relatable to the self-image of the consumer will be preferred over those that do not (Dolich, 1969). There is also another element that provides support to the use of localization practices in the tourism domain: the importance of visitors’ experience at the destination as object of promotion.

Tourism represents the forefront of experience creation and delivery (Oh, Fiore, & Jeoung, 2007). On the same lines, DMO websites and social networks are meant to virtually anticipate the holiday experience (Molinillo, Liebana-Cabanillas, Anaya-Sanchez, & Buhalis, 2018), triggering visitor's hedonic motivation (Tigre Moura, Gnoth, & Deans, 2014). Destination stakeholders do not simply sell a product and its characteristics. Instead, they try to capture visitor's imagination and desires with highly experiential content, drawing on histories, myths, and other culture-bound associations to sell a highly iconic product (Sternberg, 1997). As van Leeuwen (2001) describes, iconography, like semiotics, is about the existence of layered meanings: the denotative or representational meaning (e.g., a picture showing a group of people at a heritage site) and the symbolic or connotative meaning (e.g., visitors can enjoy the heritage experience with their family, their in-group), whose meaning entirely depends on the cultural background of the interlocutor.

Localization activities also include the translation of textual content from the source language "A" of the sender to the target language "B" of the receiver. Within the tourism context, translation is generally considered as a crucial element to make content understandable to the reference audience (e.g., Cappelli, 2008). In addition, scholars argue that properly translated content also leads to better positions in search engines – simply because the content matches with the language and expressions used in search engine queries formulated in the addressed international market (Achkasov, 2015). Given the widespread recognition of the importance of translating content, this PhD dissertation does not investigate translation effects when testing cultural adaptation effectiveness (see Chapter 5) – instead it focuses on less explored areas, like the effects of localizing cultural values on online visitors' perceptions and intentions. Yet, this PhD thesis does account for translation in all the other chapters, including when exploring the type of localization activities used by national tourism organizations (see Chapter 4).

Marketing literature addressing the concept of localization reaches divergent conclusions with respect to its effectiveness and usefulness. On the one side, there is research showing that Western European consumers are not sensitive to culturally adapted commercials in terms of COL-IND (Janssen & Hornikx, 2019; Hornikx & de Groot, 2017). Within the e-tourism domain, experimental research combining localized (congruent) cultural values with website design manipulations shows negative effects of adapted communication on online visitor's perceptions and intentions toward an imaginary destination, which – according to the scholars who conducted the

study – can be a consequence of reduced novelty in favor of familiarity (cultural congruence) (Tigre Moura, Gnoth, & Deans, 2014).

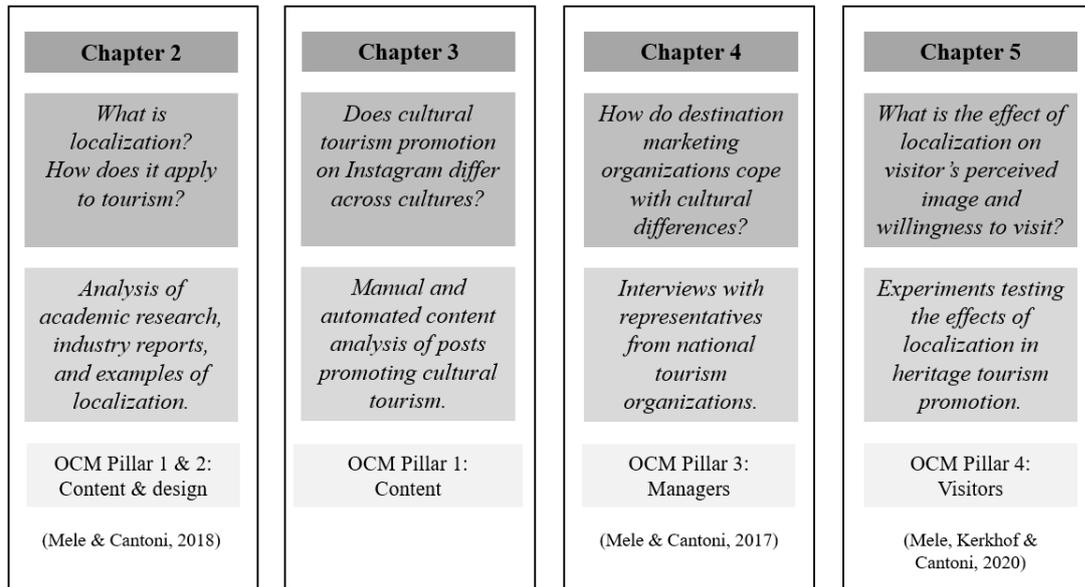
On the other side, research indicates that national (cultural) differences can play a role in terms of perceived complexity and liking of ads. For example, a study shows that Belgian respondents – characterized by a higher-context culture, where people arguably prefer implicit, artful language – perceive ads with visual metaphors as less complex and more appealing than Dutch respondents – a lower-context culture, with a preference for explicit, task-related communication (Hornikx & le Pair, 2017). In addition, scholars argue that when creating a website for an international audience, it is important to have content reflecting their cultural background (Singh, Zhao, & Hu, 2005) to improve attitude and purchase intention (Bartikowski & Singh, 2014; Baack & Singh, 2007). On the same lines, cultural differences are also found to affect (banner) advertising effectiveness (Möller & Eisend, 2010), purchase likelihood (He & Wang, 2017) and product reviews (Song, Moon, Chen, & Houston, 2018).

The discrepancy on the effects and benefits of localization in tourism promotion highlights a largely untapped opportunity for experimental research, which can be of great interest for both academics and practitioners. Addressing this gap, Chapter 4 and Chapter 5 investigate localization activities from a supply and demand perspective respectively.

1.4 Outline of the dissertation

This PhD thesis investigates the issue of cross-cultural differences and localization in tourism promotion following the four main components or “pillars” of the Online Communication Model (OCM) proposed by Tardini and Cantoni (2015) (**Figure 1.1**). Within the scope of this dissertation project, the pillars can be outlined as follows: content, design, managers, and visitors. Each pillar constitutes the focus of one or more chapters within the main narrative of this PhD thesis. In fact, the OCM components are not meant to be considered as stand-alone elements. Instead, they all contribute to build the iterative circle of online communication, with DMOs (third pillar) creating and managing website design and multimedia content (first and second pillar), following their business goals and users’ needs (fourth pillar).

Figure 1.1. Main chapters of the PhD thesis in relation to the OCM pillars.



Chapter 2: Cultural localization of web content and design

Considering the limited knowledge surrounding the topic of cultural localization in tourism, this book chapter triangulates academic articles with industry reports and examples from the web to tackle four main points (Mele & Cantoni, 2018). First, the reasons why localization in tourism online communication can be beneficial. Second, a description of the steps required to integrate it within a promotional strategy. Third, an overview of different localization practices involving web content and design, including examples from DMO websites. Lastly, the issue of over-localization is discussed with respect to the loss of perceived novelty that it may cause.

Chapter 3: Cross-cultural differences in tourism social media promotion

Moving from a broader view on cultural influences on tourism online communication and localization practices, this article uses the cultural dimensions of COL-IND, PD, and HC-LC in a manual content analysis to explore cultural value differences in Instagram posts (n = 1744) promoting cultural tourism (Mele, Kerkhof, & Cantoni, Under review). The research focuses on the images and captions published by the national tourism organizations of Chile, Portugal, USA, and Netherlands. The visual analysis not only considers the themes that convey certain cultural cues, but also *how* these are communicated by including image *mise en scene* dimensions (shot composition, angle, and

scale). In addition, an automated content analysis is conducted using the software LIWC2015 to examine the relationship between cultural orientation and linguistic style of destinations' posts.

Chapter 4: Localization activities from the perspective of DMOs

As cultural orientations appear to influence online communication in tourism, how do DMOs cope with cultural differences within their marketing plan? This paper adopts a qualitative research design to investigate whether and how cultural adaptation strategies are used by the members of the European Travel Commission (ETC) (Mele & Cantoni, 2017). The organization comprises 33 national tourism organizations, committed to strengthen sustainable tourism development in Europe. A total of 11 ETC members participated to 30-minute interviews tackling the following areas: (a) state of localization practices within the organization; (b) required market research for web copywriting; (c) most important localization activities; and (d) use of key performance indicators to measure localization effects on online visitor's perceptions and intentions.

Chapter 5: Localization effects on online visitors' perceived image and willingness to visit

Within the spectrum of localization practices, the adaptation of cultural values is arguably one of the most discussed activities in marketing research. Two preregistered, highly powered experiments – with a total of 2039 participants from Portugal and UK – are conducted following a 2 (COL vs. IND) × 2 (high PD vs. low PD) × 2 (country: Portugal vs. UK) between-subject design to test localization effects on participant's perceived image and willingness to visit a Dutch heritage site, Kinderdijk (Mele, Kerkhof, & Cantoni, 2020). The study also considers the direct and moderating effect of heritage interest, a factor measuring the general appeal of participants toward heritage tourism. Lastly, perceived image is analyzed in relation to Kinderdijk (Study 1) and to the recommended experience at the destination (Study 2).

Annex: Cultural value representation in tourism visuals

Both the content analysis of cultural values and the experimental studies testing localization effects (see previous chapters) benefited from a previous qualitative, exploratory analysis of tourism visuals from a cross-cultural perspective (Mele & Lobinger, 2018). More precisely, this research investigated the relationship among cultural values, visual content and visual style in tourism pictures (n = 95) – published by European DMOs – following theories of visual semiotics and cross-cultural communication.

1.4.1 *A mixed methods approach to analyze localization*

As the combination of qualitative and quantitative methods testifies, this PhD dissertation analyzes localization activities using a mixed methods approach. This research design allows researchers to gain a richer understanding of a phenomenon of interest and its context, combining the strengths and opportunities of different methods (Johnson, Onwuegbuzie, & Turner, 2007).

With reference to the thesis chapters, taking a step back from localization activities, the research in Chapter 3 used a quantitative content analysis to investigate the promotion of cultural tourism on Instagram from a cross-cultural perspective, considering Hofstede's et al. (2010) and Hall's (1976) cultural dimensions: Collectivism vs Individualism, Power Distance, and High-Context vs Low-Context communication. A quantitative content analysis is a research method that can be defined as "the systematic assignment of communication content to categories according to rules, and the analysis of relationships involving those categories using statistical methods" (Riffe, Lacy, & Fico, 2014, p. 3). The chosen method *simplified* cultural cues by assigning them to numbers, which were then analyzed in terms of frequency to answer questions, such as "how many times were individualist cues emphasized in post images published by the Portuguese national tourism organization? Did the occurrence significantly differ from the other destinations?" Quantitative content analysis can be applied to images (e.g., Stepchenkova, Kim, & Kirilenko, 2014), videos (e.g., Pan, Tsai, & Lee, 2011) and text (e.g., Singh, Zhao, & Hu, 2005), also with the aid of programs that conduct the analysis *for* the researcher – that is, automated content analysis. In Chapter 3, we used a (manual) content analysis for post images and caption (text) as well as an automated content analysis exclusively for post captions to analyze the influence of cultural orientation on linguistic styles.

After identifying and measuring the presence of cultural differences on the web, we used semi-structured interviews in Chapter 4 to investigate *how* destination marketing organizations would cope with them; whether cultural adaptation (localization) was an activity they would consider in their marketing strategies and how they would integrate it. Regarding the employed method, interviews are a qualitative technique used to grasp the viewpoint of people (the interviewees) on a specific topic, with a focus on diversity rather than quantity. Semi-structured interviews are an appropriate approach to conduct "descriptive, exploratory research in a new area of inquiry" (Bickman & Rog, 2009, p. 25), where the interviewer can add new questions if unexpected, relevant elements arise from the conversation with the interviewee. As all qualitative methods, interviews can

help outline and describe *complex* processes – valuing their richness – and reveal angles that have not been considered previously by the researcher (for more details, Gubrium & Holstein, 2001).

After having identified different types of localization activities, in Chapter 5 an experimental design was used to test the effects of one of them, the localization of cultural values, on participants' perceptions and intentions. Experiments are a quantitative method used to investigate *causal* relationships between one or more independent variables and (one or more) dependent variables. For the causal relationship to exist, these conditions must be true: (1) the cause must precede the effect; (2) any time the cause is present, the effect occurs; and (3) the cause must be present for the effect to take place. This research method has some specific characteristics: (1) the intentional manipulation of the independent variable(s); (2) the use of controls, such as random assignment of participants to one or more condition; (3) measurement of the dependent variable(s) that should show the effect of the manipulations. The first and the second point are what differentiates experiments from other techniques (Kirk, 2012). In Chapter 5, the conditions were represented by webpages showing manipulated cultural cues to participants, while the dependent variables – that is, the object through which the researcher measures the effect – were perceived image and willingness to visit a heritage site – both of them measured through items presented in an online questionnaire (for more details, Section 5.3.2).

The coding book for the manual content analysis in Chapter 3 as well as the experimental conditions (Chapter 5) were developed with the aid of a previous qualitative, semiotic analysis of tourism pictures published by destination marketing organizations ([Annex](#)). A semiotic analysis is a technique used to explore *how* visuals create meaning through a combination of signs (Pennington & Thomsen, 2010). In the research reported in the Annex, this method was employed to examine which signs (e.g., a happy-looking family having lunch) would communicate certain cultural cues (e.g., Collectivism) and which *mise en scene* characteristics would emphasize them (e.g., the proximity of the viewer to the scene, making him / her part of the event). A semiotic content analysis does not simplify signs into numbers, instead it discusses their characteristics and their relationship with the object expressing them, the knowledge of the viewer as well as with the broader cultural context to which the (visual) signs belong (e.g., Smith, 2018; Pennington & Thomsen, 2010).

Chapter 2. Cultural localization of web content and design¹

Abstract

The globalization of the tourism industry has been made possible thanks to ICTs. From a communication viewpoint, Internet does not know political borders, but still experiences linguistic and cultural ones. This situation requires that publishers provide both a linguistic and a cultural translation of their messages. Only caring for such a comprehensive “localization” will ensure being understandable and attractive for people with different cultural backgrounds. The chapter analyzes (1) the reasons why localization in tourism online communication is needed (with a focus on tourism destinations and cultural tourism); (2) the main needed activities to provide it. It also discusses (3) different practices and strategies (presenting a few cases), as well as (4) the issue of how much localization is needed, and when it may become counter-productive, making the destination too much similar to one’s own experience at home.

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2.1 Introduction

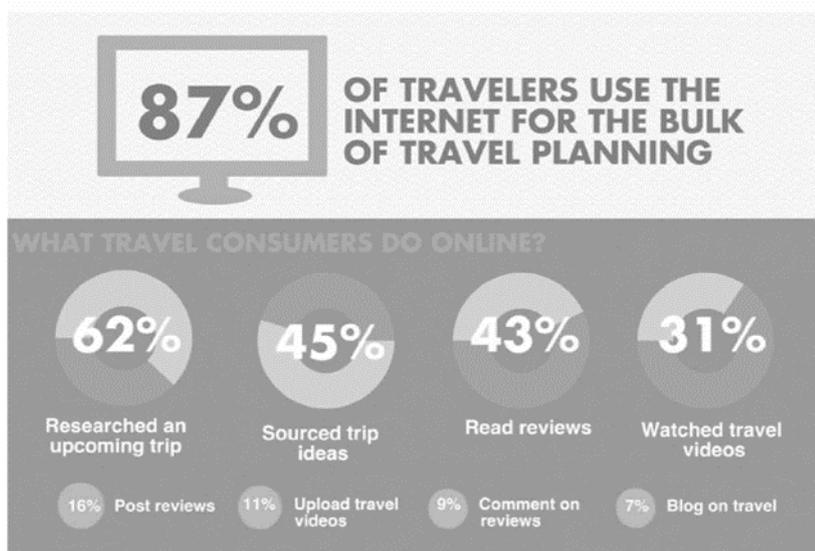
According to the statistics released by the World Tourism Organization of the UN (UNWTO), the number of international tourist arrivals reached 1.186 billion globally in 2015 and they forecast to mark 1.8 billion by 2030, with a growth of 3.3% a year (UNWTO, 2016). Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) play a major role in supporting and enhancing this phenomenon. Nowadays, tourism players are able to make their services and products more accessible for the publics they want to address. The availability of such information allows prospective tourists to find – first of all – inspiration while browsing the Web. A recent study conducted by Google (2016) in USA shows that one out of three accesses the Internet without a concrete place in mind. Referring to this dynamic, research underlines that Search Engine Optimization (SEO) is a crucial component for Destination Marketing Organizations (DMOs) that want to attract people from key markets (Pan, 2015).

According to a report elaborated by Euromonitor International (2014), 87% of prospective travelers make use of the Internet for travel planning, 45% look for trip ideas, and 31% look for inspiration by watching videos (**Figure 2.1**). Hence, it becomes easier to realize why tourism players are involved into this set of practices. An interesting study by Achkasov (2015) examines these dynamics from a cross-cultural viewpoint. More specifically, the researcher shows that SEO can be considerably enhanced by assisting it with a proper cultural adaptation of website keywords. Answering queries in a local language would allow tourism-related businesses to prevail over the stiff competition that characterizes the online environment. Among the innovations, it is important to underline that online visitors can share and retrieve information from their peers on the web about products and services. This dynamic allows them to decrease risks and uncertainties arising from the intangibility of tourism services. Indeed, reading comments provided by other tourists allows them to assess the quality of the offered service as well as visualize it in their minds (Park & Nicolau, 2015).

According to Euromonitor International (2014), online travel sales will experience a steady growth by 2017. Among the categories included in the study, there are accommodation, transportation, and tourist attractions. Such projections certainly stimulate destination stakeholders to better understand (i) how to adapt their products and services online; and (ii) how to shape their communication strategy according to the reference markets. Addressing these aspects, a study

conducted by Michopoulou and Moisa (2016) analyzes the role of cross-cultural backgrounds in differentiating the way travelers plan their holidays on the web. More specifically, the researchers refer to elements like lead-time for the preparation of the trip, flexibility, and attention to service details. Managerial implications for such outcome point at the need to implement tailored communication strategies according to the audience of reference, a need that includes the importance of accurate translation to make the content accessible.

Figure 2.1. Consumer research, shop, and engage about travel.



Translation of multimedia content needs to be supported by adaptation of services and experiences, which best fit the needs of the reference market (Mele, De Ascaniis, & Cantoni, 2015). Indeed, researchers highlight that when online visitors experience information overload, the ability of processing alternatives or options considerably decreases as well as their positive impression regarding the image of the destination (Rodríguez-Molina, Frías-Jamilena, & Castañeda-García, 2015). As opposite to this negative experience, Chung et al. (2015) observe that perceived relevance and usefulness of online content, together with continuous usage, are important triggers for travelling to a destination. At this point, it is important to underline that the need for content tailoring does not only concern the marketing sphere of tourism: it covers the full communication spectrum of it. More specifically, sharing information regarding tangible or intangible heritage on a destination website requires attentive cultural translation and adaptation (Mele, De Ascaniis, & Cantoni, 2015).

Modifying the granularity of the description regarding local heroes, religious, historical, or culinary elements allows content editors to transmit a piece of knowledge that is “sustainable”. The latter is meant here as the capacity of the recipient to understand and act according to the message sent by the publisher. An example of such dynamic is the adaptation of local narratives describing heritage sites at the destination, in an effort to transmit their value to visitors (and encourage respect) (Ndivo & Cantoni, 2016).

The above-mentioned dynamics show that while the Internet does not know political borders, it does still experience linguistic and cultural ones. Hence, this situation requires publishers to provide both a linguistic and cultural translation of multimedia contents, including texts, images, and layout (Cantoni & Tardini, 2006). This set of activities is part of the so-called “localization”, which entails all those processes that aim at “modifying products and services to account for differences in distinct markets” (LISA, 2007, p. 11). Hence, only caring for such comprehensive adaptation will ensure being understandable and attractive for people with different cultural backgrounds.

Given these premises, the chapter analyzes (I) the reasons why localization in tourism online communication is needed (with a focus on tourism destinations and cultural tourism); (II) the main needed activities to provide it. It also discusses (III) different practices and strategies (presenting a few cases), as well as (IV) the issue of how much localization is needed, and when it may become counter-productive, making the destination too much similar to one’s own experience at home.

2.2 What is localization?

The Localization Industry Standards Association (LISA), a former Swiss-based trade body specialized in the translation of computer software, described localization as “the process of modifying products or services to account for differences in distinct markets” (LISA, 2007, p. 11). Starting from this definition, it is possible to list and outline its main components.

The first part “The process of modifying products or services” (p. 11) clarifies that localization is to be understood as a process and not as a punctual activity. Namely, it involves a series of practices that continue and change over time. This also highlights the importance of having qualified personnel that decides, manages, and evaluates them, in order to assess their validity and suitability toward the market of reference. Moreover, to ensure the optimization of resources, this

process can be supported by cultural translation as well as integrated with standardized elements. For instance, an oven produced in Switzerland and sold in China and Russia will need certain components to be adapted (e.g. voltage) and others standardized (e.g. size). The second part “[...] to account for differences in distinct markets” (p. 11) specifies that localization is meant to answer markets with diverse characteristics. Namely, there is the need to adapt specific features of a product or service to make it usable for a given audience. Concerning this aspect, the International Standards Association (ISO) defines usability as the degree to which a specific public can use an artifact, within a precise context, to reach specified goals with efficiency, effectiveness, and satisfaction (ISO 9241-11, 1998). For example, to make a software usable for the Chinese audience, at the engineering stage programmers need to include the possibility to insert special characters in the textual content.

From a communication perspective, in both segments of the definition it is possible to find links with the four pillars (i.e. key elements) of the Online Communication Model (OCM) (Inversini & Cantoni, 2014). The researchers explain that online communication needs certain conditions to be effective and efficient. Their characteristics will be briefly outlined here to contextualize the definition of localization into the realm of the Web. The first and second pillars contain all contents/functionalities and the user interface of a website. Text, pictures, and layout often undergo the process of localization to make them apply to new requirements. The third pillar represents experts that create, manage, and evaluate the website, along with the adaptation process involved. The fourth pillar refers to the users of the website, without whom online communication does not take place. Thus, specialized personnel (third pillar) manages localization activities of online contents and user interface (first and second pillar), to account for the needs of a specific audience (fourth pillar). The OCM includes also a fifth element, the context, which encompasses all info-competitors of a specific destination website, shaping the expectations of online users while retrieving information to plan their holidays.

The European Telecommunications Standards Institute (ETSI) (2007) provides a definition of localization enriched with other important facets. More specifically, it is described as “taking a product and making it linguistically and culturally appropriate to the target locale (country/region and language) where it will be used and sold” (p. 12). This definition can be divided into different segments to illustrate and contextualize its components.

The first segment “Taking a product and making it linguistically and culturally appropriate” (p. 12) focuses on two principal factors. First, the importance of providing an artifact (e.g. a website) whose contents and instructions, for instance, are expressed in the language of a specific audience. Second, culture-dependent characteristics of the product need to be adequate to receivers. The second segment “[...] to the target locale (country/region and language) where it will be used and sold” (p. 12) specifies that the receivers (i.e. the market) can be identified with a geographical region, from where a website will be accessed. Given the focus on the usage of the artifact, it is important to draw a connection between this aspect and the other two ones mentioned above. Namely, a study by Barber and Badre (1998) explains that culture, including language, can affect the usability of any piece of software to the point that, in case of strong incompatibility, the local public avoids using it. To express this dynamic, the researchers present the term “culturability”. For instance, websites in Arabic should have graphics and important messages with an orientation from right to left, instead of center or left to right for American ones. Lack of attention toward these aspects can affect negatively the online user experience, going beyond the comfort zone of the visitors (Barber & Badre, 1998).

Consequently, once transposed to websites, localization describes all those activities that aim at adapting components like layout, information architecture, navigation as well as text, pictures, and videos (Tigre Moura, Gnoth, & Deans, 2014). To better understand all the phases that lead to this decision, it will be useful to introduce the Lingo diagram (**Figure 2.2**), developed by the American Translators Association (2002). Originally thought as a scheme to guide the adaptation of products for a given marketplace, it will be used here to provide an example of the steps that lead to the localization of a website.

The outer layer “Globalization” describes the process of conceptualization of a website for international markets. This includes the discussion among stakeholders regarding how many different versions are needed to address specific key publics. The second phase is the “internationalization”, where programmers engineer the website in a way that it will also support different characters as well as text orientations. This step is of great importance, because it reduces the future financial costs of adapting the communication channel for specific markets. Indeed, instead of creating another website for the Chinese audience, for instance, it is possible to create beforehand a software that allows both Latin and Mandarin characters. Hence, while “Globalization” is about the conceptualization and mapping of the website, “Internationalization” is the actual construction of the

artifact in a way that it will support the adaptation for different publics. The third step is “Localization”, which includes the activities mentioned above, focusing on one specific audience. Finally, the inner circle “Translation” describes the activity of online translation and SEO experts transposing the source language “A” into the receivers’ language “B”, making the content accessible for the reference audience as well as ensuring the presence of keywords to answer queries from local search engines (Achkasov, 2015).

Figure 2.2. The LINGO diagram.



Existing research highlights the role of localization from several different perspectives. Addressing this issue with a quantitative approach, a study by Alexander et al. (2016) examines differences for design attributes among Australian, Chinese, and Saudi Arabian websites for government, news and media. Results show their usage significantly varies across nations (i.e. identified in the study as representative of national cultures), including cultural-dependent preferences for layout, multimedia, and textual content. Discussing the research outcome, the scholars point at the need to think globally and act locally to gain the attention of the local audience, by accommodating the website according to their specific cultural needs and preferences.

On the same lines, a previous study by Mushtaha and De Troyer (2014) proposed a conceptual model to support the design of websites according to the culture of the reference audience. More specifically, the researchers indicate five different stages, containing “cultural markers”, which provide designers and content editors with a view of all website elements that need to be considered according to the needs of the company (i.e. from rather international websites to highly localized ones). Even though this chapter is not meant to provide more details on their components, what is essential to mention is the importance they attribute to the existence of different degrees of localization for a website. Indeed, according to the precise context and preference of a company (also in relation to its audience), distinct online communication strategies may coexist at the same time.

Examining localization practices within the ecommerce domain, Bartikowski and Singh (2014) analyze the effect of such process, defined here as “website cultural congruity (WCC)” (p. 246), on attitude toward the website, and trust in the online vendor. Results show that WCC positively affects online consumer behavior, particularly for those companies with weak equity brands (i.e. monetary value of a brand name). Nevertheless, findings highlight that high levels of WCC does not affect strong equity brands. At this regard, Bartikowski and Singh (2014) add that for high-risk decisions (e.g. booking a tourist service) the identity of strong equity brands could be diluted and suffer from it. Consequently, they suggest a moderate localization activity to (I) make the information accessible for the local audience and (II) still challenging them with novelty.

2.3 Why to localize in the tourism online domain?

In the first section of this chapter, we have illustrated an overview of the context that surrounds localization activities in the tourism online domain. More information will be provided here regarding existing studies that justify the need for adaptation, along with its limitations and diverging lines of thought.

Addressing this last perspective, this section will start with the hotel business, which is often regarded as the most globalized tourism industry (Yu, Byun, & Lee, 2014). According to research, also with the support of the Internet, the dynamic of globalization is responsible for an increasing homogenization of international markets’ preferences and needs (Liu, Guillet, Xiao, & Law, 2014). In their study, Liu et al. (2014) question such statement by mentioning the difficulties that standardized hotel services encounter internationally. Indeed, visitors from different countries may

want to experience the local flavor of the destination while experiencing accommodation services. Given the importance of standardization for well-established and large international hotel companies, the researchers aim at grasping a better understanding of the issue by exploring the preferences for hotel pricing policies across cultures. More specifically, the study examines whether there are differences regarding this matter between Chinese and Western customers. Results show that, apart from travel behavior, there are no diverging preferences for pricing, including room rates and refundability when booking online. Such outcome suggests that for major hotel brands complete localization of rate restrictions may be not needed, with special regard to these two markets. However, Liu et al. (2014) underline that pricing is only one component of marketing and management strategies. Moreover, the scholars add that market research plays an instrumental role for the analysis of needs and preferences of hosting cultures, before deciding what direction to take. As concluding remarks, Liu et al. (2014) state that more research is needed regarding the “glocalized” approach, located in the middle of a continuum between standardization and localization.

On the same lines, an experimental study performed by Tigre Moura et al. (2014) highlights the limitations of cultural adaptation for online tourism marketing. More precisely, following the cultural theories developed by Hofstede’s et al. (2010) and Hall (1976), the researchers develop four fictitious tourism websites to be explored by a sample of 400 Australian students. After the navigation following the standard experimental protocol, survey results show that the highly adapted ones (i.e. two out of four) lead to lower willingness to travel than the other two, with opposite cultural values. Tigre Moura et al. (2014) motivate such outcome by stating that in the context of leisure tourism, high cultural congruency does not appear as an appropriate solution. In other words, novelty elements have the power to stimulate prospects’ imagination positively, when visiting destination websites for hedonic purposes (i.e. pleasure seeking). Hence, it is possible to resume that both studies by Liu et al. (2014) and Tigre Moura et al. (2014) point at the limitations and (possible) negative effects of highly localized marketing strategies for tourism-related websites. While this could be misinterpreted as a discouraging signal for employing adaptation activities, the following part of this section will show in fact the opposite.

The construct of novelty is one of the central components of travel motivation. This appears clearly in both the well-known definition provided by UNWTO (2014) and the study developed by Lee and Crompton (1992). More specifically, the latter defines it as “the degree of contrast between

present perception and past experience” (p. 733) and adds that novelty represents the antithesis of familiarity. In other words, online visitors will access destination websites seeking for inspiration from and information about (perceived) new experiences. If prospective tourists are already familiar with the contents displayed online, this may provoke boredom and loss of interest. Indeed, the higher is the knowledge about the destination, the lower is the interest in relying on external information sources (Toyama & Yamada, 2012).

Addressing these dynamics, a study developed by Toyama & Yamada (2012) explores the relationship between destination satisfaction, familiarity, loyalty, and novelty, with the precise purpose of going beyond the novelty-familiarity continuum. As opposite to theories classifying these two concepts as opposite, (in the context of TV commercial) empirical data show no significant correlation between them. Examining their relationship as segregated constructs in the context of domestic cultural tourism in Japan, results show that both novelty and familiarity contribute to destination loyalty. Furthermore, there is no relationship between familiarity and tourist satisfaction. Addressing such results, the scholars argue that tourists are willing to reduce the risk of disappointing experiences and, at the same time, they are novelty seekers. Consequently, they suggest destination marketers to focus on novelty, while providing enough information to increase familiarity and decrease the uncertainty related to service consumption (Toyama & Yamada, 2012). From an online communication perspective, this digression shows that novelty and familiarity need to coexist on destination websites. Furthermore, context and market of reference dictate the optimal balance between them. This also explains why highly localized marketing strategies do not seem to work in the tourism context, where novelty seeking is so important. Indeed, providing an image of the destination too similar to one’s knowledge or home experience may suffocate the trigger to travel to foreign countries. Such flexibility needs to account both for familiar and standardized elements (see above) in online communication.

Underlying the importance of localization strategies to account for cross-cultural differences in the tourism domain, a study by Cho and Sung (2012) examines their effects on information value and performance evaluation. Taking the case of the Korean National Tourism Organization (KNTO) website (english.visitkorea.or.kr), the scholars test components of these two constructs for Chinese, Korean, and US-American publics. Confirming the study hypotheses, among the results it is important to mention here that travel information appears to be more important for Korean

participants. Whereas, new adventures and sensational activities principally attract the interest of US-Americans. Also involving cultural characteristics, the evaluation of user friendliness shows a lower score from U.S. users. Cho and Sung (2012) argue that this outcome may be due to the preference for explicit and detailed communication, which is typical of a relatively low-context culture like the US-American one.

Within the tourism online domain, cultural tourism certainly poses major challenges in terms of content selection and adaptation. The richness of information available, for instance, for museums and heritage (both tangible and intangible) requires careful adaptation when displayed on tourism websites. Indeed, visitors from different countries may have little knowledge regarding the topic or they may feel overwhelmed by the density of provided contents. Researchers warn against the dangers of providing a copious amount of information to online visitors, causing a less positive impression of destination image (Rodríguez-Molina, Frías-Jamilena, & Castañeda-García, 2015). A study developed by Ardissono et al. (2012) specifies that cultural heritage is probably one of the favorite domains for researchers and experts in personalization techniques. With the support of the web, prospective visitors can access contents at any moment of the tourist experience, creating a continuum where interests change according to previous and current experiences, knowledge, and other characteristics. Within the European area, researchers highlight the necessity for heritage revival to inform prospects about the historical and cultural richness that characterizes Europe. Egberts (2014) defines this concept as the possibility to make heritage live again, “[...] creating a meaningful historical experience for the audience [...] offering opportunities for personal development and self-expression” (p. 16). With the innovations brought by ICTs, in particular the Internet, cultural and heritage institutions have the possibility to establish sustainable relationships with existing key publics as well as opening conversations with new markets (Egberts, 2014).

Given the role of National Tourism Organizations (NTOs) in promoting the destination mostly to international publics (Pike, 2008), an exploratory study by Mele et al. (2015) aims at analyzing the online representations of World Heritage Sites (WHSs) for the US-American and Italian audience. By applying the framework developed by Tigre Moura et al. (2014) (with several adaptations), content analysis shows differences in terms of cultural values, reflecting most of Hofstede’s et al. (2010) classification. For example, the Italian version for the Old Town of Zamość (Poland) focuses more on past power structures and notorious artists than the US-American version

does. Addressing this aspect, it is possible to argue that such difference may be due to transposition of different cultural values for Power Distance when creating online contents for these versions. More precisely, this cultural dimension describes the relative preference for power discrepancies in society and, in the tourism context, the possibility to refer to famous people related to the destination like politicians, artists, and others (Mele, De Ascaniis, & Cantoni, 2015). As observed by Hofstede et al. (2010) the Italian cultural score on this dimension is relatively higher than the US-American one. As concluding remarks, Mele et al. (2015) add that such differences between versions show the interest of content editors and marketing managers in adapting WH online contents, to account for cultural differences in distinct markets.

Consequently, conveying information online about the heritage and history of a destination is an important challenge for content editors, who need to adapt information without falling into negative stereotypes or fictitious realities. In this sense, localization of cultural heritage online offers the possibility to notice a shift of the very concept of glocalization. Indeed, as Salazar (2005, p. 631) describes it:

“[...] whereas in its original micromarketing meaning glocalization referred to tailoring global products to particular circumstances, in the case of tourism [...], it involves tailoring local [...] products (representations of heritage and culture) to changing global audiences (international tourists coming from various parts of the world and with different preferences)”

While the researcher examines this concept within the context of local tour guiding in Indonesia (Salazar, 2005), it is possible to apply it here to understand why for NTOs localization practices are important, from the broader perspective of overall communication of attractions and experiences to the role of culture as a competitive advantage to attract international tourists. More specifically, when communicating information about, for instance, heritage sites or sacred festivals, adaptation activities should aim at making them “sustainable” for the audience. In other words, a message that can be “sustained” and “integrated” by the interlocutor.

Within website domain, these messages can take the form of storytelling (described by locals), which aim at capturing the attention of online visitors to rise their awareness (or promoting behaviors) regarding the importance of certain features of the destination. Localization plays an important role here, because it consists of all the activities that content editors employ to make online communication effective for publics with different cultural backgrounds (Mele, De Ascaniis, &

Cantoni, 2015). Innovation Norway website (visitnorway.com) provides an example of storytelling localized uniquely for the English-speaking audience (**Figure 2.3**). The text belongs to a webpage dedicated to the historical Olav's Mine in the UNESCO WHS town of Røros (Norway). The first objective here is to stimulate the fantasy of online readers with the use of affective language (e.g. "minerals are flashing shades of blue and green [...]"). The second objective is to raise their awareness regarding the symbolic and historic importance that the site has for the local population (here represented by the interviewee). Finally, both the focus on experience and the use of comparisons (i.e. "[...] as big as 21 football fields") aim at increasing the visualization of the place in the mind of online visitors before they arrive at the destination.

Figure 2.3. Innovation Norway (2016). The legacy of the miners. Retrieved November 8, 2016, from visitnorway.com/places-to-go/trondelag/roros/world-heritage/

The legacy of the miners

Arne Carlsen is the last man standing in the depths of the historical Olav's Mine in the UNESCO World Heritage town of Røros. "This is an utterly beautiful place to contemplate about life," says the 57-year old janitor.

Text: Morten Andre Samdal

Minerals are flashing shades of blue and green onto the stone walls. Narrow and steep stairs disappear into the abyss of history. More than 60 metres underground, old mining equipment still resides along the tracks.

"The environment is really unique, and it's inspiring to work down here. My job is to make sure it's safe for people to experience how it was to live and work down here," says Arne Carlsen.

He's the janitor maintaining the caves that cover an area as big as 21 football fields.

The mine was shut down in 1972, but people can still come and experience the calmness and the echo of old working traditions in the Olav's Mine, 13 kilometres outside the centre of Røros.

Also addressing the importance of ICT-mediation in tourism online communication, a study by Ndivo and Cantoni (2016) aims at examining the need for heritage interpretation for the rock-hewn churches of Lalibela, a WHS in Ethiopia. The scholars claim that it is instrumental to provide a story that involves the widest audience possible, presenting them the meanings related to the site. In addition to that, they suggest that the goal of heritage interpretation is not only to provide information, but also to transmit the importance of the WHS, appeal at visitors' imagination, and persuade them about the necessity to preserve the site for future generations. Discussing the results, the researchers highlight that effective communication together with proper explanation contributes to visitor satisfaction (Ndivo & Cantoni, 2016). From this point, it is easy to understand that prospects can benefit from diverse multimedia contents that can be localized in several different ways according to needs and context.

2.4 What can be localized and how?

With the process of localization, marketing managers and content editors can create a more effective communication strategy for key markets. Within the tourism domain, novelty and affective language necessarily support this activity, to account for the novelty-seeking nature of most tourists that go beyond their everyday life to experience something different. In this respect, the importance of localization resides in the fact that it provides valuable contents to prospects, reducing the uncertainty connected with the fear of unsatisfactory experiences and of visiting unknown places. From the perspective of cultural tourism, adaptation activities give access to “sustainable” online contents regarding heritage and history. Thus, destinations can inform international travelers in advance regarding the importance and value of certain attractions for the local population. Such strategy should aim at promoting better behaviors on site and understanding between hosts and visitors. From a supply viewpoint, this signifies the integration of “glocalized” strategies that according to audience and context (e.g. season) may focus more on standardized or tailored contents. Given the nature of localization as a process, rather than a punctual activity, DMOs need experts that deal with layout and content creation, update, and assessment, to secure its effectiveness over time. However, because of the challenging nature of tourism, with online visitors coming from several different countries, NTOs’ managers face the need to integrate these processes into their operations. To clarify these dynamics, the following section will provide a few cases regarding what can be localized and how, together with interpretations from marketing and cultural perspectives.

Addressing these issues, a study by Mele and Cantoni (2016) collects information regarding several aspects of adaptation practices at eleven NTOs that are part of the European Travel Commission (ETC) (etc-corporate.org). Among the results, interviews show that the headquarters of these organizations work in close relation with their branches in key markets to tailor contents and create ad-hoc campaigns to attract international tourists to the destination. The majority of interviewees (eight out of eleven) declare that their companies retrieve data by conducting surveys and other studies at different stages of the tourist experience, together with the collection of information made already available by other entities. The outcome of market research then serves as a direction for the improvement of content tailoring on destination websites (Mele & Cantoni, 2016). Focusing now on the actual localization practices, this section will start with one of the most important

multimedia contents for inspiring potential visitors: destination images. At this regard, it is important here to underline that pictures that populate websites are also meant to allow visitors to visualize the place, to anticipate the experience, and feel the location before actually getting there.

Several studies focus on the importance that these elements have to capture the attention of the audience and influence the creation of destination image when browsing the web. However, a few of them examine the role of culture in the creation of visual representations (Stepchenkova, Kim, & Kirilenko, 2014). At this regard, a study by Stepchenkova et al. (2014), in the context of inbound tourism in Russia, provides interesting insights regarding how the cultural profile of US-Americans (i.e. relatively low Uncertainty Avoidance and adventurous), for instance, matches with their preferences for rural areas and suburban neighborhoods. A preference shown in the pictures taken at the destination, portraying the places where locals actually live (Stepchenkova, Kim, & Kirilenko, 2014). From the supply side perspective, localizing images includes avoiding offensive contents and showing ad-hoc ones from tailored campaigns. To provide an example, Figure 4 and Figure 5 are respectively the two-second largest pictures on the homepages of the Chinese and US-American editions of Tourism Ireland (ireland.com).

Starting from **Figure 2.4**, the cartoon invites in a playful way to explore the main attractions in Ireland. From a cultural viewpoint, it is possible to argue that the image expresses different values compared to the US-American one. First, there is a clear focus on entertainment, highlighted by the use of cartoons and affective contents. Indeed, both colors and joyful expressions of the characters contribute to this factor. Second, at least five sections portray family-related activities. Referring to the framework elaborated by Tigre Moura et al. (2014), the former corresponds to the soft sell approach category, meaning that High Context cultures prefer a promotional approach based on intangible, affective, and entertaining cues. The latter (i.e. family-related activities) corresponds to the family theme, more suitable for Collectivist cultures, which privilege pictures of families and groups of tourists. Consequently, this is in line with the cultural theories developed by Hall (1976) and Hofstede et al. (2010), which respectively describe China as a High Context and relatively high collectivist national culture compared to U.S. In this sense, it is important to underline that cultural scores assigned by Hofstede et al. (2010) can only be understood from a comparison among different national cultures. Moving now to **Figure 2.5**, it is possible to argue that the values displayed there relate to the themes of independence and adventure (Tigre Moura, Gnoth, & Deans, 2014). This can

be deduced from both textual content (i.e. “Get ready for an adventure”) and wild nature into the foreground, with a few adventurers crossing a suspended bridge. Once again, it is possible to see a connection with Hofstede’s et al. (2010) theories, describing the US-American culture as relatively more individualistic (e.g. focusing on independence and self-reliance) and lower on Uncertainty Avoidance than the Chinese one. From a managerial viewpoint, asking local experts to create visual contents can allow, as in the example, a more appropriate match with the culture of the key market. While this maintains the novelty elements of the destination, it can be a powerful way to ensure that online visitors remember what they have seen, carrying a mental souvenir from the website experience.

Figure 2.4. Tourism Ireland (2016). Irish Cartoon. Retrieved November 9, 2016 from discoverireland.cn



Another key element of destination websites that should be localized is textual content. Addressing this area, a study by Cappelli (2008) tackles several issues regarding translation activities and the role of translators for tourism websites. Moreover, she says that “whenever the term ‘translation’ is used, it subsumes both translation and localization [...] two inseparable processes as far as promotional tourist websites are concerned” (p. 109). Within this peculiar realm, the scholar highlights the importance of accounting also for the source code, which must include keywords that

give search engines powerful hints about the content of the website to improve organic results in specific markets.

Figure 2.5. Tourism Ireland (2016). Northern Ireland: get ready for an adventure. Retrieved November 9, 2016 from ireland.com/en-us/



The paper also presents important specifications regarding the very nature of tourism-related text, reporting that it has specific features and modes. In addition to that, it must be considered as a multifaceted and multidisciplinary discourse that can reach diverse levels of specialization according to the topic and the audience. Textual content of tourism websites needs to answer to global readers, who have different values, interests, and preferences when searching for information on the web. Consequently, the professional translator needs to tackle both technicalities related to the linguistic level and the promotional aim of the message itself. The latter is achieved by careful selection of keywords and key phrases when localizing contents for a specific audience. These must be relevant and mostly placed in the first paragraph of a webpage. To achieve the first objective, the scholar suggests using keyword popularity tools (Cappelli, 2008). One last aspect that is important to mention here is the specific role of internationalization, which has already been mentioned above. More specifically, this process aims at simplifying the original textual content to facilitate the consequent adaptation activity performed by the expert (Cappelli, 2008). On the same lines, a study by Achkasov

(2015) underlines the scope of web translation and localization to provide meaningful (for the audience) as well as optimized content (to answer to local queries).

Providing more details on the topic, Cantoni and Tardini (2006) mention that apart from linguistic translation, also all the other elements that vary across countries must be localized too. Reporting here some of them, dates, currencies, unit of measures, laws, regulations, customs, uniforms, and historical notions may bear no clear meaning for individuals belonging to cultures that are distant from the destination (Cantoni & Tardini, 2006). To provide an example of text localization practices, **Figure 2.6** and **Figure 2.7** belong respectively to the Italian and US-American editions of Austrian National Tourist Office (austria.info).

Figure 2.6. Austrian National Tourist Office (2016). Salisburgo. Retrieved November 10, 2016 from austria.info/it/destinazioni/citta/salisburgo

Salisburgo

Famosa in tutto il mondo per aver dato i natali al genio musicale Wolfgang Amadeo Mozart, Salisburgo è anche una città arricchita dalla fortezza di Hohensalzburg che la domina, dal Castello di Hellbrunn e i suoi giochi d'acqua e da musei. Una città tutta da scoprire.

—

Both texts provide a brief description of the city of Salzburg in Vienna (retrieved from the same website on different editions). However, they present several differences between them (as well as similarities). First, **Figure 2.6** has a bigger amount of words ($n = 48$) than **Figure 2.7** ($n = 32$). This is not due to the nature of the language, but the contents themselves. Indeed, **Figure 2.6** shows a finer granularity than the US-American version, mentioning the name of a fortress (i.e. “fortezza di Hohensalzburg”) and a castle (i.e. “Castello di Hellbrunn”), for instance. The latter instead mentions in a generic way the main attractions (i.e. “churches, castles, and palaces”) and adds the fact that the city is a UNESCO WHS. Moreover, it provides information regarding the geographical location of the city of Salzburg (i.e. “Capital of SalzburgerLand”).

From a cultural perspective, one may argue that the text for the Italian audience shows more signs of High Context (for the soft sell approach) (Tigre Moura, Gnoth, & Deans, 2014) than the US-

American version does. Indeed, the former mentions the richness provided by the monuments (i.e. “una città arricchita da [...]”), choreographed water features (i.e. “I suoi giochi d’acqua”), and the pleasure of discovery (i.e. “una città tutta da scoprire”): all elements that relate to experience or entertainment. They might also suggest an ancient baroque middle-European atmosphere through a quite obsolete style (“dato i natali”, “che la domina”, “giochi d’acqua”), elements that are not highlighted in the US-American edition. In comparison, this one appears more direct, listing precisely some city’s main features.

Figure 2.7. Austrian National Tourist Office (2016). The baroque city of Salzburg. Retrieved November 10, 2016 from austria.info/us/where-to-go/cities/salzburg

The baroque city of Salzburg

Capital of SalzburgerLand

Salzburg, the birthplace of Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart, is dominated by churches, castles and palaces. Its picturesque old town is a UNESCO World Heritage Site.

Referring again to Hall’s (1976) theories, this interpretation reflects the status of Italy as High Context culture compared to the Low Context US-American one. From a marketing perspective, the presence of more content for the Italian audience may be justified by the fact that the predominant Italian segment that visits the webpage may have already heard about the names of those attractions (hence, valuable information), while the US-American one may not. Indeed, this example also shows the importance of avoiding showing pieces of content that may not make sense for culturally and geographically far online visitors, who may be overwhelmed by the amount of content. Finally, the US-American version of the text provides more hints related to artistic and historic features like the referral to the baroque period and the status of UNESCO WHS. Even for this case, the choice and adaptation of content may be dictated by preferences of the reference audience.

In addition to pictorial and textual contents, another element presented here is the localization of destination themes. From a visitor perspective, tourism as an experience economy gathers a series of perceived attributes, which include atmosphere cues (e.g. physical design of a hotel or a neighborhood) and memorabilia (e.g. souvenirs) (Gao, Scott, & Ding, 2016). These and other

attributes can group under one theme, connecting together several experience and service elements into visitors' mind (Agapito, Valle, & Mendes, 2014).

Research by Agapito et al. (2014) underlines that ICTs can enhance visitor experience at the destination and the identification of core themes can help coordinate experiential offerings. Moreover, these constructs present at least three main advantages. First, they contribute to the planning and marketing of powerful experiences. Second, they originally group together several resources to attract specific key markets. Third, destination themes influence visited places as well as the way tourists behave in the host environment. Gao et al. (2016) add that, supported by the power of storytelling, a theme helps travelers provide meanings to what they experience, group their impressions, and strengthen their memories about it. Furthermore, the construct can also help promote sustainable behaviors. Depending on the availability of services, products, and attractions, destination marketers can build different themes according to the preferences of the publics. Hence, “an *effective theme* is dramaturgical, and can be an idea, a subject [...] that determines the elements applied to create the experiential context” (p. 3). However, the scholars also report that such choices should be culturally relevant for the intended audience (Gao, Scott, & Ding, 2016). This is the reason why localization processes can enhance the communication of destination themes, diversifying them also according to the cultural profile of online visitors from specific countries.

To provide an example of destination theme localization, two cases from the same NTO will be provided and interpreted separately. Both contents (**Figure 2.8** and **Figure 2.9**) appear on the top of the Hungarian NTO's website homepage (different versions). The first theme “Por los cafés de Budapest” (in English: “Around the cafés of Budapest”) is dedicated exclusively to the Spanish audience. The textual content invites online visitors to learn about literary culture in Budapest by visiting some of the most important historic cafés, where XX century elite authors spent their time. In addition to that, the writer underlines that these are symbolic places for the city of Budapest. Strengthening and supporting the textual message, the banner on the background shows a lively (and colorful) environment with several groups of people (supposedly both tourists and locals) tasting typical culinary products. In other words, from a marketing perspective, content editors are promoting the theme of cafés and literature as a *fil rouge* that visitors can follow to explore an interesting cultural aspect of the city, linked with its artistic, literary, and culinary tradition.

The second theme is from the homepage of the Italian edition of the Hungarian NTO’s website (**Figure 2.9**). Exclusively for this audience, the theme is “Budapest, la capitale amica dei ragazzi e dei bambini” (in English: “Budapest, the friendly capital for kids and babies”). Starting from the textual content, the message wants to provide a series of experiences that can be fully enjoyed by both adults and children, listing several attractions like parks, miniature trains, and playgrounds. In addition to that, the last line mentions the importance of security, smart decisions, and low-cost experiences. As a support, the banner shows a child happily eating an ice cream on the edge of the riverside (i.e. the Danube) and on the foreground sport-related activities with an artistic cityscape. From a marketing perspective, all contents aim at transmitting a strong sensory experience, suggesting the possibility to explore Budapest following the common denominator of the family theme (which is supported by a series of products and services).

Figure 2.8. Hungarian National Tourist Office (2016). Por los cafés de Budapest. Retrieved November 11, 2016 from es.gotohungary.com/



From a cultural viewpoint, one may argue that the Italian theme shows more signs of Collectivism than the Spanish one does. Indeed, apart from showing a picture with groups of tourists, the text of the latter does not refer explicitly to any group or family-related activity. On the contrary, this is evident for the Italian edition, where both the banner and the textual content support the family theme. By operationalizing with Tigre Moura’s et al. (2014) suggested framework, such observation

goes toward a different direction from what Hofstede's et al. (2010) suggests regarding these two cultures, with Spain being relatively more collectivist (i.e. higher integration into in-groups) than Italy is. For this specific piece of content, the answer probably resides in the fact that the preferences of the predominant website audience prevail to a certain extent over cultural values transposition and cultural localization. The clear reference to cost advantages of family holidays in Budapest for the Italian audience also supports the previous statement. Indeed, even though the Italian national culture is described as being a relatively High Context one (Hall, 1976), following the framework by Tigre Moura et al. (2014), this can be a sign of Low Context, referring directly to the monetary value of the experience (instead of maintaining the overall entertainment-related spirit of the discourse). However, in this case the reference to costs can relate to (I) the economic concerns that may arise while planning a family holiday; and/or (II) the willingness of marketers to compete (on price) with other family destinations.

Figure 2.9. Hungarian National Tourist Office (2016). Budapest, la capitale amica dei ragazzi e dei bambini. Retrieved November 11, 2016 from it.gotohungary.com/



Following the adaptation of pictorial and textual contents, together with core themes, the localization of layout and content disposition is also an important issue to be addressed by content managers. Indeed, while European online visitors usually scan contents from the upper left corner, Arabic users start from the upper right corner (Alexander, Thompson, & Murray, 2016). Such

difference requires several changes, for instance, in the orientation of the menu bar and the location of the most important contents for the destination marketers. The two figures below (**Figure 2.10** and **Figure 2.11**) are screenshots of the upper part (including menu bar layout) of Myswitzerland.com (myswitzerland.com), the Swiss NTO's website, for Deutschland and Gulf countries editions.

While the promotion of the experience does not vary (in English: “Winter magic in the city”), the disposition of the menu bar, textual content, and logos change according to the selected edition, with the purpose to ensure the best experience possible to online visitors with different cultural backgrounds. In addition to that, the rectangular banner promoting St. Moritz does not appear for the Gulf countries edition, being probably an ad-hoc commercial for the German market.

From a theoretical viewpoint, this specific preference for content orientation is a cultural marker. Barber and Badre (1998) define this concept as “interface design elements and features that are prevalent, and possibly preferred, within a particular cultural group” (p. 2). Consequently, localizing layout and content disposition to account for a different cultural marker (from the perspective of the destination) is of paramount importance to preserve the usability of the website for a specific audience. The scholars add that, by applying the analogy of tourism experiences to the web, it is easy to understand that, on the one side, new and unusual environments are pleasant during the exploration phase. On the other side, when there is the need to accomplish a precise task (e.g. find the highlights of the country) in an efficient way, a culturally unfamiliar layout can be frustrating (Barber & Badre, 1998).

Figure 2.10. Switzerland tourism (2016). Homepage. Retrieve November 11, 2016, from myswitzerland.com/de



Figure 2.11. Switzerland tourism (2016). Homepage. Retrieve November 11, 2016, from myswitzerland.com/ar



This last section of the chapter has presented a few cases of localization activities on European NTOs' websites, to provide an overview of what website elements can be adapted and how content editors, designers, and programmers can achieve adaptation. Moreover, it has included examples of cultural attractions. In all instances, localization activities appear to coexist with novelty elements, with the purpose of fueling imagination as well as facilitating information search for users with different cultural backgrounds. Future research will provide other innovative perspectives on the impact that localization activities have on specific publics and the cost advantages that such practices could bring to NTOs that wish to perform cultural translation. This will also include the creation of Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) to assess the effectiveness of such strategies via A/B testing or other experimental procedures.

2.5 Future research directions

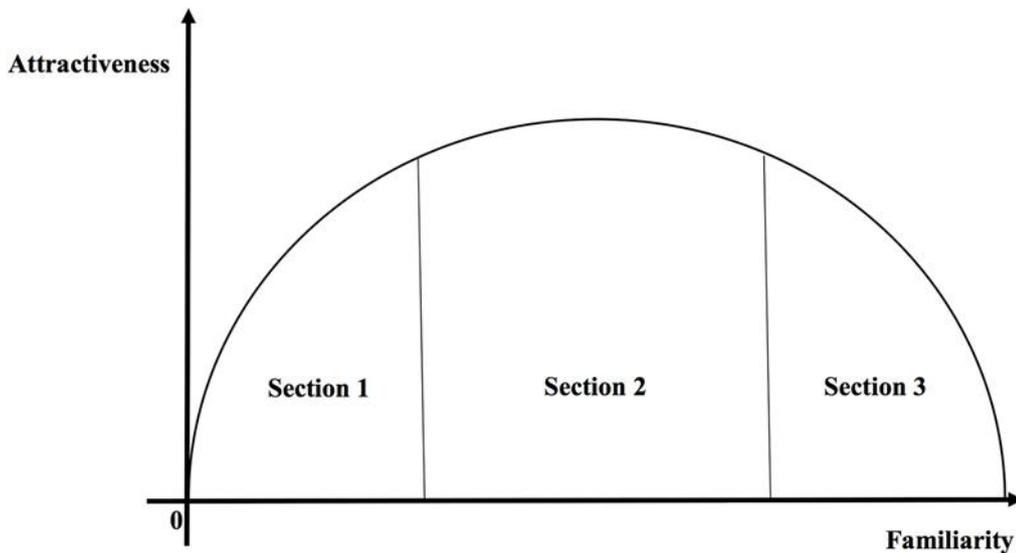
Among future and emerging trends, research indicates the growing importance of one-to-one online marketing and the complete customization of tourism experiences (Neuhofer, Buhalis, & Ladkin, 2015). At this regard, a study developed by Neuhofer et al. (2015) underlines that with the integration of ICT in business strategies, tourism and hospitality industry needs to move toward a more meaningful and personalized service for travelers. The scholars add that innovative DMOs are already moving toward this direction, by providing customization options on their websites to modify trip planning, maps, activities, and price ranges according to the personal needs of a specific online visitor. As conclusion of their results regarding especially the hospitality sector, the researchers state that due to stiff competition, tourism commoditization, and high visitor expectations, ICTs need to support differentiation strategies to make a business competitive (Neuhofer, Buhalis, & Ladkin, 2015). From the computer science perspective, also a research done by O'Neill et al. (2011) in the context of cultural heritage digitized content underlines the necessity of assisting specific users by providing personalized answers to their preferences and needs.

Although these new directions are pushing online communication toward mass-customization of online contents, differences among languages and cultural backgrounds will always be present among prospective tourists. Hence, for multimedia content collection and selection on DMO websites there will still be the need in the future to take into consideration the theory of "common ground", saying that two individuals having a conversation (in this case destinations and

online visitors) need to have shared knowledge to have a meaningful exchange (Clark, 1985). Given the international nature of tourism, this realm is particularly sensitive to such dynamics. Indeed, only taking into consideration aspects related to textual contents, there are several elements (e.g. religion, history, dates, and measures) that require attentive localization according to the culture of the intended audience. Nevertheless, as illustrated in the sections above, the tourism and hospitality industry is a particular case where localization and familiarity need to coexist with novelty. Hence, future research directions will employ experimental settings to understand how to strike the right balance between familiarity and uniqueness. As shown in **Figure 2.12**, we hypothesize that according to the level of familiarity presented online (via localization activities), perceived destination attractiveness in the mind of website visitors varies accordingly.

More specifically, in Section 1 there would be almost no familiarity with online contents (i.e. a highly challenging environment), together with low understanding and consequent low attractiveness. Section 2 represents an area that includes the exact balance between the two variables. Section 3 shows that with high degrees of familiarity and localization, perceived destination attractiveness would decline again (i.e. a negative effect). Finally, future research directions will also include the possibility of going beyond national cultures by addressing more specialized ones, like winter sport practitioners or pilgrims of a given religion.

Figure 2.12. A hypothetical curve showing the relation between perceived destination attractiveness and website familiarity.



2.6 Conclusion

The chapter analyzes (I) the reasons why localization in tourism online communication is needed (with a focus on tourism destinations and cultural tourism); (II) the main needed activities to provide it. It also discusses (III) different practices and strategies (presenting a few cases), as well as (IV) the issue of how much localization is needed, and when it may become counter-productive, making the destination too much similar to one's own experience at home. The collections of present studies, together with our contribution highlight the need of localization and cultural translation to enhance online communication, especially for NTOs' websites. Moreover, the chapter highlights three important aspects in tourism industry. The first one is the possibility to integrate localized contents and communication strategies with standardized elements, to optimize the use of resources and tailor contents only where needed. Second, within the context of marketing destination websites, localization activities should aim at decreasing the uncertainty of travel experiences, without suffocating or diluting the novelty and uniqueness of destinations in the mind of prospects. Third, adaptation processes not only are important for marketing purposes, but also for communication ones. Indeed, they help content editors make information sustainable for online users, promoting responsible behaviors and attitudes at the destination. Finally, the chapter also highlights the relation

between website usability and culture, by showing the role of localization in making information retrieval (IR) more efficient and effective for a specific audience before the travel experience. In other words, adaptation activities ensure the presence of specific cultural markers (e.g. layout and content disposition) that facilitate user navigation on the website, without compromising the novelty of the destination.

Chapter 3. Cross-cultural differences in tourism social media promotion²

Abstract

A lack of cross-cultural research has been identified regarding cultural tourism promotion on social media. Using the dimensions of Collectivism-Individualism, Power Distance, and High-Context vs. Low-Context communication, we content analyze cultural value differences in Instagram posts promoting cultural tourism – published by the national tourism organizations of Chile, Portugal, USA, and Netherlands. In addition, an automated content analysis is conducted using the software LIWC2015 to examine linguistic differences between collectivist and individualist destinations' posts. Findings show that cultural tourism promotion on Instagram differs across cultures, highlighting the importance of adapting online content when addressing culturally distant markets.

Keywords: Cultural Tourism, Cultural Values, Tourism Communication, Instagram, LIWC2015

² This chapter is under review as: Mele, E., Kerkhof, P., & Cantoni, L (Under review). Analyzing cultural tourism promotion on Instagram: a cross-cultural perspective.

3.1 Introduction

Culture and history are among the most important resources for a destination to attract visitors and both fall within the scope of cultural tourism (Timothy, 2011). Researchers as well as practitioners argue that to capture the attention and interest of a broad public, marketers must link cultural attractions to an engaging narrative, while using information and communication technologies – like social media – to deliver their contents and trigger interactions (Egberts & Bosma, 2014).

Popular social networking sites include Twitter, Facebook, and Instagram, where destination marketing organizations, including national tourism organizations, post information on attractions and events, while inviting followers to share their own experience and opinion through images, videos or text (Uşaklı, Koç, & Sönmez, 2017; Roque & Raposo, 2016; Hays, Page, & Buhalis, 2013). Among them, since its launch in 2010, Instagram has grown to become a popular photo-based platform for brand awareness (Ye, Hashim, Baghirov, & Murphy, 2018) and cultural tourism promotion (Lazaridou, Vrana, & Paschaloudis, 2017).

Tourism promotion leads inevitably to challenges related to cultural differences (Egberts & Bosma, 2014), including the preference for certain product themes over others (e.g., focus on price vs. emotions) as well as communication styles (e.g., direct vs. indirect). In this regard, scholars argue that to design an effective international marketing strategy that resonates with the cultural background of a specific geographical market, it is important to investigate how the organizations from that area communicate online (Tsai & Men, 2012). This is relevant because, from a demand perspective, research shows that culture affects customer-brand relationship on social media (Hudson, Huang, Roth, & Madden, 2016), visitor's interests (Hsu, Tien, Lin, & Chang, 2015), and online purchase decisions (Goodrich & de Mooij, 2014) – highlighting the need to account for cultural differences with customized social media strategies (Tsai & Men, 2017). The recognition of the role of culture in online communication has sparked the birth of several studies on the analysis of cultural differences on the web from a supply viewpoint (Tigre Moura, Singh, & Chun, 2016), including destination websites (Tigre Moura, Gnoth, & Deans, 2014). In this regard, calls have been made for further research on visuals (Stepchenkova, Kim, & Kirilenko, 2014) and social media (Amaro & Duarte, 2017) from a cross-cultural perspective, because of the influence that these channels have on tourist's

intentions (Molinillo, Liebana-Cabanillas, Anaya-Sanchez, & Buhalis, 2018). Furthermore, despite the relevance of cultural attractions for tourism destinations (UNWTO, 2018), there is a surprising lack of cross-cultural research addressing their online promotion, not to mention social media marketing.

Addressing this gap in the literature, the present research explores how cultural tourism is promoted on Instagram from a cross-cultural perspective, taking as reference the official accounts of the national tourism organization of four culturally different countries: Chile, United States, Netherlands, and Portugal. To achieve this objective, we first conducted a manual content analysis of cultural values expressed by Instagram posts promoting cultural tourism. More precisely, we analyzed post captions along the dimensions of Collectivism-Individualism, Power Distance (Hofstede, Hofstede, & Minkov, 2010), and High-Context vs. Low-Context communication (Hall, 1976); while post images were examined in terms of Collectivism-Individualism and *mise en scene* dimensions (Pan, Lee, & Tsai, 2014). Finally, using the Linguistic Inquiry and Word Count (LIWC) 2015 software (Pennebaker, Boyd, Jordan, & Blackburn, 2015), we performed an automated content analysis of post captions to examine whether the Instagram posts from more collectivist destinations (Chile and Portugal) differed from those published by more individualist ones (United States and Netherlands) along twelve LIWC2015 linguistic categories.

3.2 Literature review

3.2.1 Culture and cultural tourism

While there are more than one hundred definitions for the concept of culture (Kroeber & Klukhohn, 1952), they all share two common points: culture is a way of living built upon a system of shared meanings and it is conveyed from generation to generation through this very system (Danesi & Perron, 1999). Using a metaphor, Hofstede et al. (2010) describe culture as “the collective programming of the mind that distinguishes the members of one group [...] from others” (p. 6). Cultural values constitute the core of this collective programming and they describe general predispositions to prefer certain ways of living over others. According to those scholars, cultures can be analyzed and compared at the national level along cultural dimensions: constructs that allow researchers to examine the relative position of countries in terms of cultural values.

Although the existence of national cultures has been criticized by scholars, who raise the issues of cultural heterogeneity and national divisions (Shiaq, Khalid, Akram, & Ali, 2011; Jones, 2007), research shows that countries can be reliably distinguished along a series of cultural values (Minkov & Hofstede, 2011). Furthermore, within the spectrum of cross-cultural theories (Minkov, 2011), we argue that the intelligibility and parsimony of Hofstede's model (Kirkman, Lowe, & Gibson, 2006) make it particularly suitable for a quantitative content analysis of online communication. For this study, three cultural dimensions have been used – namely, Collectivism-Individualism (COL-IND), Power Distance (PD), and High-Context vs. Low-Context communication (HC-LC).

The dimension of COL-IND describes the level of interdependency among individuals. More precisely, in individualist societies people are expected to be self-reliant and as they grow up they learn about the importance of independence (as “I”); whereas collectivist societies assign the identity of the individual (as “we”) to strong in-groups, like extended families and friends (Hofstede, Hofstede, & Minkov, 2010). Widely used by researchers to analyze the expression of cultural values in both visual and textual communication (e.g., Pineda, Hernández-Santaolalla, & Rubio-Hernández, 2015; Imada, 2010), COL-IND differentiates messages reporting shared experiences (COL) from those focusing on independence and self-reliance (IND) (Tigre Moura, Gnoth, & Deans, 2014).

The cultural dimension of PD describes the relevance of hierarchy among individuals (Hofstede, Hofstede, & Minkov, 2010), with high PD societies expecting unequal distribution of power (vice versa for low PD). From a communication perspective, research suggests that members of high PD societies assign greater importance to hierarchies and opinions from authorities, including destination managers and celebrities, because of their social status (Winterich, Gangwar, & Grewal, 2018; Tigre Moura, Gnoth, & Deans, 2014). Among the celebrities, social media influencers can act as third-party endorsers who shape audience attitudes towards a brand by publishing contents directly on their own social networks (Freberg, Graham, McGaughey, & Freberg, 2011) and whose advice is considered as valuable (Khamis, Ang, & Welling, 2017). Consequently, we argue that recommendations from influencers, destination marketing organizations and notorious outlets can be classified as signs of high PD, together with status elements such as destination awards and references to luxury.

The cultural dimension of HC vs. LC communication, proposed by Hall (1976), differentiates communication styles depending on their reliance on the context – the unspoken part of a conversation – and how much information the interlocutors are expected to share (Hall, 1976). Social media marketing research suggests that HC communication is generally indirect, focusing on elements such as emotions and entertainment. On the other hand, LC communication is more direct and explicit, with social media contents emphasizing concrete, product-related characteristics (Choi, Seo, Wagner, & Yoon, 2018; Men & Tsai, 2012).

All these cultural dimensions appear to be connected. More precisely, scholars indicate that IND is negatively correlated with PD, whereas COL is positively correlated (Hofstede, Hofstede, & Minkov, 2010). In addition, HC and LC communication styles are reported as being more predominant among collectivist and individualist societies respectively (Kim, Sohn, & Choi, 2011; Würtz, 2005). Within the context of the present research, following Hofstede’s et al. (2010) and Hall’s theories and scores (van Everdingen & Waarts, 2003; Hall, 1976) (**Table 3.1**), Chile and Portugal are described as relatively collectivist, high PD national cultures, with a preference for HC communication; whereas USA and the Netherlands are reported as relatively individualist, low PD cultures, with a preference for LC communication.

Table 3.1. Hofstede’s and Hall’s cultural dimension scores.

Culture	Collectivism/Individualism	Power Distance	High-Context/Low-Context Communication ¹
Chile	20	63	81
Portugal	27	61	87
USA	91	40	19
Netherlands	80	38	37

¹Scores adapted from van Everdingen and Waarts (2003) to the same scale (0-100) of Hofstede’s scores.

Qualitative research suggests that the expression of cultural values in tourism visuals is related to mise en scene dimensions, such as shot composition (number of people in a picture), angle and scale (Mele & Lobinger, 2018). For instance, Mele and Lobinger (2018) argue that the prototypical example of individualism consists of a picture showing a single subject, far from the viewer (long shot), who is looking at the scene from an eye-level angle – thus, reinforcing the idea of the independent traveler experiencing the destination, while maintaining a “neutral”, eye-level perspective. Yet, no further (quantitative) research has been conducted to explore such relationships.

Cultural values as well as the other layers of culture – that is, rituals, heroes, and symbols (Hofstede, Hofstede, & Minkov, 2010) – are influenced by as well as constitute the cultural resources of a destination, meaning its intangible, tangible and natural heritage (Bonn, Joseph-Mathews, Dai, Hayes, & Cave, 2007), in addition to local lifestyle and contemporary art expressions; offering visitors a wide range of experiences, whether aesthetic, emotional, intellectual or psychological (Stebbins, 1996). In this regard, cultural tourism can be defined as a “special interest travel where the culture of a host country is an important factor in attracting tourists” (Reisinger, 1994, p. 24). Consequently, from a supply perspective, cultural and heritage tourism can be considered as interchangeable terms. In fact, Timothy (2011) argues that even contemporary art and living cultures are an important component of heritage, as they are built upon (recent or remote) past social values and they become somehow “historical” from the moment of their creation. Lastly, despite the global relevance of this phenomenon, there is a lack of cross-cultural research addressing its online promotion.

3.2.2 Cultural differences in online tourism promotion

From a supply perspective, the influence of culture in website design and content has been highlighted by several studies (Tigre Moura, Singh, & Chun, 2016), which have also addressed corporate communication on social media (e.g., Chatzithomas, et al. 2014; Men & Tsai, 2012). For example, research by Riskos et al. (2017) investigates cultural differences in Facebook posts published by British and Greek companies for their respective domestic audience. Results suggest that messages are country specific: corporate posts from Greece are more emotional and contain fewer informational cues than British posts. In addition, findings indicate that informational posts (vs. non-informational) in UK receive more “likes” from the domestic audience, whereas the opposite is observed for Greek Facebook posts – suggesting that cultural differences are a relevant object of research for their role in communication dynamics.

Research suggests that online tourism promotion is not culturally neutral either (Mele & Cantoni, 2017) and it should account for cultural nuances (Jiang, Tan, Liu, Wan, & Gursoy, 2020). For instance, a study by Tigre Moura et al. (2014) content analyzed the depiction of local cultural values on 46 Chinese, 36 Indian and 48 New Zealand destination websites, showing how these differ in terms of COL (e.g., contents emphasizing community relations) and LC communication (e.g.,

hard-sell approach). Other studies report cultural differences in terms of IND-COL and HC-LC communication between Eastern and Western websites of medical tourism companies (Frederick & Gan, 2015); similarly, travel blogs from the same regions are also found to differ in terms of social identity, from the focus on others (collectivist cue) to the blogger's experience (individualist cue) at the destination (Lee & Gretzel, 2014).

For what concerns cultural tourism, a phenomenon that is perceived as individual enough to deserve its own marketing scheme (Timothy & Boyd, 2006), there is surprisingly little research adopting a cross-cultural perspective. Cross-cultural differences have been either addressed from a demand viewpoint, to investigate behavioral intentions to adopt augmented reality at heritage sites (Jung, Lee, Chung, & tom Dieck, 2018), or in terms of website promotion from a qualitative standpoint (Mele & Cantoni, 2018; Mele & Cantoni, 2017). Yet, so far there has not been an empirical investigation of cultural differences in (heritage) tourism promotion on social media.

While culture and cultural values seem to pervade online communication, it may not be the case for tourism marketing on social media. Among them, Instagram is arguably the most successful platform in terms of user engagement (Uşaklı, Koç, & Sönmez, 2017), functioning as a platform for multimodal travel writing with images, videos, and text (Smith, 2018). On the one side, destination marketing organizations can convey (consciously or unconsciously) the cultural values of the host country when selecting and publishing multimedia contents to promote cultural experiences on their Instagram accounts. On the other side, research shows that Instagram is populated by self-oriented posts, following motives such as self-expression and escapism (Lee, Lee, Moon, & Sung, 2015) within an overall individualist orientation (Ekman & Widholm, 2017). Given the relation among the cultural dimensions explained above and the presence of these contrasting influences that could affect the promotion of cultural tourism, we propose the following research question:

RQ1: Within the cultural tourism promotion by the national tourism organizations of Chile, Portugal, USA, and the Netherlands, do Instagram images and captions reflect the cultural values of the host country?

Lastly, since the expression of cultural values may be connected to certain *mise en scene* attributes in tourism pictures (see section 3.2.1), we propose an additional research question:

RQ2: Is there a relationship between the occurrence of COL-IND cultural values and specific *mise en scene* attributes? Can these differences be explained from a cultural viewpoint?

To answer these research questions, the present study builds upon the research by Tigre Moura et al. (2014), for the operationalization of the cultural dimensions, in combination with previous studies on visual content analysis in the tourism domain (Mele & Lobinger, 2018; Pan, Lee, & Tsai, 2014).

3.3 Methodology

The present research investigated whether official heritage tourism promotion on Instagram varied along cultural dimensions, by taking the case of the national tourism organizations of Chile, Portugal, USA, and the Netherlands. To achieve this objective, first, a manual content analysis allowed the examination of cultural values conveyed by post image (in terms of COL-IND) and post caption (in terms of COL-IND, PD, and HC-LC). Second, an automated analysis of post captions was performed to observe whether cultural differences existed between posts published by COL destinations (Chile and Portugal) and IND destinations (USA and Netherlands) along a series of linguistic categories provided by the software LIWC2015. The two analyses are detailed below.

The research question, design, sample size and analysis plan were pre-registered before data collection on November 14, 2019 (<https://aspredicted.org/blind.php?x=f93mm7>).

3.3.1 Manual content analysis

A manual content analysis was employed to examine cultural value differences in official heritage tourism promotion on Instagram along the dimensions of COL-IND, PD, and HC-LC. A manual quantitative content analysis was considered the most appropriate technique, because it allowed to code both textual (caption) and visual content (images) into categories, and to analyze their frequency of occurrence across samples. In addition, human coding was chosen for this part of the research because of its ability to capture content nuances and because of its use in previous tourism studies investigating cultural differences on the web (Lee & Gretzel, 2014; Tigre Moura, Gnoth, & Deans, 2014).

The definition of the sample started from the preliminary identification of national tourism organizations (NTO) as official communication sources. These are destination marketing organizations that oversee tourism development and promotion at the national level (Pike, 2011). Among their functions, NTO marketing teams are supposed to collaborate with regional and local stakeholders to select products and services to be promoted on their channels (Blumberg, 2005),

which include websites and social networks. In other words, their objective is to match internal resources with marketing opportunities (Pike & Page, 2014), communicate a unique national identity (Hallett & Kaplan-Weinger, 2010), while representing the “face” of the country as a tourism destination for both domestic and international visitors (Mele & Cantoni, 2017). For the scope of this research, given their authority and function, NTOs were considered appropriate communication sources to investigate the culture of a national destination – that is, its cultural attractions as well as its cultural orientation.

Instagram posts were considered as the unit of analysis. The sample was retrieved from the official international accounts of NTOs of four countries: Chile (@chiletravel), Portugal (@visitportugal), USA (@visittheusa), and the Netherlands (@visit_holland). These destinations were selected because of their strong cultural difference along Hofstede’s et al. (2010) and Hall’s (1976) cultural dimensions (**Table 3.1**), their active Instagram accounts (> 2000 posts) and the presence of photographs showing people – as several NTO accounts did not portray any and having people in the frame was an important precondition to identify COL-IND cues. A preliminary analysis of the destinations’ websites revealed that the chosen NTOs had only one official Instagram account, the international one in English – except for Chile, which had also a domestic account (@chile_estuyo) with less followers and less published posts. In fact, the international account of the Chilean NTO had most of the post captions translated also in Spanish, showing the willingness of the NTO to reach a broad audience. Within the total sample, the few captions that were only available in Spanish and Portuguese – published by the Chilean and Portuguese NTO respectively – were translated by the main coder, who had knowledge of both languages. Finally, as previous tourism research had already shown that local cultural values could be reflected by web content meant for an English-speaking audience (Tigre Moura, Gnoth, & Deans, 2014), the selection of these (international) Instagram accounts was deemed acceptable to compare the NTOs in terms of cultural orientation.

An a priori power analysis was conducted using the software G*Power (Faul, Erdfelder, Lang, & Buchner, 2007), which indicated a grand total sample size of 1742 units to reach 90% power with a small effect size ($w = 0.1$) for chi-square tests. The final posts (436 for each account) were selected in chronological order starting from November 2019 backwards and covered a time range of two years (2019-18), except for USA (2019-16). Those posts without cultural attractions or

containing videos were excluded (805 in total), as their analysis was beyond the research scope.

Table 3.2 provides a detailed description of what was considered as cultural attraction.

In the manual content analysis, we used the Instagram post image and caption as separate units of data collection. Given the focus on cultural tourism and the fact that Instagram is a photo-based social network, only posts with photographs promoting cultural attractions were considered for the analysis. In addition, if a post had a slideshow, only the first image promoting a cultural attraction was selected. Finally, official reposts were included in the sample, as they must have been considered as appropriate by the NTO marketing team and excluding them would have generated an incomplete view of the cultural experiences offered by the destination.

Apart from the cultural dimensions, also the image *mise en scene* was considered – that is, the distribution of all elements within the frame of a picture (**Table 3.3**). Indeed, photographs are composed of content as well as framing (*mise en scene*) and both contribute to the creation of meaning (Mele & Lobinger, 2018). Addressing this topic, Neuendorf (2017) identifies two types of content with respect to its appearance: manifest and latent content – also referred to as the denotative and connotative parts of a message. Within the context of this research, the first describes all the elements that are physically observable (*mise en scene*), whereas the second is composed by the subtler ones (cultural values).

Table 3.2. Description of cultural attraction

Cultural attraction ¹	Description	Source
Intangible heritage	Handicrafts, gastronomy, traditional festivals and music, oral traditions, religions.	(UNWTO, 2018)
Tangible heritage	Movable heritage, national and world heritage sites, historic places and buildings.	
Natural heritage	Protected fauna, flora and rural environment. National, regional and local parks of unique value.	(Timothy & Boyd, 2003)
Contemporary art and architecture	Temporary and permanent art installations. Contemporary music, design and art festivals. Infrastructure with unique architectural value.	(Timothy, 2011)
Local lifestyle	Local people's customs and living culture.	

¹Division among cultural attractions only for explanatory purpose.

Table 3.3. Description of image and text dimensions.

Unit	Dimension	Description ¹	Coding Value
Image	COLIND	<p><i>Collectivism:</i> A group of people, family, children or couple. A compact crowd. If these subjects are in the foreground and single individuals are in the background, then the foreground has priority. If priority cannot be established, then None = 0.</p> <p><i>Individualism:</i> Single person or (unrelated) sparse subjects. If these subjects are in the foreground and groups are in the background, then the foreground has priority. If priority cannot be established, then None = 0.</p>	COL = 1, IND = 2, None = 0
	Composition	Number of people in the picture.	One = 1, Two = 2, Three = 3, Four or more = 4, None = 0
	Angle	<p><i>Low Angle:</i> The frame is below the subject (looking up).</p> <p><i>Eye Angle:</i> The frame is at the same level of the subject.</p> <p><i>High Angle:</i> The frame is above the subject (looking down).</p> <p><i>Bird's Eye Angle:</i> 40- to 90-degree elevated shot above the subject (looking down).</p>	Low = 0, Eye = 1, High = 2, Bird's Eye = 3
	Scale	<p><i>Extremely Long Scale:</i> The human figure is lost or tiny. This is the framing for landscapes and city vistas.</p> <p><i>Long Scale:</i> Subjects are more prominent, but the background still dominates.</p> <p><i>Medium Long Scale:</i> Subjects in full or from knees up. A balance between human figures and surroundings.</p> <p><i>Medium Scale:</i> Subjects from waist up. Gesture and expression are more visible. The surrounding is less important.</p> <p><i>Medium Close-Up Scale:</i> Body from chest up, almost occupying the height of the frame. Scarcely visible background.</p> <p><i>Close-Up Scale:</i> Body part.</p>	Extremely Long = 0, Long = 1, Medium Long = 2, Medium = 3, Medium Close-Up = 4, Close-Up = 5
Caption	COLIND	<p><i>Collectivism:</i> Overall emphasis on shared experiences. Family metaphors. Collective actions and events. Community feelings.</p> <p><i>Individualism:</i> Overall emphasis on independence, freedom and escape. Individual experiences.</p>	COL = 1, IND = 2, None = 0
	PD	<p><i>Power Distance:</i> Recommendation from the NTO formulated as an order or with top priority. Recommendation from influencers ($\geq 10k$ followers) and notorious travel guides. Emphasis on awards, power and social status, including metaphorical expressions.</p>	High PD = 1, Low PD = 0
	HCLC	<p><i>High Context:</i> Overall emphasis on feelings, entertainment, and games.</p> <p><i>Low Context:</i> Overall emphasis on facts, figures, lists. Focus on quantity.</p>	HC = 1, LC = 2

¹Edited to save space

The operationalization of the (cultural and mise en scene) dimensions was first developed from existing research and then refined with a preliminary analysis on tourism Instagram posts. The most important decision that followed this step was to analyze PD and HC-LC values only for post captions. This was decided because in most cases it was not possible to understand whether a picture was showing a celebrity or a common visitor. Similarly, HC-LC communication appeared to be more appropriate for text rather than images.

In terms of coding, both pictures and captions could convey simultaneously multiple cultural values. Yet, these could not be mutually exclusive – that is, a piece of content could not be coded both as collectivist and individualist (same for HC-LC). The expression of cultural values was measured with a binary categorical variable as done in prior research (Hamid, 2017; Riskos, Hatzithomas, Boutsouki, & Zotos, 2017). Categorical variables were also used to report mise en scene attributes. After a preliminary training and discussion on the coding book, the first author of this study coded the full sample (n = 1744), while a second coder analyzed approximately 13% of all the posts (n = 229) to assess reliability. Cohen kappa was chosen as a conservative reliability coefficient, as it yields agreement beyond chance only and it is appropriate when using two coders for the analysis of categorical data (Neuendorf, 2017). The resulting Cohen kappa statistics for the cultural and mise en scene dimensions were the following: COL-IND for post image (0.92), COL-IND for post caption (0.62), PD (0.61), HC-LC (0.47), Composition (0.96), Angle (0.81), and Scale (0.75). Consequently, the strength of the agreement ranged from substantial (0.61-0.80) to almost perfect (0.81-1.00), except for the moderate agreement (0.41-0.60) for HC-LC (Landis & Koch, 1977).

3.3.2 Automated content analysis

Automated content analysis describes a group of algorithms that employ probabilistic models to reveal the underlying themes within a corpus (Nunez-Mir, Iannone, Pijanowski, Kong, & Fei, 2016). This method is particularly useful when examining large amounts of social media data to identify linguistic features (van Atteveldt & Peng, 2018).

The purpose of this automated content analysis was to investigate whether COL destinations (Chile and Portugal) differed from IND ones (USA and Netherlands) in terms of linguistic categories, which were extrapolated from post captions using the software LIWC2015 – containing a dictionary

with almost 6,400 words and approximately 90 output variables to capture cognitive, emotional and structural components of written text (Pennebaker, Boyd, Jordan, & Blackburn, 2015). The main investigation focused those 12 variables (**Table 3.4**) that had a theoretical relationship with COL-IND (treated as a grouping variable) and its related dimensions PD and HC-LC.

The sample for the automated content analysis of Instagram post captions was the same one we used in the previous analysis (n = 1744). Before uploading the corpus for the automated analysis, frequent internet annotations (e.g., hashtags) were removed to improve the accuracy of the results. In addition, the first author translated the few post captions that were not originally written in English. The output of the automated content analysis (dimension scores) was then used as dependent variable in multiple ANOVAs to examine whether the continuous outcome (incl. means) could be explained by COL-IND differences between destination groups.

Table 3.4. Description of selected LIWC2015 linguistic categories.

Linguistic Categories	Description
1 st person singular	“I”, “she” and “he” relate to individual experiences (IND). “We” and “they” relate to collective experiences (COL).
1 st person plural	
3 rd person singular	Keywords referring to the social sphere relate to collective experiences (COL).
3 rd person plural	
Social Words	Keywords referring to “power” and “reward focus” relate to social status, recognition and power relationships (PD).
Power	
Reward Focus	
Word Count	Direct communication: little information left to context and interpretation lead to a higher word count (LC). Indirect communication: most of the information left to context and interpretation lead to a lower word count (HC).
Question Marks	Frequent use of question marks can be associated with indirect speech (HC).
Analytical Thinking	Higher numbers reflect a more formal, logical text (LC); lower numbers reflect narrative, informal text (HC).
Authentic	Higher numbers are associated with a more honest, direct text (LC); lower numbers suggest a more guarded discourse (HC).
Money	Frequent use of money-related words can be associated with direct, fact-based communication (LC).

3.4 Results

3.4.1 Cultural dimensions and mise en scene: chi-square analysis

As preregistered, chi-square tests were performed to analyze differences among the samples in terms of cultural values conveyed by Instagram posts (image and caption) promoting heritage tourism (Table 3.5). The adjusted residuals of a chi-square analysis were used to compute the p-value of each comparison within a contingency table (MacDonald & Gardner, 2000). First, we obtained the chi-square value for each comparison by squaring the adjusted residual. Second, we calculated the p-value of each single relationship using the formula provided by SPSS (IBM, 2019), containing the chi-square value and one degree of freedom: $p\text{-value} = \text{SIG.CHISQ}(\text{chi-square}, 1)$. This process was particularly useful because our analysis contained more than four comparisons and it was not clear whether all relationships were significant. Bonferroni post-hoc test (Bland & Altman, 1995) was then performed to control the overall Type 1 error rate.

Table 3.5. Cross-tabulation of cultural dimensions and destinations: chi-square analysis.

Dimensions ^a	Chile			USA			Netherlands			Portugal			χ^2 Test
	N	%	A.R.	N	%	A.R.	N	%	A.R.	N	%	A.R.	χ^2 ^c (df)
<i>Images</i>													
COL	73	16.7	-.6	75	17.2	-.3	81	18.6	.5	80	18.3	.4	126.376 (6)
IND	102	23.4	-5.3^b	226	51.8	9.2	164	37.6	1.9	98	22.5	-5.8	
<i>Captions</i>													
COL	132	30.3	-.7	125	28.7	-1.5	150	34.4	1.5	144	33.0	.7	128.366 (6)
IND	160	36.7	-5.3	265	60.8	6.4	238	54.6	3.4	167	38.3	-4.5	
LPD	271	62.2	-3.7	316	72.5	1.7	314	72.0	1.5	306	70.2	.5	14.172 (3)
HPD	165	37.8	3.7	120	27.5	-1.7	122	28.0	-1.5	130	29.8	-.5	
HC	299	68.6	4.4	223	51.1	-4.2	179	41.1	-9.2	340	78.0	9.0	151.095 (3)
LC	137	31.4	-4.4	213	48.9	4.2	257	58.9	9.2	96	22.0	-9.0	

^a Value “None” for COL-IND (image and text) not reported.

^b Adjusted residuals in bold = significant association ($p < 0.001$).

^c $p < 0.005$.

The adjusted residuals also provided information on the direction of the relationship between the actual and expected count of cultural values within each destination. An adjusted residual value smaller than -1.96 indicated a negative relationship between two categorical values – namely, the

actual count was significantly smaller than the expected count. A reversed conclusion applied to values greater than 1.96 (Stepchenkova & Zhan, 2013). As expected, Chilean and Portuguese post images had a negative association with individualist cues. Yet, only USA posts showed higher scores for individualism, while the difference between expected and actual count for Dutch post images was not significant ($p = 0.54$). For what concerns COL, the sample did not show differences in terms of collectivist values for both Instagram images and captions. Concerning textual differences, the findings confirmed our expectations in terms of IND and HC-LC communication. Lastly, Chilean post captions scored lower on low-PD values and higher on high-PD values. Yet, the post captions from the other destinations did not differ on this dimension.

Additional chi-square tests were run to explore the relationship between COL-IND and image mise en scene (**Table 9.2**, Appendices). Bonferroni post-hoc tests (Bland & Altman, 1995) were conducted to control the overall Type 1 error rate. The most relevant results for each mise en scene dimension are outlined here; followed by the respective co-occurrence value and the adjusted residual. Most images that conveyed collectivist cues had a shot composition with four or more people ($N = 150$, adj. res. = 17.5). In terms of shot angle, collectivist ($N = 12$, adj. res. = -3.2) and individualist ($N = 22$, adj. res. = -5.1) cues had a negative relationship with bird's eye angle. Collectivist cues conveyed by Instagram images were associated positively with medium-long shot scale ($N = 67$, adj. res. = 3.4). Finally, individualist cues were found to have a negative relationship with medium shot scale ($N = 5$, adj. res. = -6.3).

3.4.2 Linguistic analysis of captions

The objective of this part of the research was to investigate whether the destination's cultural background could predict variations in language use, which were known to be related to Hofstede's et al. (2010) and Hall's (1976) cultural dimensions. The captions were analyzed using LIWC2015 software (Pennebaker, Boyd, Jordan, & Blackburn, 2015). Multiple ANOVAs were conducted to compare the destination means for the 12 linguistic categories illustrated in **Table 3.4**. More precisely, for this analysis, Instagram post captions ($n = 1744$) were re-grouped with two dummy variables (with two levels each). Following Hofstede's et al. (2010) and Hall's (1976), the first variable was COL-IND: post captions from Chile and Portugal were categorized as collectivist (high PD and HC), whereas those from USA and the Netherlands were categorized as individualist (low

PD and LC). In order to establish whether the linguistic differences could be attributed specifically to those cultural dimensions – represented by the dummy variable COL-IND – the four destinations were also grouped in terms of geographical location: Americas and Europe. The two dummy variables (COL-IND and Geography) were then employed in multiple univariate models to analyze their main and interaction effects.

Multiple ANOVAs indicated significant relationships (**Table 3.6**) between COL-IND and four out of six linguistic variables. Unexpectedly, in two out of three cases, Geography had a higher F-value than COL-IND. In addition, Geography was the only variable associated with the two PD-related categories, Power and Reward. Lastly, no significant relationship was found on the linguistic category “3rd Person Singular.”

As expected, the descriptive statistics showed that the category (personal pronoun) “I” had a higher mean in individualist posts (vs. collectivist posts) promoting cultural heritage (**Table 3.7**). Similarly, the category “They” and “Social” had lower means in the same posts (vs. collectivist posts). Contrary to our expectations, the category “We” had a higher mean in individualist posts – which was also confirmed by the interaction effect. In addition, the PD-related categories had higher means for the posts published by US-America and Chile (vs. Netherlands and Portugal).

Table 3.6. ANOVAs for COL-IND and PD linguistic categories.

	I		We		They		Social		Power		Reward	
	F	η_p^2	F	η_p^2	F	η_p^2	F	η_p^2	F	η_p^2	F	η_p^2
COLIND	4.818*	.003	66.995**	.037	12.892**	.007	5.358*	.003	2.860	.002	2.663	.002
Geo	10.703*	.006	51.888**	.029	.591	.000	89.018**	.049	7.351*	.004	6.048*	.003
COLIND × Geo	3.535	.002	16.207**	.009	1.677	.001	1.959	.001	1.876	.001	.006	.000

Notes: non-significant values for “3rd Person Singular” not reported; df= 1; error df= 1740; * p < 0.05, ** p < 0.001.

Table 3.7. Descriptive statistics for COL-IND And PD linguistic categories – main effects.

	I		We		They		Social		Power		Reward	
	Mean	SE	Mean	SE	Mean	SE	Mean	SE	Mean	SE	Mean	SE
COL	.05	.02	.70	.08	.30	.03	7.30	.19	1.41	.08	1.97	.10
IND	.12	.02	1.60	.08	.13	.03	6.67	.19	1.61	.08	1.74	.10
Americas	.13	.02	.75	.08	.23	.03	5.69	.19	1.67	.08	2.03	.10
Europe	.03	.02	1.53	.08	.20	.03	8.27	.19	1.35	.08	1.68	.10

Six additional ANOVAs revealed a significant relationship between COL-IND and the designated dependent variables related to the cultural dimension HC-LC (**Table 3.8**). As expected, COL-IND had a higher F-value than the other independent variables – except for the linguistic category “Analytical Thinking”, with whom Geography had a higher score than COL-IND.

As expected, descriptive statistics showed that Instagram post captions classified as IND – hence, LC communication – had a higher mean for the linguistic categories Word Count, Authentic, and Money, and a lower one for the category Question Marks (**Table 3.9**).

Table 3.8. ANOVAs for HC-LC linguistic categories.

	Word Count		Question Marks		Analytical Thinking		Authentic		Money	
	F	η_p^2	F	η_p^2	F	η_p^2	F	η_p^2	F	η_p^2
COLIND	315.372**	.153	61.231**	.034	27.717**	.016	68.631**	.038	13.535**	.008
Geo	56.676**	.032	47.256**	.026	201.628**	.104	2.113	.001	1.811	.001
COLIND × Geo	295.431**	.145	29.626**	.017	9.203*	.005	6.417*	.004	.103	.000

Notes: df = 1; error df = 1740; * p < 0.05, ** p < 0.001.

Consequently, LC captions (vs. HC) were more explicit in providing information about cultural products and services, including information about price. Differently, HC captions were more indirect and used more question marks to communicate with the audience. Lastly, LC captions (vs. HC) had a higher mean for Analytical Thinking, suggesting a more logical, hierarchical textual structure. Yet, unexpectedly, the orientation of the means was inverted when the geographical location (Americas vs. Europe) of the destinations was considered.

Table 3.9. Descriptive statistics for HC-LC linguistic categories – main effects.

	Word Count		Question Marks		Analytical Thinking		Authentic		Money	
	Mean	SE	Mean	SE	Mean	SE	Mean	SE	Mean	SE
COL	28.20	.68	1.59	.07	82.49	.68	35.46	1.10	.27	.04
IND	45.33	.68	.78	.07	87.57	.68	48.34	1.10	.48	.04
Americas	33.13	.68	.83	.07	91.87	.68	43.03	1.10	.33	.04
Europe	40.40	.68	1.54	.07	78.19	.68	40.77	1.10	.41	.04

3.5 Conclusions

Overall, the findings of this exploratory research indicate that heritage tourism promotion on Instagram differs across culturally distant destinations. Data from the manual content analysis of posts (**Table 3.5**) published by four national tourism organizations revealed that images and captions differed in terms of emphasis on individualist values – namely, US-American and Dutch post captions (vs. Chilean and Portuguese) had a positive relationship and a higher frequency score on this dimension. A similar outcome was found for Instagram images – except for those from the Netherlands, which had a non-significant association with IND. Expectations were met also in terms of HC-LC communication: Chilean and Portuguese post captions privileged high-context cues, whereas US-American and Dutch posts presented a low-context communication style. Lastly, post captions from Chile had a positive association with PD, whereas, unexpectedly, the other destinations did not show any significant relationship with that dimension. In addition, the sampled posts did not differ in terms of emphasis on collectivist values. Presumably, this last outcome is due to the overall self-centered orientation of Instagram (see section 3.2.2), where destinations can have opposite associations with individualist cues, but still show a relatively individualist orientation.

Data from the automated content analysis of post captions provided an additional perspective to the object of research by grouping the four countries according to their theorized cultural orientation (COL vs. IND) and geographical location (Americas vs. Europe). The mean scores of most linguistic categories confirmed our expectations in terms of COL-IND and HC-LC communication preferences – except for the category “we”, which was frequently used in Dutch posts, and the “3rd person singular” (which did not show any significant association). In line with the manual analysis, cultural orientation did not predict a change in terms of PD-related variables, which appeared to be associated with the geographical location of the destinations.

This exploratory research analyzed not only which cultural cues were conveyed by Instagram pictures, but also *how* these were communicated. Mise en scene analysis revealed that those images categorized as collectivist were composed mostly by four or more people and had a positive association with medium-long shot scale; whereas images with individualist values had one person in the frame and a positive relationship with long shot scale, increasing the distance between the viewer and the subject. Following the literature on semiotic analysis and tourism visuals (Mele &

Lobinger, 2018), this finding suggests that collectivist cues (vs. individualist cues) find their prototypical expression in pictures with a higher degree of perceived observer-subject proximity and interactivity. In the opposite direction, individualist cues like self-reliance and independence are conveyed by images that arguably isolate the subject from the observer.

The present study has multiple theoretical implications. First, it indicates that cultural values permeate heritage promotion on Instagram both at the visual (image) and textual (caption) level, extending previous literature on the topic of cross-cultural differences (and adaptation) in online communication (Tigre Moura, Singh, & Chun, 2016), social media (Goodrich & de Mooij, 2014), and travel photography (Pan, Lee, & Tsai, 2014). More importantly, the influence of cultural orientations on a popular social network like Instagram also suggests that – while removing physical distance – tourism promotion is not characterized by a homogeneous culture. On the one side, this contributes to the cultural richness of a destination and its heritage. On the other side, the identification of cultural orientations in our sample arguably signals the persistence of cultural (value) preferences in tourism promotion on social media and, consequently, the importance of accounting for them in marketing strategies (Goodrich & de Mooij, 2014). Indeed, also experimental research indicates that culturally adapted social media content is more persuasive than culturally incongruent (standardized) messages (Sung, Kim, Choi, & Lee, 2020). Finally, as the main and interaction effects of geographical location suggest, certain content preferences can be also predicted by a combination of factors rather than cultural orientations alone, like the co-existence of a Pan-European culture (Homikx & de Groot, 2017) or the use of benchmarking to elaborate online messages that are similar to those published by cutting-edge competitors within the same region (e.g., Americas) (Hays, Page, & Buhalis, 2013).

From a managerial perspective, we suggest destination marketers to consider audience' cultural preferences when addressing geographically (and culturally) distant markets with heritage tourism promotion on social media – for instance, by conducting paid campaigns with A/B tests that include culture-based contrasts or by creating different Instagram accounts for distinct key markets – given the importance of these platforms in inspiring tourists via *meaningful* cultural experiences. Therefore, following our findings and the literature on the topic, we argue that marketing the destination on Instagram with one international account – without adapting posts – could be detrimental or (at least) less persuasive than culturally sensitive messages. In addition, the selection

of travel pictures for the promotion of the destination should also account for image *mise en scene* – apart from *what* is being portrayed – to project specific experiences to live while visiting cultural attractions (e.g., self-reliance and escape for more individualist cultures). The implications of our findings can be extended to other social networks that share a similar structure with Instagram, such as Facebook and Weibo, where the effect of cultural adaptation or standardization can be tested also with audiences with different demo- and psycho-graphic characteristics. Nevertheless, the reflection of national cultural values in international tourism promotion should not always be considered a barrier. In fact, experimental data suggest that (cultural) tourism promotion within the same region of the destination (e.g., Europe) minimizes the role of culture-bound preferences and, consequently, lowers the importance of cultural (value) adaptation activities (Mele, Kerkhof, & Cantoni, 2020) – which should not be undertaken in such context.

In conclusion, limitations of this exploratory study include the moderate agreement among coders for HC-LC communication – even though it is still an acceptable value (e.g., Döring et al., 2016), it should be regarded as tentative. Second, the main coder was not blind to the conditions of the research and analyzed both cultural values and *mise en scene* dimensions. Third, the choice of international Instagram accounts may also represent a limitation – although results suggest that it does not affect the relative cultural difference in heritage tourism promotion. Apart from addressing these elements, future experimental research should test the effects of culturally adapted Instagram messages (following our framework) on variables such as ad liking and persuasiveness. Furthermore, future studies should consider additional cultural constructs, also in the light of the criticism addressing Hofstede’s theory of national cultures (Jones, 2007). Lastly, it would be interesting to include social media contents from popular Eastern destinations, like China, allowing a broader generalization of the findings.

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Chapter 4. Localization activities from the perspective of DMOs³

Abstract

The number of international tourist arrivals is increasing substantially both globally and in Europe. Given the role played by information and communication technologies (ICTs) to inform visitors from international markets, the process of translating destination websites is acquiring a central position. The stiff online competition not only requires national tourism organizations (NTOs) to tailor tourism services, but also to shape their communication strategies according to the cultural background and habits of their different audiences. Such adaptation is defined as “localization”, a well-recognized practice in the ecommerce and marketing sectors as well as in the tourism sphere. The goal of the present study is to examine the actual use and integration of website localization practices at NTOs. To accomplish this, IT and marketing specialists are interviewed, providing an overview of adaptation activities at eleven NTOs which are members of the European Travel Commission (ETC). Results show that localization processes are recognized as important for marketing and communication purposes on destination websites.

Keywords: eTourism, Localization, NTO

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4.1 Introduction

According to recent statistics issued by UNWTO (2016), in 2015 the number of international tourist arrivals in the world reached 1.184 billion and 608.6 million in Europe. The figures show a growth of 4.4 and 4.9% respectively. Given the role played by ICTs to inform visitors from international markets, the process of translating destination websites is acquiring a central position. As an effort to overcome online competition, NTOs are promoting tailor-made products and services. Nonetheless, these choices need to be supported by a localized online communication (Mele, De Ascaniis, & Cantoni, 2015). The process of localization describes all those activities that aim at “modifying products and services to account for differences in distinct markets” (LISA, 2007, p. 11). According to the American Translators Association (ATA) (2002), localization is defined as “the process of customizing a product for consumers in a target market so that when they use it, they form the impression that it was designed by a native of their own country” (p. 4). Within the area of online communication, this set of adaptation practices describes the customization of multimedia contents (including their translation) and layout to account for the cultural background of a specific audience (Tigre Moura, Gnoth, & Deans, 2014). Cantoni and Tardini (2006) specify that localization needs to consider all those elements that vary across cultures. For example, this is the case for units of measure, calendars, and currencies, together with historical and folkloric notions. Research by Achkasov (2015) adds that the use of effective keywords for search engine optimization (SEO) is instrumental for localization practices. Indeed, a customized website version has to satisfy the queries of the local audience to compete online. Despite the recognized importance of localization within the marketing and ecommerce sectors (Wang, Peng, Sia, Tong, & Ku, 2016), more research needs to be done in the tourism area (Tigre Moura, Gnoth, & Deans, 2014). More specifically, none of the so-far available studies provides an overview on the actual state of website localization practices at destination management organizations (Mele, De Ascaniis, & Cantoni, 2016). To accomplish this goal, the present study entails interviews with IT and marketing specialists from NTOs which are members of ETC.

4.2 Literature review

The growing number of tourists employing ICT during the travel-planning phase is pushing destination marketing organizations (DMOs) to enhance their Internet presence (Gibbs, Gretzel, & Noorani, 2016) continuously. Websites are inserted into a specific external environment, which is composed by information competitors, substitutes, and users. Thanks to the Web 2.0, online visitors are able to share suggestions (i.e. user generated content) about destinations (Inversini & Cantoni, 2014). Given the abundance and availability of travel information on the Web, the expectations of Internet users are rising (Lee & Gretzel, 2012). To answer to this trend, tourism products and services are often customized to meet the needs of potential consumers, who compare different websites to choose the most suitable offer (Jin, He, & Song, 2012). Within this context, NTOs' websites aim at providing information and promoting experiences at the destination especially for international publics (Pike, 2008). Hence, it becomes clear that these organizations are constantly confronted with the issue of making their communication strategy appealing. A recent study by Choi et al. (2016) further explores this aspect, by showing that DMOs' websites need to capture the attention of the visitor by making them feel at the destination and raising their knowledge.

To be effective, the communication and promotion of destinations to international markets requires the translation of multimedia content. According to research by the European Tourism Association (2016), 90% of online visitors choose their native language before deciding whether to purchase a product or service. In addition to that, language translation needs to be supported by local SEO expertise. Achkasov (2015) writes that textual elements need to be relevant, appealing, and responding to appropriate keywords. Without these components, the website will inevitably fail its intended communication purposes toward the audience. Both textual translation and SEO adaptation are part of the so-called "localization". This concept describes those set of activities that aim at "modifying products or services to account for differences in distinct markets" (LISA, 2007, p. 11). According to the American Translators Association (ATA) (2002), localization is defined as "the process of customizing a product for consumers in a target market so that when they use it, they form the impression that it was designed by a native of their own country" (p. 4). Within the tourism area, localization takes also into account those elements that vary across cultures. Among them, Cantoni and Tardini (2006) highlight dates and figures, currencies, measures and rules. The authors add that

pieces of information relating to local history, religion, or geography need to be adapted too. Writing “*Hotel X is near Assisi [...] and [...] St Francis’s Basilica is fully understandable by people who know where Assisi is, who St Francis was [...]*” (p. 110), while this may appear confusing for tourists from China, for instance. Given the role that pictures and videos have in presenting the destination, their adaptation must be taken into account as well (Stepchenkova, Kim, & Kirilenko, 2014).

The centrality of culture within localization activities is justified by its impact during information and planning stages. A study by Frías et al. (2011) shows that the creation of destination image through information sources (including the Internet) is affected by the cultural background of visitors. More specifically, the researchers refer to those tourists who have high Uncertainty Avoidance, namely: the relatively strong preference (compared to those who are low on this characteristic) for structured and clear situations over uncertain ones (Hofstede, Hofstede, & Minkov, 2010). Thus, the tourists from France or Italy perceive the Internet as less reliable than those from UK. Such findings should push NTOs to stress the reliability of content and data privacy when communicating with high Uncertainty Avoidance cultures (Frías, Rodríguez, Casteñeda, & Buhalis, 2011). On the same lines, a study by Huang et al. (2013) examines the effect of culture on tourists’ intention to travel. Findings suggest that, within the context of Chinese tourism, mystery and cultural congruency increase the desire to visit a destination. Indeed, the presence of novelty in travel narratives is necessary to feed the desire of temporary freedom and exploration of the unknown, which are intrinsic tourism components (Robledo & Batle, 2017). This assumption is also confirmed by Tigre Moura et al. (2014), who show the negative effects (i.e. boredom) of complete cultural localization on online visitors’ destination image and willingness to travel. While the co-existence of novelty and familiarity may appear as a contradiction, Toyama and Yamada (2012) explain that recent cognitive science classify these two concepts as separate ones (instead of opposite). Within the context of Japanese tourism, the researchers suggest destination marketers to highlight the novelty of the place, while providing necessary information to make it understandable to the reference audience (hence increasing familiarity) (Toyama & Yamada, 2012). The localization of textual content is particularly important for the promotion of cultural tourism. Indeed, tailored narratives can improve the transmission of the significance that host cultures attribute to their heritage and enhance visitor experience (Ndivo & Cantoni, 2016).

Despite its attractiveness in terms of tourism, Europe shows a need for heritage revival (Egberts, 2014). This concept is defined as “a meaningful historical experience for the audience, [...] offering opportunities for personal development [...]” (p. 16) with the goal to make visitors aware of heritage and history. Related to the tourism area, a study performed by Ardissono et al. (2012) provides an overview of practices related to content adaptation for cultural heritage. More specifically, the authors state that dealing with these type of experiences requires attentive content selection, because of the enormous amount of information available and the risk of overloading online visitors. Given the importance that ICT has in heritage communication and promotion, Mele et al. (2015) explore this topic on three European NTO websites. The study aims at understanding how World Heritage Sites (WHSs) are localized for the US-American and Italian publics. Findings show that multimedia contents are adapted according to the audience of reference and the representation of cultural values varies across different versions. A consequent explorative study by Mele et al. (2016) examines the promotion of attractions and services on three European NTO websites. As for the previous research, results show a clear commitment of NTOs to adapt online contents to meet the needs and preferences of the reference publics (i.e. US-American and Italian tourists). At this regard, it is important to underline that despite the presence of localization activities, research shows that these practices need to be followed by assessment strategies to understand whether they are meeting user expectations (Shia, Chen, & Ramdansyah, 2016). Finally, despite the recognized importance of content adaptation for marketing and communication purposes in the tourism area, there is a lack of studies examining the existence and integration of these practices from a managerial viewpoint (Mele, De Ascaniis, & Cantoni, 2016). Hence, more research is needed to explore the importance and presence of such activities, together with existing assessment strategies, at DMOs in Europe and their branches abroad.

4.3 Method

The present research aims at providing an overview of localization practices and activities at NTO members of ETC. Among their roles, tourism organizations at the national level have the aim to promote the destination to international markets (Pike, 2008). Hence, it is reasonable to assume that they represent the best study case to explore the actual integration of adaptation processes within the area of tourism marketing and communication. Established in Norway in 1948, ETC is an

organization that has three aims (European Travel Commission, 2016): (I) promoting Europe as a tourist destination; (II) supporting the collaboration and information exchange among NTOs; and (III) providing partners and other concerned parties with statistics and trends about inbound tourism. Currently, ETC gathers together 32 NTOs in the European geographical zone.

ETC members were invited to participate to a 30 min open-ended interview. Apart from being one of the most diffuse qualitative techniques, this method was chosen because it would allow interviewees to voice freely their opinions and thoughts (Turner, 2010). Interviews were conducted in English by one researcher in the period July 2015–October 2016. After 3 months, researchers collected data from eleven NTOs (**Table 4.1**). Participants could indicate two dates for availability and they had the possibility to opt for a written open-ended interview. The latter was realized by employing the online survey platform Qualtrics (qualtrics.com).

Table 4.1. ETC NTO members who participated in the study.

NTO name	Website
Croatian National Tourist Board (CNTB)	www.croatia.hr
Czech Tourism	www.czechtourism.com
German National Tourist Board (GNTB)	www.german.travel
Toerisme Vlaanderen (TV)	www.visitflanders.com
Hungarian Tourism ltd.	www.gotohungary.com
Tourism Ireland ltd.	www.ireland.com
Innovation Norway	www.visitnorway.com
Polish Tourist Organisation (PTO)	www.poland.travel
National Tourism Organisation of Serbia (NTOs)	www.serbia.travel
Slovenian Tourist Board (STB)	www.slovenia.info
Switzerland Tourism	www.myswitzerland.com

Questions covered four macro areas regarding adaptation practices and activities: (I) current state of localization processes; (II) market research for online content creation and selection; (III) most important adaptation activities; and (IV) use of key performance indicators (KPIs) to assess the effectiveness of marketing and communication ad hoc choices. These areas were selected by the researchers following previous studies on the topic (Mele, De Ascaniis, & Cantoni, 2016; 2015).

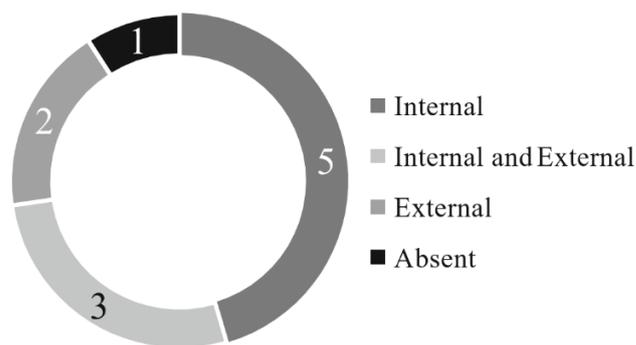
Interviewees were content editors, IT or marketing managers, who declared themselves prepared to discuss about localization practices. In an effort to avoid misunderstandings with “geo-

localization”, the researchers added an explanation of it to the request for participation. Interviewees’ names and organizations are hereafter kept under complete anonymity for privacy reasons.⁴

4.4 Results

The first part of the interview addressed the actual state of localization processes at the NTOs. Ten out of eleven representatives declared that their organization integrates these activities into communication strategies to address key markets. The operationalization of such processes appears to vary, as indicated in the following figure (Figure 4.1).

Figure 4.1. Localization practices at eleven ETC NTOs.



Five NTOs assign localization practices to marketing offices, who are based either at the headquarter or at branches abroad. The selection of online content derives from the coordination of joint efforts. At this regard, “Interviewee_N_1” declared:

We have our own established companies in the strategic markets. Concerning digital we are translating our image content, which is like a brief description [...]. The deeper content, which describes certain cities or natural parts, is translated only for the markets where we are maintaining marketing campaigns. This is modified by the headquarter and then is checked again by the markets.

The reported text highlights a cost-saving aspect of localization. Namely, the translation of online contents is applied only when the activity or location is appealing for the audience. As opposite, a standard (non-localized) description can be provided when the local marketing office does

⁴ Exception is made for those pieces of information that can be retrieved publicly on the Internet.

not signal a potential interest. Interviewees reported that external agencies were employed as a support too. Referring to this matter, “Interviewee_N_2” said:

Now we do make use of localization practices. For what regards the programming [...], there is an outsourced company taking care of it. In terms of content for different editions of the website, we do it ourselves. We have professionals taking care of the content [...]. Indeed, we have [...] offices abroad and each office is in charge of the local website.

Like the previous respondent, also this one underlines the role of local offices in determining the most appropriate content for the reference audience. However, not all organizations rely solely on their branches abroad for adaptation choices. Two of them completely outsource localization practices (i.e. including content creation) to external agencies, which work in contact with the tourism organization headquarter and its branches.

Differently from the other ten NTOs, one representative declares that only literal translation is applied across website editions—with no variations. Nevertheless, “Interviewee_N_3” admitted the shortcomings and limitations of such approach and said:

However, for the future we would like to have a website that shows [...] different experiences and products for different geographical markets. [...] At the moment we have the same depth of translation for [certain] offers for [certain international and domestic] tourists. This is totally nonsense, because [certain international tourists] will never come to [the destination] for [those activities].⁵

The respondent also added that localization activities would require major technical changes affecting the global server for the creation of different templates.

Given the centrality that market research has for localization activities, the second part of the interview focuses on this area. More specifically, if and how specific multimedia content choices across website editions are supported by research. Results show (**Figure 4.2**) that six out of eleven NTOs preferably employ customer research performed by internal departments. Namely, data are retrieved directly from potential visitors or at any step of the tourism experience (i.e. before, during, or after the trip). Addressing this point, “Interviewee_N_4” declared:

We have a department that takes care of market research. This helps us develop strategies that guide us while choosing which content has to be present on which editions. We also have offices in the markets that tell us what content is needed for the local audience. Together with them our content team is developing specific content [...].

⁵ Words enclosed in square parentheses are added by the authors to keep anonymity.

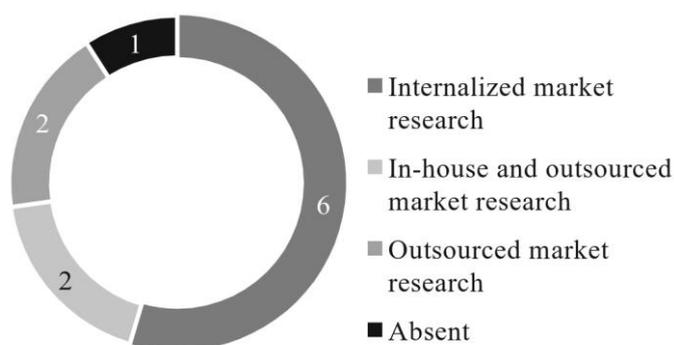
Interviews show that social media and user generated content (UGC) help tourism specialists enhance their online communication for key markets. At this regard, “Interviewee_N_4” said:

We also do social media research on a specific topic [...] that gives us information on how the external environment perceives our destination. For instance, we want to know what the main motivations to come [here] are. Consequently, we are elaborating market profiles for some countries [...].

Interviews also reveal that four NTOs rely their market choices on data collected or produced by external entities. Namely, NTOs gather data from statistics, reports, and studies from other companies or organizations.

The third area of the interview focuses on the exploration of preferred localization activities and their coordination. Results show that four out of eleven NTOs have formalized localization practices into editorial guidelines to improve their processes. For example, those elaborated by the Norwegian tourism organization “Innovation Norway” are freely available online (editorial.visitnorway.org). They mention localization issues for areas like (I) spelling and text; and (II) front page content. The former includes rules for units of measure, dates, and adjectives. The latter reminds local editors to give priority to the needs of their market during the year, by localizing content that fits with the local needs (Innovation Norway, 2016).

Figure 4.2. Market research for localization at eleven ETC NTOs.



Among the preferred localization activities, adaptation of textual content appears to be the most important one (**Figure 4.3**). This affects especially three factors: content choice, granularity, and focus. Namely, based on the reference audience (and season), local editors decide whether to include or not a specific activity or attraction on the website. In addition to that, a certain experience

(for instance) can focus on different elements according to the public or simply vary the quantity of information displayed (as declared by “Interviewee_N_1”). As part of textual content adaptation, four out of ten NTO representatives declare that visa and travel regulations are important pieces of information that need to be adapted according to the reference audience. “Interviewee_N_2” provided an example regarding this matter:

The practical information is more relevant to Europe for some cases, whereas for some other markets it has been adapted according to their needs. [...] This is the example of Japan, India, China, and US, where practical information makes the difference. [...] It is also about flight connections, exchange rates, visa regulation, and custom regulation.

The second most important activity is the localization of destination themes. These can be defined as underlying concepts that help tourists connect experiences and services around one common denominator (Gao, Scott, & Ding, 2016). Addressing this aspect, “Interviewee_N_1” said:

We have several projects in the markets where they take on special topics [...]. Like for example the topic of heritage in the US market [...]. The center of our marketing activity is based on highlighting different aspects of the destination. We have a topic-based marketing plan. We take a topic and we promote it to specific markets.

Among the localized themes, five interviewees mention tangible and intangible heritage as an important factor for destination promotion to specific international markets. Alongside with this aspect, “Interviewee_N_5” says that online content can be tailored to (II) meet positive stereotypes of the reference audience; and (II) increase cultural familiarity. Results show that images and videos are also adapted for distinct purposes, including cultural ones. Referring to localization choices, “Interviewee_N_6” declared:

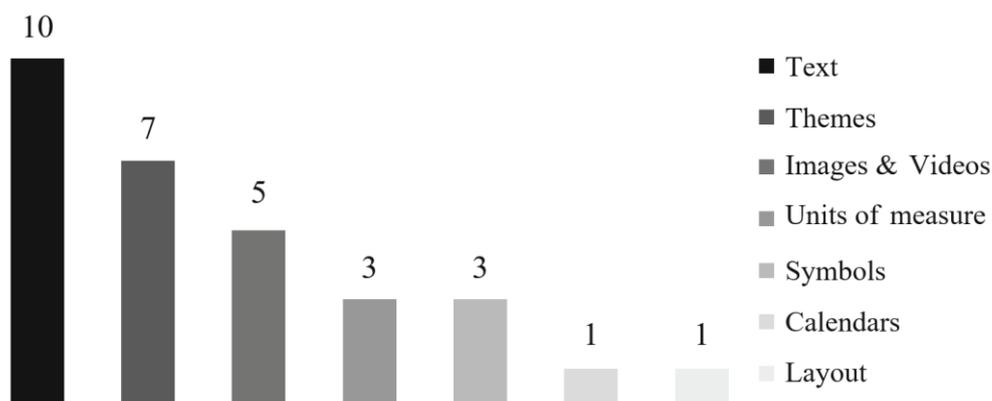
Generally, we show content together with an image. Otherwise it is not attractive. We do not adapt images if it is not really necessary. For the Arabic market we take into account that we cannot show naked skin of women and other regulations. The aim is not to be offensive toward the specific market [...].

Results reveal that the less frequent localization activities are those affecting units of measure, currency symbols, layout, and calendars.

The fourth and last part of the interview provides an overview on the presence and use of KPIs to assess the effectiveness of localization strategies. Results reveal that among those NTOs that perform adaptation activities, only four actually measure their impact on online communication. More specifically, “Interviewee_N_7” states that they have experts monitoring page views and user

flow per country specific visitor. The former allows web editors to understand the popularity of an adapted webpage for users accessing the website from a specific market. Namely, if the number of viewed pages for market-tailored experiences increases, managers can infer the success and fitness of those localized contents. User flow is a metric that reports user paths through the website from the first landing page to the moment they exit it, providing data about its traffic and effectiveness. From the perspective of this study, these figures show the most popular steps (i.e. what webpages are viewed) for users from a specific country exploring a localized website edition.

Figure 4.3. Most important localization activities at eleven ETC NTOs.



Starting from the homepage, for instance, the more visitors reach their goals (e.g. finding information regarding special tour offers), the more the localized content is answering their needs and preferences. On the same lines of “Interviewee_N_7”, also “Interviewee_N_2” and “Interviewee_N_8” declare that they employ web analytics metrics to understand the effectiveness of adapted contents. Moreover, the latter, who represented an external company hired to localize contents for the NTO, added:

What we do not really do is to compare [website’s] versions with each other. [...] We share our findings rather informally during our team meetings [...]. [...] [The NTO] hires another agency to deal with their analytics accounts and big data.

With this statement, “Interviewee_N_8” introduces the option of sharing and assessing localization practices informally among all content editors. Hence, it is possible to assume that personal satisfaction of the expert in charge as well as web analytics metrics play an important role for the assessment of marketing strategies for this NTO. Providing another key perspective on the

issue, “Interviewee_N_1” declares that proper localization has a direct and evident impact on SEO. More specifically, improvements for organic rankings on local search engines for relevant keywords is considered as a KPI. Indeed, increased visibility allows the website to stand out from stiff online competition. For what regards those NTOs that do not have KPIs for localization activities, two main reasons have been identified. The first refers to an explicit preference to measure the performance of the tourism website as a whole, rather than particular pieces of contents or webpages. The second involves the e-maturity of the NTOs themselves. Meant here as the level of integration of ICT into the operational practices of the company (Buhalis, 2003, p. 79). Among them, “Interviewee_N_9” declares that given the need to offer different experiences according to the public, they are actually taking important first steps for assessments by doing A/B testing for campaigns tailored for specific markets. At this regard, “Interviewee_N_9” stated:

One of the essentials of online marketing [...] is A/B testing [...]. I play a few different types of visual ads on the Internet and I am catching what is going to attract [online visitors] and to trigger engagement. For example, for some domestic campaigns we did not change every section. For example, [...] [we did some campaigns for a certain experience in the local language] [...] and we needed to adapt a little just that page [...] [to promote it on] Google AdWords.

In other words, A/B testing can be a helpful research technique to examine the effect of alternative localized online ads (published on the Web) on clickthrough rate (CTR) and user engagement.

4.5 Conclusions, limitations, and further work

As mentioned in the research goal, this paper has provided an overview of website localization practices and activities at eleven ETC NTOs. Information from open-ended interviews reveals that all content editors, IT and marketing specialists are well-aware of the importance of these processes for tourism communication. Apart from one case, all interviewees report the use of localization strategies to adapt destination websites according to the needs and preferences of specific key publics. Such strategies are mostly based on in-house market analysis performed by internal personnel. On the same lines, research shows that outsourcing these practices can be less effective than involving staff directly (Goffin, Varnes, van der Hoven, & Koners, 2012).

From a theoretical point of view, this paper contributes on two points. First, it provides an overview on the way the concept of localization is perceived by the tourism supply on the following areas: (I) current state of localization processes; (II) market research for online content creation and selection; (III) most important adaptation activities; and (IV) use of key performance indicators (KPIs) to assess the effectiveness of marketing and communication ad hoc choices. Second, it depicts the concept of localization as a process rather than a punctual activity. On the one side, this implies that adaptation activities are not meant to suppress the novelty of the destination in favor of complete familiarity (Tigre Moura, Gnoth, & Deans, 2014). Instead, they aim at making sustainable (i.e. understandable) only certain aspects of the website (e.g. content selection), while maintaining intact the novelty of the tourist experience. On the other side, the process of localization implies the possibility of coexistence with a globalized communication approach in the tourism field. Literature defines this as a “glocalized” strategy, which shows a balance of characteristics belonging to both approaches (Matusitz, 2010).

This paper presents also three managerial implications. First, interviews with eleven ETC NTOs show that localization activities can be employed to enhance online contents for specific publics. The selection of ad hoc activities avoids the risk of information overload (i.e. an exaggerated number of alternatives and number of attributes), together with its negative effects on destination image (Rodríguez-Molina, Frías-Jamilena, & Castañeda-García, 2015). Second, interviews show that localization can be used not only for marketing purposes, but also to convey sustainable information about culturally sensitive topics like local heritage. Third, results show that the effects of localization activities can be measured by examining (I) web analytics metrics (i.e. user flow and page views); and (II) search engine positioning among organic results. In addition to these, there is also the possibility of (III) performing A/B testing online to measure the effect of alternative localized ads (published on the Web) on clickthrough rate (CTR) and user engagement; and (IV) holding meetings among content editors to share and assess localization practices informally.

The study is not exempt from limitations. While ETC gathers 32 members, the overview on localization activities regards only 11 of them. Hence, its results cannot be generalized to those who have not participated. Future research will include other NTOs outside the European area and DMOs of different sizes (i.e. not only those at the national level). Finally, it will be necessary to conduct research on further indicators for localization activities such as costs and quality control.

4.6 Acknowledgements

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Chapter 5. Localization effects on online visitors' perceived image and willingness to visit⁶

Abstract

This research examines the effects of localizing cultural values on perceived image and willingness to visit a heritage site. Using Collectivism-Individualism and Power Distance, two preregistered experiments were conducted with a total of 2039 respondents from Portugal and United Kingdom. In Study 1, against expectations, culturally incongruent webpage content expressing low (vs. high) Power Distance generates a higher willingness to visit among Portuguese participants. In Study 2, localized webpage content expressing Individualism (vs. Collectivism) leads to a higher willingness to visit among UK respondents, with the mediation of perceived image. Neither experiment shows an effect of the stimuli on perceived image. Findings suggest limited benefits of localization for heritage promotion and a high tolerance of participants toward incongruent cultural values.

Keywords: Localization, Collectivism, Individualism, Power Distance, Heritage Tourism

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5.1 Introduction

The process of localization is used to adapt promotional content to convey values that are culturally congruent with those of the reference audience (Kanso & Nelson, 2002). Research indicates that the web is not a culturally neutral medium (Goodrich & de Mooij, 2014). In fact, cultural differences appear to have an impact on corporate website design, providing support to the notion that websites, and online communication in general, should be culturally sensitive (Calabrese, Capece, Di Pillo, & Martino, 2014). Scholars as well as practitioners have long recognized the general relevance of cultural adaptation activities to create effective marketing strategies for international audiences (de Mooij M. , 2019; Mele & Cantoni, 2018). Research highlights the importance of localization across different contexts, including e-commerce (Huggins, White, Holloway, & Hansen, 2020), airline and hotel marketing (Lituchy & Barra, 2008). Within the tourism industry, research shows that destination websites reflect the cultural orientation of the country where they were created (Tigre Moura, Gnoth, & Deans, 2014). Interviews with destination marketers, members of the European Travel Commission, reveal that the cultural background and preferences of key audiences affect the choice of destination themes (e.g. heritage) and multimedia content to be promoted online. Interviewees declare that culturally sensitive promotion is important for the attractiveness of destination experience (Mele & Cantoni, 2017). Comparative research shows that the spectrum of localization activities includes tailoring content depth (e.g. the number of words and details provided to describe a cultural attraction), search engine optimization (e.g. adaptation of website keywords), and adaptation of cultural values (e.g. emphasis on collective experiences for the Chinese market) (Mele & Cantoni, 2018).

Surprisingly, while destination marketers highlight the benefits of cultural adaptation activities in tourism promotion, only one experimental study so far (to the best of our knowledge) has investigated localization from a demand side, analyzing the effects of cultural value adaptation in combination with website design manipulations (Tigre Moura, Gnoth, & Deans, 2014). Given the constant presence of cultural barriers in international marketing, we argue that is important to expand the empirical knowledge on the localization of cultural values, by analyzing the main effects of congruent cultural values (vs. incongruent) and their interactions on participant's perceptions and

intentions – without involving website design (e.g. relevance of visuals within a webpage), as its adaptation to specific countries would be considered anachronistic nowadays.

Addressing this knowledge gap, the current research examines the impacts of localizing the cultural values belonging to the dimensions of Collectivism-Individualism (COL-IND) and Power Distance (PD) on online visitors' perceived image and willingness to visit, taking the case of the UNESCO world heritage site Kinderdijk (the Netherlands). Two preregistered, highly powered experiments are conducted to test how participants from two culturally distant countries, Portugal and United Kingdom (Hofstede, Hofstede, & Minkov, 2010), respond to manipulated webpages displaying one combination of the cultural dimensions. More precisely, Study 1 focuses on perceptions and intentions toward the heritage *destination*, whereas the follow-up experiment (Study 2) focuses on the perceived destination *experience*.

This paper contributes to the tourism field in multiple ways. First, scholars have called for more experimental research involving localization and online communication (Mele & Cantoni, 2018; Tigre Moura, Gnoth, & Deans, 2014; Vyncke & Brengman, 2010). We answer this call by focusing on the single and interacting effects of congruent (vs. incongruent) cultural values on respondents' perceived image and willingness to visit a heritage site. Second, research in heritage tourism has indicated the need to consider cultural differences when developing contents for international audiences (Jung, Lee, Chung, & tom Dieck, 2018): would cultural congruency alone improve perceptions and intentions toward a heritage site? Examining the impacts of localizing cultural values, in combination with participants' heritage interest, has managerial significance for the improvement of online promotion of heritage tourism.

5.2 Literature review

5.2.1 Measuring and localizing cultural values

Culture is defined by Hofstede et al. (2010, p. 6) as “the collective programming of the mind that distinguishes the members of one group [...] from others.” Occupying the core of such collective programming, cultural values represent “broad tendencies to prefer certain states of affairs over others” (p. 9) and, among their roles, they are found to guide consumer behavior in tourism (Hsu & Huang, 2016; Sabiote-Ortiz, Frías-Jamilena, & Castañeda-García, 2014).

According to Hofstede et al. (2010), cultural values can be measured and compared at the national level, along six virtual constructs called “cultural dimensions.” For the scope of this research, two of them are outlined here: COL-IND and PD. The former has been chosen for experimental manipulation because it is one of the most important dimensions in cross-cultural psychology and comparative studies (Meng, 2010); while PD has been identified as one of the most influential factors in decision making about tourism destinations (Correia, Kozak, & Ferradeira, 2011). In addition, both cultural dimensions have been frequently used in marketing research (Saleem & Larimo, 2017). Although criticized by scholars for their simplistic reduction of cultural phenomena (Jones, 2007), research shows that countries can be reliably distinguished along a series of cultural values (Minkov & Hofstede, 2011) and these are reflected also in online experiences (Alcántara-Pilar, Armenski, Blanco-Encomienda, & Del Barrio-García, 2018). In addition, while acknowledging the limitations of Hofstede’s model, it is argued here that its clarity and parsimony (Kirkman, Lowe, & Gibson, 2006) make it suitable for experimental research.

COL-IND describes the extent to which individuals are connected to ingroups. Collectivist societies position the identity of the individual (as “we”) in extended families or groups of friends. Instead, individualist cultures prize a person’s independence (as “I”) and self-sufficiency with loose societal bounds (Hofstede, Hofstede, & Minkov, 2010). Within the tourism context, COL can be conveyed by emphasizing family and group activities, along with the purchase of gifts and souvenirs for family members (Woodside, Hsu, & Marshall, 2011), while IND can be conveyed by referring to values of independence, uniqueness and self-fulfillment (Tigre Moura, Gnoth, & Deans, 2014). The difference between individualist and collectivist cultures is also reflected in the style of marketing messages. Individualist cultures privilege directness and persuasion based on facts and figures (hard selling approach). On the other hand, in collectivist cultures advertising primarily aims at building trust between companies and customers employing an indirect communication style (Men & Tsai, 2012), and emphasizing intangible elements like harmony (Hornikx & de Groot, 2017) and oneness with nature (Frederick & Gan, 2015).

Hofstede et al. (2010) show that COL and IND have a positive association with high and low PD respectively. PD describes the extent to which people expect and emphasize power differences. Societies that score high in PD assign greater importance to authorities, including celebrities because of their status (Winterich, Gangwar, & Grewal, 2018), and to the prestige of a

destination brand (Correia, Kozak, & Ferradeira, 2011). On the other hand, cultures with low PD prefer equality in social relations, regardless of people's status and wealth (de Mooij & Beniflah, 2017; Loi, Lam, & Chan, 2012). Consequently, within the tourism context, high PD can be reflected by images and texts emphasizing authorities endorsing the destinations or attractions (Tigre Moura, Gnoth, & Deans, 2014).

The cultural values conveyed by a website can also be adapted to conform to the cultural preferences of the reference audience. In this regard, website localization refers to a set of activities aimed at adapting a website to the cultural needs and preferences of a specific audience, so that it feels 'local' or natural to the receiver (Singh, Toy, & Wright, 2009). Among the several strategies available to achieve this objective (Mele & Cantoni, 2017; Tigre Moura, Singh, & Chun, 2016), the localization of cultural values generally consists of matching the values expressed by the contents on the website with those held by online visitors from a specific country. In other words, the values conveyed by the website become congruent with those of the reference audience (Singh & Matsuo, 2004).

Scholars argue that if local websites reflect local cultural values, then it would make sense for an international company to also localize their communication in a way that feels local for that market (Chun, Singh, Sobh, & Benmamoun, 2015; Singh & Matsuo, 2004). Research suggests that cultural adaptation enhances the online competitiveness of a company and, through a better online experience and satisfaction (Benmamoun, Singh, & Sobh, 2019), positively affects consumers' attitudes and intentions (Singh, Park, Chun, Tigre Moura, & Seung, 2017). Although some marketing research questions the benefits of cultural congruence (Hornikx & de Groot, 2017; Tigre Moura, Gnoth, & Deans, 2014), studies indicate its importance for advertising effectiveness (Möller & Eisend, 2010) and purchase likelihood (He & Wang, 2017). In addition, research shows that marketing managers from destination marketing organizations invest effort in localization (Mele & Cantoni, 2017), for instance by assigning content production to experts from the reference markets and offering country-specific versions of the destination website.

5.2.2 Heritage, perceived image and willingness to visit

Among the themes promoted by destination websites, heritage is described by Merriman (Merriman, 1991, p. 8) as "culture and landscape that are cared for by the community and passed on

to the future to serve people's need for a sense of identity and belonging." Scholars highlight the popularity of cultural tourism (Chen & Chen, 2010), consisting of people experiencing built heritage, contemporary arts or cultural events (Timothy, 2011). Arguably an important factor directly affecting prospective tourists' perceived image and visitation intention, heritage interest refers to visitors' general appeal for cultural attractions. Drawing from Leone et al. (Leone, Chirumbolo, & Desimoni, 2012), it is argued that heritage interest exerts both a direct and a moderating effect on the willingness to visit a heritage site, because participants interested in heritage tourism may be more susceptible to stimuli involving a heritage experience. The effectiveness of promoting a heritage site, in terms of perceived image and behavioral intentions, is then enhanced by visitors' interest in heritage tourism.

A perceived image consists of a conscious, multisensory, mental experience held by prospective visitors (Lai & Li, 2015) and it can influence the success of a heritage site (Remoaldo, Ribeiro, Vareiro, & Santos, 2014). Within the tourism domain, a perceived image can refer to a multiplicity of elements, including attractions (MacKay & Fesenmaier, 1997) and destination experiences (Hunter, 2016). This research focuses on the concepts of destination image (Study 1) and experience image (Study 2), both of which are perceived images and refer to "the aggregate sum of beliefs, ideas, impressions and expectations" (Chon, 1990, p. 4) held by tourists. Within the context of this research, the difference between the two resides in the object of reference: destination image measures the perception of the destination as a unique amalgam of attributes, products and services; whereas experience image measures people's perception of the activities and experience offered by the destination. Consequently, the latter is strictly related to the concept of "telepresence," described as the experience of a location through a communication medium (Steuer, 1992) – that is, the website or any other online channel used by prospective tourists to virtually experience destination activities and form a perception about them.

Cultural factors have been identified as an important antecedent for perceived (destination) image formation (Kastenholz, 2010; Tigre Moura, Gnoth, & Deans, 2014; Yacout & Hefny, 2014). Scholars argue that visiting a place is not an essential requirement for tourists to form a perceived image (Beerli & Martín, 2004). For potential visitors, the formation of a perceived image is based on a variety of sources (Echtner & Ritchie, 1991), including destination marketing organizations' online presence on websites (Llodrà-Riera, Martínez-Ruiz, Jiménez-Zarco, & Izquierdo-Yusta, 2015). Research shows that a positive perceived (destination) image influences behavioral intentions

(Molinillo, Liebana-Cabanillas, Anaya-Sanchez, & Buhalis, 2018) like willingness to visit (Kim & Kerstetter, 2014).

The construct of perceived image can be analyzed both in terms of an overall assessment (single factor) as well as within its separate factors (Tasci & Gartner, 2007), namely the cognitive, affective and overall image components (Baloglu & McCleary, 1999). Cognitive evaluations refer to the knowledge about a destination, product or service, including the quality of the experience (Baloglu, 2001), while affective components refer to the feelings about it. Overall image combines both cognitive and affective evaluations (Baloglu & McCleary, 1999). The multiple- and single-construct approaches for the analysis of perceived image are used in Study 1 and Study 2 respectively, with destination image (Study 1) and experience image (Study 2).

5.3 Study 1

The research questions, hypotheses, design, sample size and analysis plan of Study 1 were pre-registered (<https://aspredicted.org/si3ut.pdf>) before data collection in March 2019.

5.3.1 Hypotheses and research question

The literature review highlights a gap in the knowledge about the influence of online content displaying congruent cultural values on visitors from different countries. The present study examines the effect of localized communication on participants' perceived image and willingness to visit a heritage site, with the direct and moderating effects of heritage interest. For what concerns the analysis of localization effects, this research adopts the cultural dimensions COL-IND and PD for their relevance in marketing research. Considering what was outlined in the literature review, it is argued that content displaying congruent COL-IND and PD values will positively affect participants' perceived destination image and willingness to visit. Consequently, it is hypothesized as follows:

- H1. Webpages displaying congruent COL-IND values positively affect visitors' cognitive, affective, overall destination image and willingness to visit, when compared to webpages displaying incongruent COL-IND values.
- H2. Webpages displaying congruent PD values positively affect visitors' cognitive, affective, overall destination image and willingness to visit, when compared to webpages displaying incongruent PD values.

Based on hypothesis 1 and 2, it follows that webpages displaying exclusively congruent cultural values, both in terms of COL-IND and PD, result in a more positive perceived destination

image and higher willingness to visit among participants. One might argue that they strengthen each other, with a multiplicative effect of congruence across multiple cultural dimensions. Yet, one may also argue that there is an optimal level of localization beyond which the effects disappear or may even backfire, as argued by Tigre Moura et al. (2014). In other words, while the congruence for only one dimension may have a positive effect on the dependent variables (H1 and H2), participants may perceive fully congruent communication as tedious, because the novelty of the heritage destination is replaced by cultural familiarity. Instead, they may privilege contents that show a balance between congruent (familiar) and incongruent (novel) cultural values. Therefore, an exploratory research question is needed:

- RQ1. How do webpages displaying congruent values on both IND-COL and PD affect visitors' perceived destination image and willingness to visit, when compared to webpages displaying incongruent cultural values?

Furthermore, based on what was outlined in the literature review, it is argued that participants' heritage interest has a direct and moderating effect on their perceived destination image and willingness to visit a heritage site:

- H3. Heritage interest is positively associated with cognitive, affective, overall destination image and willingness to visit.
- H4. Heritage interest has a positive moderating effect on the relationship between the exposure to congruent cultural values and cognitive, affective, overall destination image and willingness to visit.

5.3.2 Methodology

5.3.2.1 Participants and destination

Portugal and UK were selected for comparison because they occupied reversed positions on the dimensions developed by Hofstede et al. (2010). The two countries had already been chosen for cross-cultural comparisons in previous research, showing relevant differences in terms of information and communication technology use (Amaro & Duarte, 2017; Goodrich & de Mooij, 2014). As destination, this study took the case of the Dutch heritage site Kinderdijk: a UNESCO World Heritage site since 1997 (UNESCO World Heritage Centre, 2018), a prototypical example of (built) heritage destination.

Following Hofstede et al. (2010) cultural scores, the Portuguese national culture is relatively collectivist (cultural score = 27/100), while UK is among the most individualist countries (cultural

score = 89/100). The two countries also differ in terms of PD, with Portugal scoring higher on this dimension (cultural score = 63/100) than UK (cultural score = 35/100).

The free software G*Power 3.1.9.2 (Faul, Erdfelder, Lang, & Buchner, 2007) was used to compute the required sample size for an experiment with 90% power, expecting a small effect $f^2(V) = 0.02$ ($\eta^2 = 0.02$) (Tigre Moura, Gnoth, & Deans, 2014), using a MANCOVA. The tool indicated a minimum required of 481 respondents per country.

Participants from both countries were recruited using the commercial crowdworking platform Prolific (2018) and rewarded £ 0.67 (£ 5.03/hour) upon completion. Data were collected in March 2019. A screening questionnaire was used to retain participants that fit with two criteria: their country of birth and nationality matched their residence; they had never been to Kinderdijk. The first criterion increased the probability of selecting participants integrated within those forces like the national education system that contribute to create shared cultural values (Hofstede, Hofstede, & Minkov, 2010). The second criterion ensured that respondents would not rely on previous personal experiences at the destination, affecting their perceived destination image and willingness to visit.

The online surveys received a total of 500 complete responses from Portugal and 501 submissions from UK, all aged 18 and older. A tracking item was integrated in the survey page containing the (only) hyperlink to the webpage promoting Kinderdijk. In addition, the button to go forward was set to appear after one minute, to stimulate participants to click on the hyperlink with the condition before proceeding with the survey. The few participants that did not click on the hyperlink were removed (Portugal = 5; UK = 3), resulting in a total of 993 valid responses: 495 from Portugal and 498 from UK. Data were analyzed using IBM SPSS Statistics 25 (IBM, 2019).

The online survey was available in the mother tongue of the participant and the link was accessible through the platform Prolific (2018). To test the hypotheses and answer the research question, this study used a 2 (COL vs. IND) \times 2 (high PD vs. low PD) \times 2 (Portugal vs. UK) between-subjects design, with one condition per participant.

5.3.2.2 Measures

Each condition consisted of a single responsive webpage with both image and text displaying a combination of manipulated cultural values, offered in the native language (British English and Portuguese) of the respondent. Overall, the webpages were promoting the same types of

activities at the heritage destination Kinderdijk, but with a different style and recommended experience according to the values to be conveyed. The webpage content had no hyperlinks and was subdivided into three main sections with respective headers and photographs: the introduction to the heritage site, with its history and characteristics; the description of the activities; booking information and ticket prices (which did not vary across conditions). All sections showed quotations about the heritage experience at Kinderdijk, emphasizing a different combination of cultural values depending on the condition. Each cultural dimension was represented by the same number of pictures and by a similar number of words. The webpage content was elaborated following the operationalization of the cultural dimensions indicated by the literature review and a study by Mele and Lobinger (2018) on the visual representation of cultural values (**Table 5.1**).

To produce the experimental conditions, four webpages were first constructed from a master document in English, each of them with four pictures (with captions) and text displaying specific cultural values. Second, the four webpages were discussed, and their contents improved in a focus group with other researchers. Third, given the importance of visuals in inspiring visitors (Lee & Gretzel, 2012), three pilot tests with a between-subjects design were conducted online until the photographs were correctly categorized in terms of COL-IND and PD by participants. Finally, once participants were able to recognize both dimensions, the four chosen pictures were integrated into a total of eight single webpages, four in British English and four in Portuguese, which were then used as stimuli in both studies. To ensure the quality of all textual contents (including the main survey), backtranslation was performed together with two Portuguese mother tongue individuals, who were also proficient in English.

Table 5.1. Operationalization of cultural dimensions for the elaboration of webpage content.

	Images	Text
Collectivism	Groups with subjects looking at the viewer.	Group (family and friends) related activities, with indirect communication style highlighting entertainment, harmony and togetherness.
Individualism	One single person, not looking at the viewer.	Independence, freedom, uniqueness, with direct, hard-selling communication style.
High Power Distance	Authorities recommending the heritage site (embedded text and icon).	Recommendations by authorities.
Low Power Distance	Common visitors recommending the heritage site (embedded text and icon).	Peer-to-peer recommendations.

Items and scales for cognitive, affective, overall destination image and willingness to visit are illustrated in **Table 9.1** (Appendices). Cognitive image was measured with five items: four of them (friendly/unfriendly, lively/stagnant, interesting/boring, overcrowded/uncrowded) adapted from Ekinçi and Hosany (2006), one exploratory item “novel/familiar” was added to evaluate participants’ perception of novelty and familiarity connected to Kinderdijk. As the first reliability tests yielded a low Cronbach’s $\alpha = .54$, two items (uncrowded/overcrowded, novel/familiar) were removed. The second reliability test with 3 items yielded a Cronbach’s $\alpha = .68$, which, being very close to $.70$, was considered as acceptable (Gliem & Gliem, 2003). Subsequently, the three items were averaged for the main analysis ($M = 5.50, SD = .96$).

Affective image was measured with four items (pretty/ugly, pleasant/unpleasant, exciting/gloomy, relaxing/distressing) developed by Hosany et al. (2006) (Cronbach’s $\alpha = .84, M = 5.90, SD = .87$). Overall image was assessed with one single item reporting the overall impression of the site, as proposed by Baloglu and McCleary (1999) ($M = 6.17, SD = .71$).

Willingness to visit Kinderdijk was measured using two items adapted from Dodds et al. (1991) ($r = .60, p < 0.01, M = 5.76, SD = 1.04$). All items were rated on 7-point scales, with the most positive evaluation assigned to the highest score.

Concerning heritage interest, participants were asked with three items about their interest in heritage tourism, whether they usually visited cultural attractions, and whether they valued visiting UNESCO attractions (Cronbach’s $\alpha = .75, M = 3.91, SD = .69$) (**Table 9.1**, Appendices). Among the covariates, online trust was assessed on two items adapted from Kim et al. (Kim, Chung, & Lee, 2011), namely ‘official tourism destination websites are reliable’ and ‘reviews by other tourists are trustworthy,’ measured on 5-point scales. As there was a weak correlation between the two items ($r = .29, p < 0.01$), it was decided to treat these two items separately for the main analysis. The study also accounted for other exploratory covariates that could affect the results: age, gender, household members, education level, general travel experience and past business / leisure travel experience in the Netherlands.

5.3.2.3 Manipulation checks

The manipulation checks confirmed that participants correctly recognized the cultural stimuli of the conditions and, consequently, engaged with webpage contents. One-tailed independent

sample t-tests showed that webpages in the collectivist conditions were associated more with heritage experiences “with family or friends” ($M = 6.65, SD = .59$) than “by yourself” ($M = 5.86, SD = 1.17$), while the individualist counterparts were associated more with experiences “by yourself” ($M = 5.26, SD = 1.36$) than “with family or friends” ($M = 3.69, SD = 1.72$); these differences were significant for COL ($t(740.012) = -13.341, p = .000$) as well as IND ($t(937.224) = 15.912, p = .000$). The manipulation check for PD showed that participants correctly associated high PD conditions with heritage experiences recommended “by authorities” ($M = 3.03, SD = 1.71$) and low PD conditions with recommendations “by peers” ($M = 4.75, SD = 1.98$). As with the previous dimension, these differences were significant ($t(968.687) = 14.687, p = .000$).

Following Alcántara-Pilar et al. (2018), a set of questions from the Value Survey Module (Hofstede, Hofstede, & Minkov, 2010) was used to measure participants’ cultural orientation in terms of COL-IND and PD. Results showed that the Portuguese sample was more collectivistic (cultural score = 38/100) than the UK sample (cultural score = 48/100). Portuguese respondents were also higher on PD (cultural score = 32/100) than their counterpart (cultural score = 20/100). Thus, the relative differences on the cultural scores for both dimensions had the same direction indicated by Hofstede et al. (2010), yet their distance was not as marked as reported by those scholars. Consequently, the congruence between the manipulated conditions and participants’ cultural orientation was assumed from the outcome of the manipulation check and respondents’ cultural scores. A similar assumption had already been made in previous tourism research on the effects of cultural localization (see Tigre Moura et al., 2014).

5.3.3 Results

Given the presence of multiple interacting dependent variables and the necessity of accounting for covariates as well as a moderator, MANCOVA was used for data analysis. Heritage interest was centered inserted as covariate and included in a custom multivariate model in SPSS (IBM, 2019) as interaction term with the other factors.

After controlling for the significant effects of age, online trust item 1 ($V = .011, F(4, 966) = 2.602, p = .035$) and item 2 ($V = .025, F(4, 966) = 6.182, p = .000$) (Table 5.2), Pillai’s Trace did not indicate any multivariate effect of the stimuli on the dependent variables also when the moderator was included. A similar result was obtained also after excluding the covariates from the analysis.

Table 5.2. Study 1 – MANCOVA and univariate follow-ups of Willingness to Visit.

	Pillai's Trace	Error df	Univariate Follow-Ups		
			<i>df</i>	<i>F</i>	η_p^2
<i>Covariates</i>					
Online Trust: item 1	.011	966	1	6.71*	.007
Online Trust: item 2	.025	966	1	22.61***	.023
Age	.030	966	1	6.75**	.007
<i>Main and interaction effects</i>					
Heritage Interest	.143	966	1	135.66***	.123
Country*PD	.007	966	1	4.67*	.005
Error			969		

Table 5.3. Study 1 – Estimated marginal means of Country*PD.

Dependent variable	Country	PD	<i>M</i>	<i>SE</i>
Willingness to Visit	United Kingdom	Low PD	5.77	.06
		High PD	5.75	.06
	Portugal	Low PD	5.88	.06
		High PD	5.60	.06

Separate ANOVAs on the outcome variables revealed one significant effect of “Country*PD” on willingness to visit ($F(1, 969) = 4.666, p = .031, \eta_p^2 = .005$). Unexpectedly, Portuguese participants assigned to the conditions with incongruent (low) PD values reported a higher willingness to visit Kinderdijk ($M = 5.88, SE = .06$) than after being exposed to congruent (high) PD stimuli ($M = 5.60, SE = 0.6$) (**Table 5.3**). Consequently, hypothesis 1 and 2 were not supported. In addition, providing an answer to the exploratory research question 1, results did not indicate any interaction effect between congruent cultural values and dependent variables.

As expected, Pillai's Trace indicated a significant direct effect of heritage interest on the dependent variables, $V = .143, F(4, 966) = 40.226, p = .000, \eta_p^2 = .143$. Separate ANOVAs on the outcome variables revealed a significant positive effect on cognitive image $F(1, 969) = 47.469, p = .000, \eta_p^2 = .047$; affective image $F(1, 969) = 47.028, p = .000, \eta_p^2 = .046$; overall image $F(1, 969) = 101.635, p = .000, \eta_p^2 = .095$; and willingness to visit $F(1, 969) = 135.659, p = .000, \eta_p^2 = .123$. Consequently, hypothesis 3 was supported. The analysis revealed no moderating effect of heritage interest on the relationship between the stimuli and the dependent variables, rejecting hypothesis 4.

5.4 Study 2

Overall, results from Study 1 did not confirm what was hypothesized regarding the effects of localization on destination image and willingness to visit a heritage site. Yet, such unexpected results could be caused by the fact that the items of the main dependent variables were addressing Kinderdijk as a heritage destination, rather than the (perceived) experience at Kinderdijk. If this was the case, participants did not consider the localized activities and experiences, displaying the manipulated cultural values, when rating the items of the questionnaire. Instead, they gave a relatively positive rate to the heritage site *per se*. Therefore, to test this argument and capture the effects of localization on the designated dependent variables, it was decided to re-direct the questions toward the recommended heritage activities and experiences at Kinderdijk in a follow-up experiment. Consequently, Study 2 focused on the heritage *experience*, something of great relevance for cultural tourism (Chen & Chen, 2010). Participants were asked to evaluate a set of items about their perceptions, feelings and overall impressions of suggested experiences (activities) – that is, experience image – followed by questions asking whether they were willing to visit Kinderdijk in the same way as recommended by the testimonials on the webpage (e.g. traveling in group or by yourself). In Study 2, (perceived) experience image was treated as a single factor for two reasons. First, Study 1 did not indicate any difference among cognitive, affective and overall image in terms of localization effects. Second, as shown by previous research (e.g. Tasci & Gartner, 2007), visitors' perceived image can be analyzed as a single factor to predict future behavioral intentions. Therefore, a mediated-moderation model was used in Study 2, whereby experience image acted as a mediator between the stimuli and willingness to visit, with heritage interest moderating these relationships. Finally, following the findings from Study 1, heritage interest was again analyzed for its direct and moderating effects on experience image and willingness to visit.

The research questions, hypotheses, design, sample size and analysis plan of Study 2 were preregistered (<https://aspredicted.org/dj84x.pdf>) before data collection in June 2019.

5.4.1 Hypotheses and research question

Study 2 considers experience image as a mediator between website localization and future behavioral intentions. Based on what is outlined in the literature, it is argued that congruent cultural

values in terms of COL-IND and PD positively affect the perception of Kinderdijk heritage experience. Therefore, it is hypothesized as follows:

- H1. Webpages displaying congruent COL-IND values positively affect visitors' experience image.
- H2. Webpages displaying congruent PD values positively affect visitors' experience image.

In turn, the perceived image of the heritage experience is expected to affect the willingness to visit the heritage site (in the way recommended by the webpage). Therefore, the following hypotheses are proposed:

- H3. A favorable experience image is positively associated with willingness to visit.
- H4. Experience image mediates the relationship between the exposure to congruent cultural values and willingness to visit.

Following the results from Study 1, it is argued that heritage interest will have a direct positive effect on both experience image and willingness to visit. In addition, participants' heritage interest will make them more receptive to culturally adapted messages promoting activities in a heritage destination, influencing the relationships among stimuli, mediator, and outcome variable. Consequently, it is hypothesized as follows:

- H5. Heritage interest is positively associated with experience image and willingness to visit.
- H6. Heritage interest has a positive moderating effect on the relationship between the exposure to congruent cultural values and experience image.
- H7. Heritage interest has a positive moderating effect on the relationship between experience image and willingness to visit.

Finally, drawing from the argument in Study 1 on the interaction of congruent cultural values, the following exploratory research question is proposed:

- RQ1. How do webpages displaying congruent values on both IND-COL and PD affect visitors' experience image, when compared to webpages displaying incongruent cultural values?

5.4.2 Methodology

5.4.2.1 Participants and destination

As in Study 1, this follow-up experiment was conducted with participants from Portugal and UK and the destination was Kinderdijk, a UNESCO heritage site in the Netherlands. In Study 2, the

effects of the stimuli were assessed using a single dependent variable (experience image), therefore the main pre-registered statistical test for Study 2 was an ANCOVA, which brought a change in the calculation of the power analysis. More precisely, G*Power 3.1.9.2 (Faul, Erdfelder, Lang, & Buchner, 2007) was asked to calculate the minimum required sample size for an experiment with 90% power, expecting a small effect $f = 0.1429$ ($\eta_p^2 = 0.02$), as a result of performing an ANCOVA. The output indicated a sample size of 517 participants, which was rounded to 520 per country. Participants from both countries were recruited using the commercial platform Prolific (2018) and rewarded £ 0.42 (£ 5.04/hour) upon completion of the survey. Data were collected in June 2019. The same screening questions of the previous experiment were applied, and participants from Study 1 were excluded. The online surveys received a total of 523 complete valid submissions from Portugal and UK respectively, 1046 in total, all aged 18 and older.

The design and procedure of the online survey was the same of Study 1, but it was decided not to ask participants about their cultural orientation, as the participant pool was the same (Prolific) and it would have produced an almost identical outcome to the one from the previous experiment.

5.4.2.2 Measures

The stimuli in Study 2 were identical to those used in Study 1 (**Table 5.1**): four webpages for the promotion of the heritage destination Kinderdijk to Portuguese and UK participants respectively, showing a set of manipulated cultural values (COL-IND and PD). The changes affecting the dependent variables and covariates are outlined below.

Items and scales for experience image and willingness to visit are illustrated in **Table 9.1** (Appendices). Experience image was measured on five items adapted from Baloglu (2001) (wonderful/terrible; interesting/boring; pleasant/unpleasant; good value for money; overall image), shifting the original focus of the scale from the destination to the activities (experience); and one exploratory item “the activities described on the webpage would be the best way for me to experience Kinderdijk” (Cronbach’s $\alpha = .87$, $M = 5.70$, $SD = .82$). Willingness to visit was measured on two items adapted from Dodds et al. (1991), $r = .76$, $p = 0.01$ ($M = 5.40$, $SD = 1.24$, for the combined scale). As in Study 1, the items for both experience image and willingness to visit were rated on 7-point scales.

Heritage interest was measured using the same items as in Study 1 (Cronbach's $\alpha = .77$, $M = 3.93$, $SD = .75$). For what regards the covariates, as there was only a weak correlation between the items measuring online trust in Study 1, in this follow-up experiment we used the same two items proposed by Kim et al. (2011) (Table 9.1, Appendices), $r = .69$, $p < 0.01$ ($M = 4.16$, $SD = .67$, for the combined scale). The items for both heritage interest and online trust were rated on 5-point scales. Finally, age and education were kept as covariates as they had a significant effect on the dependent variables in Study 1. All the other exploratory covariates used in Study 1 (see section 5.3.2.2) were excluded from the preregistration and analysis.

5.4.2.3 Manipulation checks

Using a single bipolar item, manipulation checks confirmed that participants correctly associated COL conditions with heritage experiences “with family or friends” ($M = 6.52$, $SD = .88$) and IND conditions with experiences “by yourself” ($M = 5.10$, $SD = 1.69$), $t(796.680) = -17.173$, $p = .000$. Similarly, webpages conveying high PD values were connected to experiences recommended “by authorities” ($M = 4.85$, $SD = 1.81$), while those with low PD values were connected to recommendations “by peers” ($M = 2.76$, $SD = 1.93$), $t(1039.907) = -18.114$, $p = .000$.

5.4.3 Results

Given the presence of multiple interacting categorical variables (which could not be taken separately), the necessity to account for covariates, a mediator and a moderator, ANCOVA and regression analysis were used to examine localization effects within a mediated-moderation model. Study 2 thus followed the causal steps approach by Baron and Kenny (1986) on mediation analysis by first testing the effect of the independent variables on the mediator (experience image), followed by a two-step test – both with and without the mediator – of the effect of the independent variables on willingness to visit (see Lee & Cranage, 2011, for an application in the area of online tourism).

Heritage interest was centered, entered as covariate and included in a custom univariate model in SPSS (IBM, 2019) as interaction term with the other factors. After controlling for the effect of education, $F(1, 1027) = 10.990$, $p = .001$, and online trust, $F(1, 1027) = 51.529$, $p = .000$, ANCOVA revealed no significant effect of congruent or incongruent cultural values on the experience image, also when the moderator was included. Similar results were obtained when

excluding the covariates from the analysis. Therefore, hypothesis 1, 2, and 6 were not supported. In addition, with reference to research question 1, results did not indicate any significant effect of the interaction of congruent cultural values on experience image.

In order to test the mediating role of experience image, a two-step regression analysis of willingness to visit was conducted by entering the following variables in this order: (Step 1) fixed factors, heritage interest and their interactions; (Step 2) experience image and its interaction with heritage interest (**Table 5.4**). The fixed factors were COL-IND, PD and Country (Portugal vs. UK). Afterwards, experience image was included in an ANCOVA as a covariate to analyze the effects of the independent measures on the outcome variable.

Table 5.4. Study 2 – Regression analysis of Willingness to Visit.

	Step 1				Step 2			
	b	SE	β	t	b	SE	β	t
Constant	4.259	.264		16.152	5.224	.185		28.229
Country	.084	.130	.034	.647	-.012	.091	-.005	-.134
COL-IND	-.394	.096	-.159***	-4.122	-.129	.067	-.052	-1.935
PD	.078	.095	.032	.821	.046	.066	.019	.700
Age	.017	.032	.016	.532	-.010	.022	-.009	-.448
Education	-.093	.030	-.086**	-3.110	-.023	.021	-.022	-1.123
Online Trust	.354	.053	.192***	6.699	.075	.038	.041*	2.010
Heritage Interest	.633	.058	.382***	10.992	.201	.044	.122***	4.593
Country*COL-IND	.351	.168	.122*	2.092	.202	.116	.070	1.740
Country*PD	-.106	.167	-.037	-.639	-.102	.116	-.035	-.880
Country*COL-IND*PD	-.065	.197	-.017	-.330	-.114	.136	-.030	-.838
Country*COL-IND*Heritage Interest	-.160	.159	-.043	-1.011	-.033	.111	-.009	-.297
Country*PD*Heritage Interest	-.131	.161	-.035	-.814	-.003	.113	-.001	-.025
Country*COL-IND*PD*Heritage Interest	.244	.264	.046	.926	.065	.183	.012	.354
Destination Experience Image					1.085	.033	.718***	32.875
Destination Experience Image*Heritage Interest					-.007	.029	-.005	-.241

Note: ⁽¹⁾Adjusted $R^2 = .231$; ⁽²⁾Adjusted $R^2 = .632$

* $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$; *** $p < .001$

The regression analysis showed a significant positive association between willingness to visit and experience image ($\beta = .72$, $p = .000$), supporting hypothesis 3. Contradicting what was hypothesized, there was no moderating effect of heritage interest on the relation between experience

image and willingness to visit. Therefore hypothesis 7 was not supported. In the first step of the regression model without experience image, the test showed a significant positive association between “Country*COL-IND” and willingness to visit ($\beta = .12, p = .037$). In the second step the same effect became non-significant ($\beta = .07, p = .082$), indicating an indirect effect of the stimuli on willingness to visit.

One ANCOVA showed that participants from UK reported a higher willingness to visit Kinderdijk after visiting webpages with congruent IND values ($M = 5.51, SE = .07$) than with incongruent COL values ($M = 5.12, SE = .07$). No difference was found for Portuguese participants. Consequently, Hypothesis 4 was partially supported.

Finally, two separate ANCOVAs revealed a significant direct positive effect of heritage interest on experience image ($F(1, 1027) = 115.548, p = .000, \eta_p^2 = .101$), and willingness to visit with experience image as covariate ($F(1, 1026) = 30.478, p = .000, \eta_p^2 = .029$). Therefore, hypothesis 5 was supported.

5.5 Conclusions

Overall, the findings of both studies suggest limited benefits (at best) of localizing cultural values in tourism heritage promotion. Study 1 did not support what hypothesized on localization effects. In fact, among the findings, we found a positive effect of incongruent (vs. congruent) PD values on willingness to visit among Portuguese participants, while no effect was found among British respondents. Study 2 indicated no effect of congruent (vs. incongruent) cultural values in terms of COL-IND and PD on destination experience image. On the other hand, providing partial support to one of the hypotheses, results from Study 2 indicated a positive effect among British respondents of localized IND values on willingness to visit Kinderdijk as recommended by the webpage, via a more positive destination experience image. Yet, no such effect was found among Portuguese respondents.

An explanation for this can lie in participants’ tolerance for incongruency, leading to a minimal influence of (congruent vs. incongruent) cultural values on travel preferences and intentions. Indeed, while respondents from both countries differed in their value preference for both COL-IND and PD, this did not affect their behavior in assessing their perceived image and willingness to visit Kinderdijk, even when it was promoted by emphasizing incongruent values.

Respondents' indifference toward cultural variation in advertising content (e.g. COL vs. IND) can be a consequence of larger European dynamics toward inclusive views that have been pushing individuals to accept cultural values that are different from their own (Hornikx & de Groot, 2017). Indeed, prospective tourists navigating the web are exposed to a variety of multimedia contents produced in culturally distant countries, as testified for example by cultural value differences in travel blogs (Lee & Gretzel, 2012) and tourism websites (Tigre Moura, Gnoth, & Deans, 2014). The plurality of cultures expressed by tourism online sources can thus have heightened the tolerance threshold toward incongruent cultural values, leading participants to also appreciate heritage tourism experiences that do not fit implicitly with their own value orientations – at least within a European context.

In line with our hypotheses, heritage interest had a direct positive effect on perceived image and willingness to visit in both Study 1 and Study 2. Yet, heritage interest did not have a positive moderating effect in either experiments. An explanation for this outcome can be that, when evaluating the dependent variables, British and Portuguese participants did not associate the *specific* manipulations to promote Kinderdijk with their *general* interest in heritage tourism, because from an affective and cognitive viewpoint heritage interest was too distant from the stimuli – hence, heritage interest did not enhance their effect on perceived image (in both studies) and willingness to visit. The same interpretation can apply to the lack of moderation on the relationship between perceived experience image and willingness to visit (Study 2), meaning participants' *general* interest in visiting cultural attractions did not make them more receptive toward Kinderdijk experience image.

The present article contributes to the body of cross-cultural tourism literature, by showing that the localization of cultural values has minimal effects on travel perceptions and intentions. These findings complement previous tourism research on localization. With reference to those who argue in favor of cultural novelty (incongruence) over familiarity (congruency) for destination websites (Tigre Moura, Gnoth, & Deans, 2014), this article provides evidence that participants from culturally distant countries do not prefer tourism websites displaying incongruent cultural values over those displaying congruent cultural values (and vice versa). For what regards research suggesting cultural adaptation benefits, this article critically questions the effectiveness of localizing cultural values to improve travelers' perceptions and intentions, at least within a European context.

This paper has two main managerial implications. Following our experimental findings, the present research suggests to heritage tourism marketers – within the European context – to emphasize the cultural values of their country in their online promotion to European markets, without allocating resources to prioritize cultural similarity for a “local feel” over cultural difference (and vice versa). This decision can lead to several advantages, such as reduced costs related to content production and distribution across channels; common standards (from a cultural value viewpoint) to promote heritage experiences to European markets; and integration of social media reviews regardless of the cultural orientation of the reference audience – as also Portuguese (high PD) respondents prefer peer reviews. On the other hand, as shown by the effect of covariates and heritage interest on perceived image and willingness to visit, this research further confirms that content adaptation should be based on audience’s demographics and psychographics rather than cultural (value) orientation.

As with other studies, this article presents limitations, which open the road for future research. To test the hypotheses and research questions, we retrieved participants from Prolific (2018). Despite its qualities and screening advantages compared to other platforms (Palan & Schitter, 2018), it may represent a limitation for the cultural representativeness of the samples from Portugal and UK. Future studies could use professional sample providers, as performed for example by Alcántara-Pilar et al. (2018). If collaborations with destination managers are possible, researchers could also monitor the actual behavior of online visitors browsing a real website, in combination with A/B testing strategies. Obtaining data from actual website visits would solve the limitation of ecological validity that an online experiment inevitably presents. Additionally, it would provide information about the time spent by each participant on the webpages – a metric that was not possible to monitor in this research and, consequently, it represented a limitation.

In terms of heritage interest, in the light of our research outcome, future studies should consider other moderators, like type of media, as done by Molinillo et al. (2018), whereby the manipulation would be presented in different ways and thus probably lead to a change in the relationship between stimuli and dependent variables.

In sum, our findings provide empirical evidence that the presence of cultural discrepancies within a European context does not support the choice of cultural value localization for heritage tourism promotion, showing stronger acceptance and resilience of prospective tourists toward

cultural differences. In the light of this striking finding, future research should explore whether the same conclusion applies to participants from more geographically distant markets.

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5.7 Disclosure statement

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5.9 Data deposition

The data that support the findings of this research are openly available in the Open Science Framework (OSF) at <https://osf.io/r523y/>. DOI: 10.17605/OSF.IO/R523Y

Chapter 6. Conclusion and discussion

What is the role of culture and cultural localization in online tourism promotion? Following the main pillars of the OCM (Tardini & Cantoni, 2015), the key findings of this dissertation can be discussed with reference to: web content and design (the objects), and to destination managers and online visitors (the people). Localization activities are performed and monitored by marketing managers (pillar III) to adapt online content (pillar I) and design (pillar II) according to the cultural background of the reference audience (pillar IV). While the findings of each study have been already resumed in their respective sections, this final chapter aims at providing a more comprehensive view; connecting the dots in a narrative whose protagonist is culture, a *hot* topic in tourism – to paraphrase Egberts and Bosma (2014) – whose importance will not fade any time soon.

6.1 Localization of web content and design

Are cultural orientations reflected online and what is the process of localization? Chapter 2 presented localization as a set of practices that could be used by destination stakeholders to tackle cultural differences in online communication and promotion. Localization appears to be part of a process that starts from a (1) “globalization phase” – when a company or organization discusses the creation of a communication channel, such as a website or Instagram page – and then goes through a series of steps that involve the engineering and organization to direct these channels to key international markets – the (2) “internationalization phase” – to (3) localization activities and, lastly, the (4) translation of textual content.

Main localization activities identified in the chapter included the adaptation of visuals and embedded text to propose experiences that resonate with individualist or, instead, collectivist orientations – depending on the IP address of the person accessing the website. For example, the first orientation could be expressed by an image showing individual travelers exploring the rugged Irish coastline, along with a message inviting readers to live the adventure. Instead, collectivist cues could be conveyed by a series of images depicting a happy family with children visiting the main attractions in Dublin (Chapter 2). Apart from resonating with the COL-IND dimension description (Hofstede, Hofstede, & Minkov, 2010), such content choice finds support also from a study on tourism

photography (Stepchenkova, Kim, & Kirilenko, 2014), whose findings show that US-American visitors – representing an individualist culture – take pictures of off-the-beaten-track, adventurous locations in Russia; whereas Korean travelers – representing a collectivist culture – focus on main Russian attractions and popular (crowded) areas.

Another localization practice consists of modulating the level of granularity of textual content promoting heritage destinations or attractions according to the cultural background and proximity of the reference audience. From a communication perspective, information granularity can be defined as the relative scale, size and level of detail (depth) of content describing an object. Arguably, a refined (high) information granularity about specific objects (e.g., cultural attractions) can be more interesting for those who have the appropriate cultural background to process it. Thus, for example, the Hohensalzburg fortress and Hellbrunn castle (in Salzburg, Austria) promoted to Italian online visitors become “churches, castles and palaces” for US-American readers – along with an ad-hoc highlight on how *old* these attractions are (Chapter 2).

Overall, the analysis conducted in this first chapter expanded the existing literature on localization in tourism (Tigre Moura, Singh, & Chun, 2016), by illustrating examples of cultural adaptation activities, along with a discussion on the possible negative effects of over-localization on the attractiveness and perceived uniqueness of the destination. Furthermore, the study set the base for the following research on analysis and adaptation of cultural values in tourism promotion.

As localization activities in tourism marketing are a response to cultural differences, it is arguably relevant to understand whether such differences still exist online; what themes convey certain cultural cues as well as (visually) how these are communicated. One way of doing this is by operationalizing and analyzing cultural values in web content – a practice that is part of the first type of localization presented above. Adopting this approach, Chapter 3 explored whether heritage tourism promotion varied across cultures, by content-analyzing the Instagram posts of the NTOs from four culturally different destinations: US-America, Netherlands, Chile and Portugal. Findings showed that cultural orientations were largely reflected in heritage tourism promotion on Instagram. As expected, images differed in terms of IND (see example, **Figure 6.1**) – except for Dutch posts, which had a non-significant relationship with this dimension – and post captions reflected the HC-LC orientation theorized by Hall (1976). In terms of PD, only Chilean captions had a positive relationship with this dimension; whereas the other destinations did not differ. Lastly, neither images

nor captions had a significant association with collectivist cues. Such discrepancy with Hofstede's et al. (2010) theory could be explained by the overall individualist, self-centered orientation of Instagram (Ekman & Widholm, 2017; Lee, Lee, Moon, & Sung, 2015) – resulting in some destinations being less individualist than others (in terms of communication), but still relatively individualist.

In this regard, it is important to mention that the lack of difference among the destinations in terms of collectivist cues (for both images and text) was arguably a sign of the influence of the channel (Instagram) on the content. Addressing this dynamic, McLuhan (1964) coined the expression “the medium is the message” (p. 126), which exemplified the importance that platforms should have for communication researchers. In other words, the inherently individualistic traits of Instagram – a platform that is focused on self-expression – appear to have emerged and affected the cultural cues (in terms of COL-IND) analyzed in manual content analysis in Chapter 3. In addition, it is important to mention that the medium was not the only force – apart from cultural background – influencing the visual and textual content. Indeed, benchmarking was arguably another agent affecting the choice of content published by the national tourism organizations – something that emerged more clearly in the automated content analysis (see below). Such a competition of forces did not diminish the importance of the influence of cultural orientation on online communication in tourism; instead, it simply reflected a complex and rich reality where culture was not the only player. This notwithstanding, our exploratory content analysis did indicate that cultural background often surpassed the other forces showing, for instance, the varying emphasis of individualist cues in pictures or the varying directness of speech in post captions.

In addition, the cultural differences we found among the destinations – especially for the manual analysis – were reflecting Hofstede's et al. (2010) and Hall's (1976) theories, arguably indicating that the detected cultural cues were mirroring the cultural orientation of the sender (the national tourism organization) instead of the cultural orientation of a possible international receiver. Furthermore, the fact that the destinations only used one Instagram account – the international one – was arguably a good indicator that the content addressed to the broadest possible audience – hence, no specific geographical market that could be used by the national tourism organization to culturally adapt content promoting heritage tourism. Consequently, this resulted in multimedia content that reflected the value of the destination (the receiver). The only exception was Chile, which had two

Instagram handles – one for the domestic audience and one for a global audience. Yet, the international account was the most active one, with captions translated also in Spanish in a clear attempt to grasp also the attention of the domestic audience (Section 3.3.1). Therefore, its content was arguably comparable (from a cultural viewpoint) to the one published by the other national tourism organizations considered in the study.

Figure 6.1. Example of Instagram post with individualist cues in both image and caption.



The automated content analysis of Instagram post captions conducted in Chapter 3 also showed that cultural orientations (categorized as COL vs. IND) were related to 10 (out of 12) linguistic categories, with most of them going toward the expected direction – except for the plural first-person pronoun “we”, whose score was higher for IND (vs. COL). The automated content analysis also included the categorical variable “Geography” (Americas vs. Europe) to better isolate the effect of culture on the designated dependent variables. While reporting here all the findings would be out of scope, it is important to discuss the main ones. Overall, the automated content analysis – using the software LIWC2015 (Pennebaker, Boyd, Jordan, & Blackburn, 2015) – revealed

that cultural orientation could predict changes in linguistic styles and these could be explained from a cultural perspective. Furthermore, the direct as well as interaction effects of Geography indicated the presence of other factors, such as the co-existence of a pan-European culture (Hornikx & de Groot, 2017), benchmarking practices – to imitate the style of destinations from the same region – and idiosyncrasies. The latter, for instance, was evident in the case of Dutch posts, which made abundant use of the pronoun “we” – possibly following the organization’s guideline. Lastly, the direct effect of Geography on PD-related linguistic variables could also explain why we did not find a difference in the manual analysis for most destinations along this dimension – namely, benchmarking or a pan-European culture possibly overshadowed the cultural orientation.

The co-existence of national cultures with other forces is not surprising, as the cultural difference between countries theorized by Hofstede et al. (2010) does not exclude the presence of other factors at macro- or micro-level – as stated by the same scholars. Consequently, given the presence of cultural differences in (heritage) tourism promotion on Instagram, what is the approach of destination marketing managers toward this phenomenon? If localization activities are undertaken, what is their effect on online visitor’s perceptions and intentions?

6.2 Localization activities: supply and demand

The analysis of cross-cultural differences in heritage tourism promotion showed that cultural orientations had a role in influencing the choice of visuals – at least in terms of individualist cues – and communication styles in captions. From a theoretical perspective, such findings arguably provided support to the importance of accounting for cultural orientations in international marketing of tourism destinations. Addressing this aspect, Chapter 4 explored the supply side of localization by directly asking destination marketers about it.

Interviews were conducted with representatives from 11 NTOs, members of the European Travel Commission (ETC). Almost all participants – except for one – declared that their organization was performing some form of cultural adaptation activity when addressing international key audiences. The study also revealed that NTO headquarters kept a close collaboration with the offices abroad to elaborate culturally appropriate content for strategic markets – with teams working together to elaborate appealing website and social media content. The three most frequent forms of cultural adaptation addressed text, themes and visuals (**Figure 4.3**). Among the activities, the localization of

cultural values appeared as a result of sharing or delegating decisions regarding multimedia content to the local offices. Prototypical examples of this are **Figure 2.4** and **Figure 2.5** for the Chinese and US-American audience respectively. From a connotative viewpoint, the former is highlighting collective experiences in Dublin (Ireland) with a cartoon, balancing the happy-looking family with the points of interest in the background. Instead, the latter arguably emphasizes individualist cues, like self-reliance.

Finally, the interviews revealed that the effectiveness of localization activities – like any other strategy involving online content – were mostly measured with A/B tests (with both organic and paid content) using tools like Google Analytics to measure dependent variables, such as click-through rate, user flow and page traffic.

Given the popularity of Hofstede's et al. (2010) cultural dimensions and the general interest in localization practices, Chapter 5 addressed the effects of adapting cultural values – one of the possible localization practices – on British and Portuguese respondents' perceived image and willingness to visit Kinderdijk, a UNESCO (built) heritage site in the Netherlands. Two highly powered experiments were conducted following a between-subject design, 2 (COL vs. IND) \times 2 (high PD vs low PD) \times 2 (Country: Portugal vs. UK). Even though participants correctly recognized the cultural cues of the experimental webpages (**Figure 9.1**, **Figure 9.2**) in the manipulation checks, findings showed limited benefits (at best) of localizing cultural values in heritage tourism promotion. Considering the previous chapters, what are the main theoretical and managerial implications of such findings?

6.3 Theoretical and managerial implications

From a theoretical perspective, first, the findings from Chapter 5 suggest that the exclusive localization of cultural values has little effects on online visitors' intentions. A plausible explanation for such outcome can be the co-existence of a pan-European culture overshadowing cultural value preferences; along with online visitors being used to exploring content produced by people with a different cultural background (see section 5.5). In other words, the adaptation of cultural values *alone* seems to be too subtle to provoke a significant change in perceptions and intentions – even when those refer to the very heritage tourism experiences that have been manipulated in the experiment. Second, our research shows that fully localized webpages – both in terms of COL-IND and PD – do

not lead to a negative perceived image or lower willingness to visit. Therefore, despite their intuitiveness, the arguments by Tigre Moura et al. (2014) on the negative effects of localization on visitors' perceived novelty – in favor of the “dull” cultural familiarity – do not find empirical support. In addition, the hypothesized positive effects of localizing cultural values within the context of European tourism are not confirmed either. Most importantly, this does not imply that investigating the presence of cultural value differences on the web has no theoretical relevance. Instead, it suggests researchers to focus on destinations that belong to culturally different, geographically distant regions – for whom localizing cultural values may have greater effects. Lastly, within the debate over standardization versus localization (Liu, Guillet, Xiao, & Law, 2014), overall, this PhD dissertation provides support for the latter in destination marketing – especially when considering the presence of cultural differences in tourism promotion on social media and the importance assigned to localization by destination marketers. On the other side, important thresholds have been identified for what concerns participants tolerance toward incongruent cultural values – at least within a European context – and over-localization issues – that is, when cultural familiarity (congruency) overshadows the novelty and uniqueness of the destination (Section 2.5) making it appear less interesting in the mind of the online visitor.

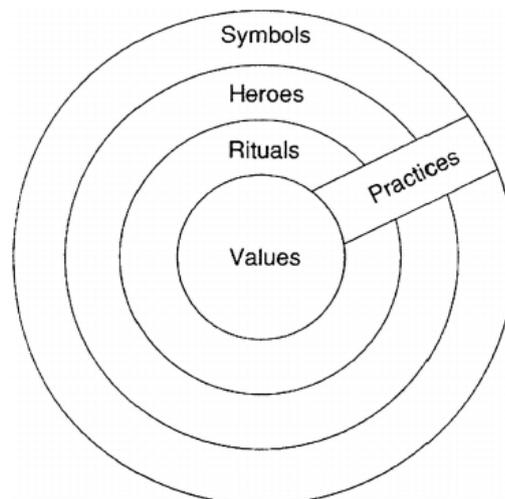
From a broader theoretical perspective, what is the overall contribution of this PhD thesis to Hofstede's et al. (2010) theory of culture? This popular (as well as criticized) theory places cultural values at the center of a system or “onion” (**Figure 6.2**), which is composed by concentric layers – from the most visible (the outer circle) to the hidden one (the core). These are the symbols, heroes, rituals that compose the practices of a society, which are built upon long-lasting values. Such a relationship could be observed especially in Chapter 3, where experiences involving cultural heritage attractions (e.g., statues of heroes, who become symbols) not only conveyed certain cultural cues, but were also communicated *through* different linguistic styles associated with specific cultural orientations.

Consequently, on the one side, the present dissertation suggests that the persistence of cultural values applies also to tourism promotion on social media, and that cultural values are associated with specific image mise en scene and linguistic dimensions. On the other side, our findings – including the experimental research in Chapter 5 – enrich Hofstede's et al. (2010) theory also by indicating that cultural value orientations do not always result in preferences for culturally

congruent or incongruent communication; therefore additional factors, like geography, should be considered when testing cultural theories in tourism.

For what concerns Hall's (1976) theory of culture, the present dissertation – Chapter 3 in particular – suggests the importance of using the dimension of HC vs. LC communication to explore linguistic preferences in tourism promotion on social media. Thus, from a methodological viewpoint, our research moves dimensions that were meant to measure differences in the offline world to tourism websites and multimedia content on web 2.0 platforms, like Instagram – where automated content analysis can come to aid. Overall, it seems that the Internet has not become the “global village” of the theorist Marshall McLuhan, which blends together space and time into something universal (Srinivasan, 2017). Instead, it still reflects the cultural values theorized by these anthropologists, as also shown by social media research from a demand perspective (e.g., Goodrich & de Mooij, 2014). In other words, these platforms do not appear to be neutral, but socially constructed; similarly, scholars as well as practitioners should always strive toward technologies that consider differences in practices, beliefs and values within an inclusive and pluralist view – instead of viewing the future of technology within a sort of homogeneous universality detached from societies.

Figure 6.2. The “onion” metaphor of culture.



From a managerial perspective, the findings of this PhD dissertation invite destination marketers to carefully consider cultural differences within international marketing strategies. In terms of online promotion – following Chapter 3 and Chapter 4 – it is recommended to adapt destination

themes in a way that resonates with the cultural background of the reference audience. For instance, Instagram or Facebook posts for US-Americans about Cold War heritage in Germany could highlight the dramatic past events that the two have shared. Given the relevance of social networks for museum promotion, Dutch posts for the Italian market could emphasize, for example, the mutual influence that the two countries had for what concerns artistic painting. Lastly, the localization of destination themes can be elaborated also by highlighting positive stereotypes and it should include – whenever applicable – the adaptation of units of measure, laws (e.g., visa information) and other practical elements that would otherwise be inappropriate or less interesting for a certain international audience (for more information, Chapter 2).

This more tailored communication can be done in multiple ways. The first and most straightforward one is to launch paid social media campaigns addressing people who are from a specific geographical market and have already viewed, interacted with the content published by the destination marketing organization. The campaign can then be extended to audiences that have similar interests – keeping constant the geographical location. Another way of localizing communication on social media is the creation of multiple accounts, one for each key geographical market. This allows marketing managers to publish tailored organic content – even though in this case there is no real control over the audience – and have better control over paid campaigns connected to a specific account. The latter is especially relevant for markets with different languages, which require the adaptation of post captions, including hashtags.

Moving from social media to websites, one common technique for destination marketing organizations is to change the website version depending on the IP address of the online visitor. This allows the website to display content that is tailored for the cultural background of a specific geographical market. The visitor has then the possibility to change the country (and the language) if she / he accesses from a hotel, for instance. Certainly, also this technique has its limitations, including the fact that visitors may be fluent in different languages – and therefore they will not consider changing website version – or may leave the website entirely because they do not understand the language at all (e.g., a tourist accessing the website from the hotel at the destination).

Notwithstanding the limitations, such an approach to cultural tourism promotion can make heritage relatable, interesting and *alive* – arguably leading to greater interaction on social media and, ultimately, to increasing visits. Such recommendations extend those provided by other experts in the

tourism field on the importance of heritage revival (Egberts & Bosma, 2014), a project that envisages to engage people from different backgrounds using multiple media – before the tourism experience as well as on site.

The localization of themes, leveraging on certain symbols and heroes, addresses the more external, visible layers of culture (**Figure 6.2**), which constitute the practices of a society (Hofstede, Hofstede, & Minkov, 2010). Following the findings of this PhD dissertation, destination managers should also address the core element of the “cultural onion” – meaning, the cultural values – by adapting their social media content in terms of self- versus group-oriented experiences (COL vs. IND) and “hard” sell, fact-based promotion versus “soft” sell, relationship-based communication (HC vs. LC). In this regard, Chapter 3 shows that heritage tourism promotion varies across culturally distant destinations, thus highlighting the importance of adapting content for geographically and culturally distant markets. Lastly, following the findings of Chapter 5, it is advised to avoid localizing cultural values within the context of European tourism, as experimental data show little benefits (at best) of this practice in (heritage) tourism promotion. In this case, a more standardized approach would be recommended – that is, keeping the cultural orientation of the destination.

Localization is undoubtedly a costly activity (more costly than a standardized approach to communication), therefore it should be avoided where a return on investment cannot be clearly observed. Yet, also the measurement of its effectiveness can be challenging, as the goal of the online promotion of any attraction or destination is to get actual visitors, and this cannot be directly measured. This notwithstanding, interviews with destination marketing managers (Chapter 3) revealed multiple ways to measure the effects of cultural adapted content, using key performance indicators that measure the engagement of the addressed audience, for example, before and after an intervention on a webpage. In this regard, according to the interviewees, culturally adapted web content gains more visibility in search engine results and it is also perceived as more appealing by online visitors – something that should justify localization over standardization, despite its costs.

In conclusion, the stiff competition of the online environment requires DMOs to carefully design marketing and communication plans to address strategic markets. The findings of this PhD dissertation can thus be used by destination managers to make more conscious decisions regarding content copywriting for international online visitors on various channels. The recognized importance of social media also warrants further studies on the effectiveness of cultural localization in terms of

post liking and persuasiveness. Starting from this claim, future research directions are outlined in the following section.

6.4 Limitations and future research

The identification of limitations in scientific research is important as it indicates future research directions. As this is a cumulative dissertation, each article has its limitations in its dedicated section. Nevertheless, it is important to underline here that possibly the main limitation of this whole research project is the focus on Hofstede's et al. (2010) theory of culture and cultural values. On the one side, the concept of national culture (and its components) is undoubtedly suitable for a more quantitative approach to the analysis of cultural differences on the web (see section 5.2.1) – hence its popularity. On the other side, the scholars' approach to culture has been criticized for being simplistic, reducing a country to a “single” cultural expression ignoring internal differences (see for example, Jones, 2007). Thus, future communication and marketing research could explore the theories developed by Schwartz (2006) or Triandis, whose tightness-looseness distinction arguably provides a more nuanced understanding of cross-cultural differences in consumer behavior (Torelli & Rodas, 2017). Furthermore, considering the limitations of the present dissertation and tourism trends, two additional future research directions have been identified:

- *Analysis and use of stereotypes on social media.* Stereotypical images related to tourism can be found both in brochures and on the web. As these constructs can provide cues about tourism imaginaries (Gravari-Barbas, 2019) and cultural differences (Bender, Gidlow, & Fisher, 2013), first, it would be interesting to critically analyze their characteristics and limitations – also observing different destinations. Second, given their use in marketing, it would be relevant to measure the effect of localized ads in terms of information granularity (high vs low), which includes positive stereotypes – as low granularity is (also) about simplifying the image of a destination, its culture and history. Given the relevance of social networks in tourism, it is suggested to conduct such experiments within the context of social media.
- *Cultural differences in tourism narratives.* The promotion of destinations relies heavily on narratives of places, highlighting their heritage and uniqueness (Egberts & Hundstad, 2019). Given the transborder presence of several UNESCO World heritages attractions (e.g., the Wadden Sea) and the environmental changes affecting natural resources, it would be interesting to explore from a qualitative standpoint how these are communicated and promoted both off- and on-line from a cross-cultural perspective. Such research would not only shed light on current strategies for the promotion of heritage, but it would also provide information on the underlying cultural dynamics contributing to the imaginary of these unique locations.

Lastly, future research using a cross-cultural perspective should have a focus on visuals, for their relevance in tourism promotion and imaginary. In this regard, automated content analysis of social media pictures appears to be one important way forward, allowing for the examination of larger samples as well as triggering the collaboration between researchers from different fields of expertise.

7. Annex - A framework to analyze cultural values in online tourism visuals of European destinations⁷

Abstract

Images play a crucial role in inspiring and informing travelers throughout the tourism experience. Due to this, destination management/marketing organizations (DMOs) do their best to provide visually rich websites and mobile applications. Among the factors guiding online communication choices, cultural values influence the selection and use of website design and multimedia contents. While several strategies are available to measure cultural values offline and online, so far, no consistent framework has accounted for the visual style of cultural categories in the tourism domain, especially within the European context. Addressing this research gap, the aim of this article is to propose a framework for the visual analysis of cultural values in the context of European destinations, also discussing the relation among values, visual content and visual style. The final model results from the combination of existing theories of visual semiotics and cross-cultural communication with bottom-up data from the semiotic analysis of 95 pictures from UK and Portuguese DMO websites.

Keywords: Cultural Categories, Cultural Dimensions, Destination Marketing Organization, Destination Website, Portugal, Qualitative Analysis, Tourism Pictures, United Kingdom

⁷ This research served as basis to elaborate the framework for the study in Chapter 3 and to elaborate the experimental conditions for the study in Chapter 5. This chapter is published as: Mele, E., & Lobinger, K. (2018). A framework to analyze cultural values in online tourism visuals of European destinations. *International Journal of Semiotics and Visual Rhetoric (IJSVR)*, 2(2), 41-56. doi:10.4018/IJSVR.2018070103.

7.1 Introduction

Photography and tourism have always been intrinsically connected (Urry & Larsen, 2011). Since its origins, photography has influenced travelers' imaginary and expectations, also influencing their willingness to travel (Garrod, 2008). With the shift to the web 2.0 (O'Reilly, 2009), websites allow for greater interactivity (Xiang, Magnini, & Fesenmaier, 2015) and the possibility of integrating multimedia contents including pictures and videos (Wirtz, Schilke, & Ullrich, 2010).

In addition to being extremely useful to travelers, who get inspiration and information, visual communication also helps tourism marketers promote and shape the identity of the destination online (Hallett & Kaplan-Weinger, 2010). As for offline promotional material, such as commercials and tourism guides, cultural values are also conveyed in online communication (Tigre Moura, Gnoth, & Deans, 2014). These represent the core of any culture and consists of "broad tendencies to prefer certain states of affairs over others" (Hofstede, Hofstede, & Minkov, 2010, p. 9). In terms of visual communication, for instance, cultural values can be expressed by the choice of a certain location in tourism pictures (Stepchenkova, Kim, & Kirilenko, 2014) or by the type of portrayed activities (Mele & Cantoni, 2018). Studies in the tourism domain highlight the importance of examining culture-bound preferences in messages directed to international and local visitors (for example, Mele, De Ascaniis, & Cantoni, 2016; Cho & Sung, 2012). Providing an important contribution, Singh et al. (2003) propose a model for the analysis of cultural values in international companies' websites, which was later adapted to the tourism domain by Tigre Moura et al. (2014). However, more research is needed to acknowledge specifically the cultural values in tourism photography (Stepchenkova, Kim, & Kirilenko, 2014) and to account for the underlying meanings held by different visual styles (Lobinger & Brantner, 2015; Harrison, 2003; Bell & Milic, 2002; Cho, Kwon, Gentry, Jun, & Kropp, 1999). The analysis of cultural practices and values is especially relevant in European countries (Hornikx & de Groot, 2017; Kolman, Noorderhaven, Hofstede, & Dienes, 2003), as they are connected by strong cultural, economic and political ties to one overarching European identity, while preserving their national cultures and traditions (Gursoy & Umbreit, 2004).

Contributing to this body of research, the present study proposes a framework for the visual analysis of cultural values in the context of European destinations, including a discussion on the relation among values, visual contents (the "what") and visual styles (the "how"). The model is

developed from an extensive review of visual semiotics and cross-cultural communication research, combined with bottom-up data from the semiotic analysis of 95 pictures of two UK and four Portuguese DMO websites. Using Hofstede's et al. (2010) and Hall's (1976) dimensions, the resulting framework provides not only information related to what pictorial contents contribute to conveying certain cultural values, but also how chosen visual styles contribute to the process. As such, the model lays the basis to future research investigating and measuring the expression of cultural values in the tourism domain, within the European context. Theoretical implications for future research and limitations are discussed at the end.

7.2 Background

7.2.1 Visual semiotics and visual communication in tourism

The symbolic and representational role of photographs, along with their influence on memory, are among the most important aspects that connect photography to tourism (Lo, McKercher, Lo, Cheung, & Law, 2011). Chalfen (1979) argues that the camera allows tourists to document their experiences and to filter the connection with the unusual and exotic. Thus, photographers impose their preferences on what and on how something should be captured, making photographs the result of an active signifying practice that affects the visual construction and representation of destinations (Urry & Larsen, 2011). In this way, travelers become the “unsung armies of semiotics” (Culler, 1990, p. 2) that constitute tourism: a fundamentally semiotic industry, where an important part of the consumption regards goods like images, lifestyles, and memories (Thurlow & Jaworski, 2011). For this reason, images can be addressed as complex sign systems that represent the destination (Francesconi, 2014) as well as reflect cultural differences of the tourists themselves (Stepchenkova, Kim, & Kirilenko, 2014).

Images and texts in travel guidebooks are closely related to tourists' expectations and future satisfaction, influencing their willingness to travel (Wong & Liu, 2011). In this regard, it is also important to acknowledge that the search for appealing photographs in official communication channels can have undesired effects (Andsager & Drzewiecka, 2002). Andsager and Drzewiecka (2002) illustrate that pictures in guidebooks and other promotional materials often lead to the creation of stereotypes about destinations, condensing and exaggerating their characteristics. Proposing a

more positive approach to stereotypes, Bender et al. (2013) suggest that tourism clichés and national stereotypes can provide security, orientation, and serve as memories to be brought home like souvenirs. In addition to that, pictures can facilitate the understanding of a culture by reflecting (and co-constructing) “the average” style of its members. Examining official tourism websites, Hallett and Kaplan-Weinger (2010) observe that the need for simplification resides in the willingness of creating a national identity for the destination. The scholars illustrate that metaphors, *mise en scène*, and interaction with pictures can in fact convey a message of unification for the country, while (at the same time) promoting its attractions.

The underlying meanings of specific visual styles and characteristics have been explored in a variety of contexts by researchers in visual semiotics and visual communication. A study by Mullen (1998) uses Hall’s (1963) concept of proximity, defined as the “the perceived closeness of the photographed subject” (Mullen, 1998, p. 4), and identifies three basic proximal categories: close-up, medium, and long (far away) shot. Within the context of US-American politics, findings show that close-ups can increase the relevance of the subject as well as evoke a more emotional response in viewers – who find themselves at an intimate distance with the potential interlocutor. Similarly, research by Lobinger and Brantner (2015) shows that camera angle (as part of the representational techniques), together with photographic setting, and human interaction also play an important role in shaping favorable or unfavorable perceptions of the depicted persons.

Kress and Van Leeuwen (2006) describe similar clusters of visual representation, outlining three principal dimensions of visual semiosis: representation, interaction and layout dimensions. The representational dimension divides images depending on whether they depict narrative or conceptual processes. While the former focuses on actions undertaken by subjects (“who act”), the latter highlights certain subjects’ attributes (“who are”) or de-emphasizes the concrete detail of the image to achieve a stronger symbolic meaning. The interactional dimension is structured following the gaze, distance, and angle of the subjects. A direct look at viewers invites them to enter an imaginary relation with participants, while lack of eye contact represents an offer to join the situation as an invisible observer. Within the interactional dimension, the concept of “distance” is marked by what viewers can see of the subjects and it relates to proximity and proxemics discussed by Hall (1963). This includes the angle of view, with its implications in terms of power relations (e.g. a high angle may

induce disempowerment) (Bell & Milic, 2002). Finally, the layout dimension of analysis refers to subjects' disposition within frames of vertical or horizontal commercials.

Within the tourism domain, Pan et al. (2014) propose four dimensions to analyze the *mise en scène* of DMOs' photographs: scale, density, composition and angle. As illustrated by the authors, "scale" refers to the distance between viewers and subjects, from extremely long to close-up shots. The second dimension (density) refers to the amount of information presented in the picture and it generally increases with composition (i.e., number of portrayed subjects) and overall level of detail. For example, images with stark density (or texture) have typically one or no subjects, underlining feelings like solitude or emphasizing the relevance of the environment – also achieved in long shots. Finally, the "angle" dimension identifies the viewpoint of the photographer from bird eye to low level. Pictures emphasizing the subjects privilege eye-level angle, which may increase interaction and appear as less manipulated or "objective" to viewers. Addressing precisely the issue of objectivity, Pritchard and Morgan (2001) argue that representations used in destination marketing are not value-free responses to the external environment. Instead, they result from historical, social economic and political processes, revealing "the social construction of space, cultural change, identity and discourse" (p. 177). This strategy flows within the narration of national culture (Hall, 1996), which contributes to the establishment of a unique identity for the destination.

7.2.2 Defining (and examining) culture and cultural values

According to Danesi (2008), successful marketing raises products and services to the level of signs, linking them to cultural layers of the reference audience, like cultural traditions, values, and rituals. Addressing the cultural construct, Kroeber and Kluckhohn (1952) provide more than one hundred definitions of it, which share two common points (Danesi & Perron, 1999, p. 22): (1) culture is a way of life based on a system of shared meanings and (2) it is transferred across generations via this very system. In the present study, culture is thus defined as "the collective programming of the mind that distinguishes the members of one group [...] from others" (Hofstede, Hofstede, & Minkov, 2010, p. 6).

According to Hofstede and colleagues, relative cultural differences can be observed at the national level along a series of cultural values, representing the core of such collective programming. These are measured on the so-called "dimensions of cultures" (Hofstede, Hofstede, & Minkov, 2010,

p. 31) or cultural dimensions. Along the years, the relevance of national cultures has been highly criticized (Shiaq, Khalid, Akram, & Ali, 2011; Jones, 2007; Ess & Sudweeks, 2006). Nevertheless, research shows that countries cluster at the national level along a series of basic cultural values, underlining the existence of cultural differences among countries and their relevance for research (Minkov & Hofstede, 2011). In addition, Hofstede's et al. (2010) dimensions provide a powerful way to examine cultural values as shown by their wide use in marketing research (Saleem & Larimo, 2017; Zhang & Nelson, 2016; Samaha, Beck, & Palmatier, 2014).

Due to their relevance in previous analyses of cultural values in online communication (Tigre Moura, Gnoth, & Deans, 2014; Würtz, 2005; Singh, Zhao, & Hu, 2003), this research focuses on three cultural dimensions by Hofstede et al. (2010) – *Collectivism/Individualism* (COL/IND), *Power Distance* (PD), and *Uncertainty Avoidance* (UA) – and one dimension developed by Hall (1976) – *High Context/Low Context* (HC/LC). The first dimension (COL/IND) describes the degree of interdependence among society members. Collectivist cultures favor bonds with cohesive in-groups, composed by extended families and close friends. As opposite, people from individualist societies are supposed to look after themselves and their immediate family (Hofstede, Hofstede, & Minkov, 2010). From a tourism perspective, collectivist values can be conveyed by emphasizing family, group and community activities. Differently, contents highlighting freedom and independence can be more strongly related to individualist values (Tigre Moura, Gnoth, & Deans, 2014). The PD dimension describes the extent to which societies accept and expect power differences among their members (Hofstede, Hofstede, & Minkov, 2010). Research connects high PD values to the purchase of prestige goods (Park & Reisinger, 2009), higher relevance of popular individuals (Garcia-Gavilanes, Quercia, & Jaimes, 2013) and celebrity endorsement in commercials (Schaefer, Parker, & Kent, 2010). The UA dimension describes the extent to which individuals are comfortable with uncertainty in their lives. Members of high UA cultures tend to feel uncomfortable with novelty and ambiguous situations. As opposite, low UA individuals tend to consider what is new or unfamiliar as a normal feature of life (Hofstede, Hofstede, & Minkov, 2010). Scholars show the relevance of pictures to tangibilize (and clarify) destination services (Mariarcher, Ring, & Schneider, 2013) and the variation across cultures of visual communication strategies to cope with uncertainty (An, 2014). Research suggests emphasizing intangible aspects of products or services like harmony and education when promoting to HC cultures (Men & Tsai, 2012). Whereas, more direct

communication strategies leveraging on service price and qualities are preferred by LC individuals (An, 2014).

Despite the growing body of research addressing cross-cultural issues in the tourism domain, studies focusing on visual representations are still needed (Hunter, 2016; Pan, Lee, & Tsai, 2014; Stepchenkova, Kim, & Kirilenko, 2014) – especially those addressing the European context (Hornikx & de Groot, 2017; Gursoy & Umbreit, 2004). In this regard, the genuine features of the visual mode that have been discussed extensively in visual semiotics and their implications for meaning making (Rose, 2016; Holsanova, 2012) need to be acknowledged (Rose, 2016; Lobinger, 2012; Müller, 2007). Particularly, in visual communication, cultural values are expressed by how something is depicted in terms of composition, style and aesthetics, and not only by what is depicted as motifs (Würtz, 2005; Cho, Kwon, Gentry, Jun, & Kropp, 1999). Contributing to this body of literature, the present research proposes a framework for the analysis and measurement of cultural values in pictures of European destination websites, suggesting not only what contents can convey certain values, but also how the visual style can contribute and strengthen such process.

7.3 Method

In this study, a deductive development of a preliminary framework for the analysis of cultural values in European tourism photography was derived from theory and empirical studies in visual semiotics, visual communication and tourism. The decision of combining deductive and inductive reasoning resides in the advantages that can arise from their synergy. For instance, a study by Fereday and Muir-Cochrane (2006) underscores the possibility of integrating theoretical tenets with the a-priori choice of existing frameworks, while allowing themes to emerge directly from the analyzed data using inductive coding.

The qualitative inductive analysis of 95 pictures taken from DMO websites allowed for an improvement and refinement of the final framework until reaching theoretical saturation of the categories. From a deductive analysis comprising Hofstede's et al. (2010) and Hall's (1976) cultural theories, along with previous studies on the analysis of cultural values in online communication, the following cultural dimensions were chosen as the starting points of the framework: COL/IND, PD, UA, and HC/LC. During the operationalization, they were further subdivided into multiple categories based on existing research (see section 7.2.2), to enable the semiotic analysis of tourism pictures. In

addition to connecting certain themes or subjects to each cultural dimension, these were also linked to typical representational dimensions in terms of *mise en scène*, dynamism, and viewer interaction. Following the literature (see above), the representation dimension of *mise en scène* was divided into image scale, angle, density, and composition. People or objects represented in pictures were also analyzed in terms of dynamism. Already presented by Kress and Van Leeuwen (2006), image dynamism accounted for variations in terms of active or static representations in combination with the expression of specific values. Finally, drawing on the same scholars' theories, pictures were also analyzed in terms of interaction between subjects and viewers. More precisely, depending on eye contact and position of the subjects, viewers were described as participants (strongest interaction), spectators (medium interaction) or observers (weakest interaction). In this regard, it was suggested that, regardless of eye contact, interaction would diminish with the increase of distance between subjects and viewers – the latter becoming observers of the scene when subjects were positioned at medium long, long, or extremely long distance. **Table 7.1** provides an overview of such representational dimensions.

Using the leading heritage organization Europa Nostra (2018) as reference point for the European market, official tourism websites from destinations in UK (n = 2) and in Portugal (n = 4) were selected to conduct the bottom-up analysis: Visit London (n.d.), Visit Bath (2018), Turismo de Coimbra (n.d.), Centro de Portugal (2018), Visit Lisboa (n.d.), and Visit Açores (2018). Within the European area, their selection was based on their relative cultural distance, also highlighted by previous research on cross-cultural behavior (Amaro & Duarte, 2017; Goodrich & de Mooij, 2014). Indeed, according to Hofstede's et al. (2010) cultural scores, Portugal is one of the most collectivist European countries (cultural score 27) and the second most uncertainty avoidant culture in the world (cultural score 104). As opposite, UK is the third most individualist country internationally (cultural score 89) and it is among the lowest in terms of UA (cultural score 35). Differences are evident also in terms of PD, where Portugal and UK have cultural scores of 63 (high PD) and 35 (low PD) respectively. In addition, Portugal is described as a HC culture, where an important part of communication happens via subtle cues and nonverbal language (Nielsen, Soares, & Machado, 2009), whereas UK privileges the direct and succinct LC communication patterns (An, 2014). The choice of culturally distant countries was meant to reach a large degree of cultural variation in terms of photographic representation of European destinations and the consequent refinement of the

framework. Consequently, it is important to specify that such analysis did not aim at characterizing and measuring actual cultural differences between UK and Portuguese websites.

Table 7.1. Dimensions of visual style.

	Visual Category	Description
Mise en Scène	Scale	Extremely long, long, medium long, medium, medium close-up, or close-up
	Angle	Bird eye, high, eye level, or low
	Density	Stark, moderate, or highly detailed
	Composition	Number of people in a picture: none, single, two, three, four or more
Image dynamism	Active	Pictures portraying an action being performed by subjects
	Static	Pictures portraying still objects, landscapes or posing subjects
Viewer interaction	Participant	Subjects looking directly at viewers from medium, medium close-up or close-up distance with eye-level angle; direct viewer personification by showing only one body part of subjects performing an action from their perspective (e.g., a hand validating a card)
	Spectator	Viewers observing subjects from medium, medium close-up or close-up distance, with no eye contact or direct personification
	Observer	Subjects are at medium long, long or extremely long distance from viewers

To perform a semiotic analysis of images expressing local cultural values, the research was conducted on the local-language versions (in English and Portuguese respectively) of the selected websites. The different number of websites per country was owed to the relevance of examining a comparable number of images from both Portugal (n = 46) and UK (n = 49). In fact, the selected DMO websites in UK appeared to be more visually-rich (and articulated) than the Portuguese ones. Such discrepancy could be explained by the different rate of ICT penetration in the two countries – with UK being one of the most advanced in the area (World Economic Forum, 2012).

The semiotic analysis followed a holistic approach. All elements of the picture were examined regarding the visual expression of cultural values. As photographs are complex visual texts, they do not convey one specific set of cultural values alone. For example, a picture could show signs that could be interpreted as family theme (COL category) and celebrities and power (PD category), when depicting a group of children and parents asking local celebrities for an autograph. Each time an image content or a certain style could not be interpreted within the already existing analytic categories, the framework was refined accordingly, and all pictures were analyzed again (to identify whether further changes in the framework were needed). As suggested by Glaser (1965), the

qualitative analysis of tourism pictures was performed until the description of the cultural categories and their visual styles reached theoretical saturation.

7.4 Results

Combining the deductive and inductive approaches, this research proposes an adapted framework for the analysis of cultural values in tourism visuals, with a similar structure to those presented by Singh et al. (2003) and Tigre Moura et al. (2014). More precisely, from the qualitative analysis of 95 pictures, the resulting model (**Table 7.2**) contains four cultural dimensions operationalized in typical visual content and visual style categories. Starting from the first dimension, it is suggested that proximity between viewers and subjects, within a multiple-subject composition, can contribute to the conveyance of collectivist values in terms of family and community relations (Tigre Moura, Gnoth, & Deans, 2014) – as highlighted in social semiotics (e.g., Kress & van Leeuwen, 2006).

For example, **Figure 7.1** shows a crowd of people at medium close-up scale, raising their hands while attending a concert. While there is no cue on its exact location or on the band, the image positions viewers within an anonymous cheering community participating to the concert. The anonymity of the crowd is provided by the stark density of the photograph. Indeed, while highly detailed texture is generally associated with pictures portraying numerous subjects (Pan, Lee, & Tsai, 2014), there can be cases (like this one) where the camera is intentionally out of focus. As argued by Kress and Van Leeuwen (2006), by de-emphasizing the concrete detail of the image, the photographer scene achieves a stronger symbolic meaning. Viewers as spectators are looking at the scene at eye-level angle, which contributes to creating a feeling of closeness and togetherness between viewers and subjects. Therefore, these visual styles are providing an instrumental contribution in conveying strong community relations values. Their role in transferring strong or weak collectivist values is especially evident by comparing **Figure 7.1** with **Figure 7.2**. While maintaining a similar visual content, with a high angle and extremely long scale, **Figure 7.2** positions viewers relatively far from a clearly recognizable event: the “Festas dos Tabuleiros” (Festival of the Trays) in Tomar, Portugal. The effect of this visual style provides in this case a weak interaction between viewers (as observers) and locals in costume, minimizing the latter to a colorful gathering to be viewed from distance rather than to be joined.

Table 7.2. Framework for the analysis of cultural values in European tourism photography.

	Cultural Category	Visual Content Emphasizing:	Visual Style
COL	Family theme	Family relations, gifts and souvenirs for family and dear ones, and bounds among colleagues	Medium close-up scale; eye-level angle; highly detailed density; four-subject composition; active subjects; and participant interaction
	Community relations	Interactions with and among communities of tourists and/or locals	
IND	Independence theme	Independence, self-reliance, self-fulfillment, and adventure	Long scale; eye-level angle; stark density; one-subject composition; active subjects; and observer interaction
PD	Celebrities and power	Foreign or local celebrities to promote the destination and celebrations of (past or present) people with power, who have (or had) relations with the destination	Medium scale; eye-level angle; moderate density; one-subject composition; static subjects; and spectator interaction
	Status benefits	Prestige, elegance, and luxurious or royal settings to promote services or products	
UA	Tourism guidance	Guidance before or during the tourism experience, including illustrations to explain services	Medium scale; eye-level angle; stark density; two-subject composition; static subjects; and spectator interaction
HC	Aesthetics	Harmony among people and oneness with nature	Medium close-up scale; eye-level angle; moderate detailed density; four-subject composition; active subjects; and spectator interaction
	Soft-sell approach	Education and entertainment to promote attractions, services and products	
LC	Hard-sell approach	Discounts and quality advantages to promote attractions, services and products	Close-up scale; eye-level angle; stark density; one-subject composition; static subjects; and participant interaction

Providing an example of typical visual style and content to convey *independence theme* values, **Figure 7.3** combines a long scale with eye-level angle and stark density in a single-subject composition. Viewers observe the achievement of the cyclist, who stands alone on top of a peak while contemplating a rocky landscape. The presence of cool colors (green and blue) and the simplicity of the environment depicted with stark-detail density provide a sense of serenity and tranquility to the scene (Pan, Tsai, & Lee, 2011), thus strengthening the halo of independence of the subject. This combination of content and visual style invites observers to experience the same adventure, without interfering with the peaceful isolation of the subject.

Figure 7.1. London & Partners (n.d.). People attending a concert. Retrieved March 7, 2018 from <https://www.visitlondon.com/>



Furthermore, by positioning viewers on the right side of the cyclist, their attention is first directed toward her achievement presented in the foreground and then toward the natural scene. Indeed, if the main goal of the photographer had been an invitation to explore the environment alone, viewers would have likely been positioned behind the cyclist to share the same direction of the tourism gaze (Francesconi, 2014).

While scholars indicate the relevance of low angle to underline power distances between viewers and subjects (Harrison, 2003; Bell & Milic, 2002), the majority of analyzed pictures imitate a personal encounter by positioning celebrities at eye-level angle and medium scale. For instance, **Figure 7.4** shows a rugby player signing autographs to children at the stadium. Viewers are at medium distance from the celebrity, who is smiling directly at them from eye-level angle. On the one side, Power Distance is smoothed by the choice of visual style and the high interactivity provided by the eye contact. On the other side, the group of children and adults (sign of family theme values) in front of the player asking for autographs provides a hint of his prestige and importance. All these visual cues contribute to convey celebrities and power values, which appear as less strong if compared to the cricket players in **Figure 7.5**. Indeed, in this case, the celebrities are looking directly at viewers from a high angle in an elegantly furnished room – reinforcing their halo of prestige. Finally, the angle formation of the subjects increases the sense of depth, perspective, and distance from viewers (resulting in lower interactivity), who are looking at them at medium-long scale.

Figure 7.2. TCP/ARPT Centro de Portugal (2018). People attending the event “Festas dos Tabuleiros.” Retrieved March 21, 2018 from <http://www.centerofportugal.com/pt/tomar/>



The typical visual content and visual style categories employed to portray tourism guidance values consist of two-subject compositions at medium scale and stark-detail density, depicting static scenes of tourists looking for information or guidance about the destination on a map or mobile application. For example, in the foreground of **Figure 7.6**, there is a couple in front of a map of Bath Skyline. The content of the map itself is barely visible. From left to right, the map takes approximately two thirds of the whole foreground and the couple only takes the last portion on the right. At medium scale and from eye-level angle, viewers find themselves at the left side of the subjects reducing the interactivity between them and moving their attention on the map. All these visual style characteristics transform viewers into spectators, who are invited to learn more about the destination. The tourism guidance values are also strengthened by the written content embedded in the picture, where the destination invites prospect tourists (with a direct question) to start plan their visit and solve their doubts.

Figure 7.3. TCP/ARPT Centro de Portugal (2018). Cyclist in “Serra da Estrela” Natural park. Retrieved April 18, 2018 from <http://www.centerofportugal.com/pt/parque-natural-da-serra-da-estrela/>



Figure 7.4. Bath Tourism Plus (2018). Rugby player signing autographs. Retrieved July 4, 2017 from <https://visitbath.co.uk/listings/single/bath-rugby-club/>



The typical visual style conveying HC values has strong similarities to the one depicting COL values, especially in terms of composition, scale, and dynamicity. Nevertheless, the expression of feelings of harmony among subjects may lower the interaction with viewers, inviting them as spectators rather than active participants. The same applies for soft-sell approach values, where people are portrayed in the act of learning something and the interaction stays among them. Opposite

to HC values, the typical form of visual expression of hard-sell approach concentrates the attention of viewers on the advertised object (e.g. a card), which gives the promise of a monetary discount to visit the destination. For example, **Figure 7.7** shows a close-up of a hand (i.e. single-subject composition) putting the Visitor Oyster card on one sensor at the entrance of the London Tube. Thus, viewers can directly personify themselves into the traveler that benefits from price advantages by using a tourism transport card.

Figure 7.5. London & Partners (n.d.). Women's Cricket World Cup final. Retrieved July 3, 2017 from <http://www.visitlondon.com/things-to-do/event/45439386-icc-women-s-cricket-world-cup-final-at-lords?ref=mosaic#wjwBLV80P30tYuHt.97>



7.5 Conclusion

As main theoretical contribution, this article proposes a framework for the analysis of cultural values in tourism visuals with a special focus on European destinations using Hofstede's et al. (2010) and Hall's (1976) theories. The model results from the combination of existing theories of visual semiotics and cross-cultural communication with bottom-up data from the semiotic analysis of 95 pictures. Second, the qualitative analysis shows that cultural values from distinct cultural dimensions do in fact coexist in the same pictures. This applies especially to those correlating dimensions like COL and HC (Würtz, 2005). Such finding also implies that the pure visual expression of cultural values does not exist, as photographs are highly complex systems of visual

signs. Third, the research suggests that visual styles (the “how”) may be as important as visual contents (the “what”) in conveying cultural values, with the power to weaken or strengthen their message. Consequently, this paper contributes to emphasizing the importance of taking pictures and their visual representation techniques in tourism research.

Figure 7.6. Bath Tourism Plus (2018). Couple looking at Bath skyline map. Retrieved April 18, 2018 from <https://visitbath.co.uk/plan-your-visit/>

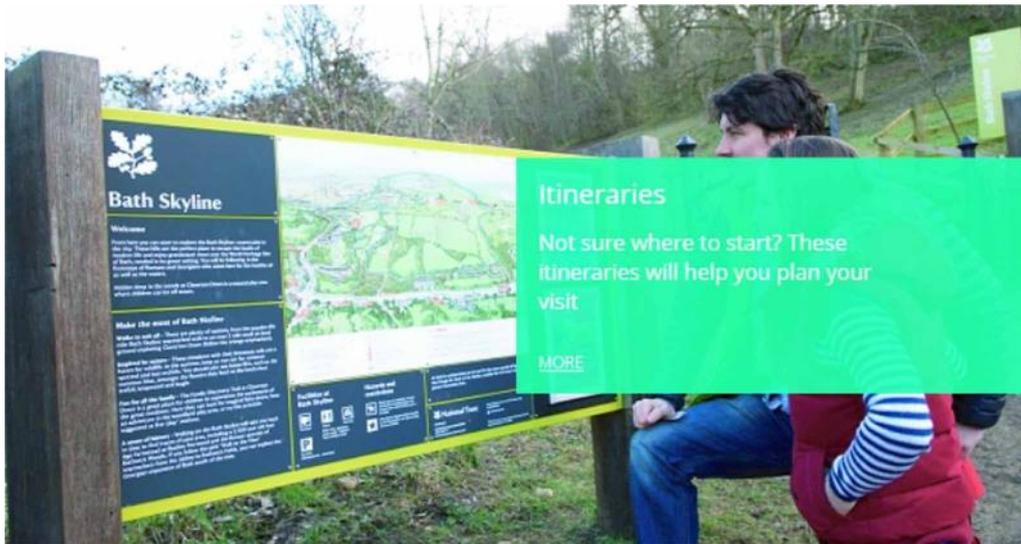


Figure 7.7. London & Partners (n.d.). Oyster cards and travelcards in London. Retrieved April 18, 2018 from <https://www.visitlondon.com/traveller-information/getting-around-london/oyster>



The main limitations of this study are the following. First, the framework refers to the European tourism context. Therefore, it cannot be transferred to other settings or destinations without previous adaptations. Second, it employs Hofstede's et al. (2010) and Hall's (1976) theories, which are often criticized by scholars for issues related to the very concept of national culture (Jones, 2007). Third, given the suggestion of "typical" visual contents and styles, if applied without reflecting on contextual factors, the model might overlook diversities and differences while highlighting stereotypes, which would not be effective for either producers or tourists. In the light of these considerations and implications, future studies are invited to critically consider both visual contents and styles when analyzing pictures in the tourism domain. In addition, the model should be adapted and extended also to other contexts within the tourism domain or, more in general, in visual communication. Future studies analyzing cultural differences in tourism websites are invited to employ the suggested framework, to adapt it (if necessary), and to validate it empirically on larger-scale samples.

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9. Appendices

Figure 9.1. Sections of web pages displaying “IND x high PD” (left) and “COL x low PD” (right) to UK participants: (left) <https://tourism46562224.wordpress.com/4-en/>; (right) <https://tourism46562224.wordpress.com/2-en/>

Kinderdijk UNESCO World Heritage



About

In the 13th century, the powerful count Floris V of Holland ordered the founding of the District Water Boards with the aim of improving local water management. Windmills were used to pump polders dry and then lead the water to a river in a lower area: Kinderdijk.

Kinderdijk means *Children's Dyke* and legend has it that it got its name from a baby found in a floating cradle after a heavy flood. Nominated UNESCO World Heritage in 1997, Kinderdijk is one of the most unique UNESCO sites in the Netherlands; its 19 windmills standing as a testament to the Dutch struggle against floods.



Your visit

The Wisboom visitors centre is the best place to start your cultural escape. In the Wisboom pumping station, do not miss the special multi-screen film about the story of Kinderdijk and its struggle with the water. Give yourself a gift by visiting the souvenir shop.

Kinderdijk



Our heritage

In the 13th century, after obtaining local consent, Floris V of Holland founded the District Water Boards: residents united in a joint effort to improve our water management. We built windmills to pump our polders dry and then lead the water to a river in a lower area: Kinderdijk.

Kinderdijk means *Children's Dyke* and legend has it that the site got its name from a baby found alive in a cradle after a flood and adopted by a family of loving millers. Nominated UNESCO site in 1997, Kinderdijk is nowadays a testament to our cooperation against floods and, according to recommendations by UK visitors, an incredibly scenic site.



Visit us

Get a group of friends together and start the visit at the Wisboom visitors centre, where you can watch an entertaining multi-screen film about the story of Kinderdijk and our relationship with the water. You can also buy something for friends and family at our souvenir shop.

Figure 9.2. Sections of web pages displaying “COL x high PD” (left) and “IND x low PD” (right) to UK participants: (left) <https://tourism46562224.wordpress.com/1-en/>; (right) <https://tourism46562224.wordpress.com/3-en/>

Kinderdijk UNESCO World Heritage



Our heritage

In the 13th century, the powerful count Floris V of Holland ordered the founding of the District Water Boards: residents united in a joint effort to improve our water management. We built windmills to pump our polders dry and then lead the water to a river in a lower area: Kinderdijk.

Kinderdijk means Children's Dyke and legend has it that the site got its name from a baby found alive in a cradle after a flood and adopted by a family of loving millers. Nominated UNESCO World Heritage in 1997, Kinderdijk and its scenic windmills are a testament to our cooperation against floods.



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Table 9.1. Measurement scales (part 1).

Constructs and items	Type of scale
<i>Cognitive Image</i> (Study 1)	7-point semantic differential scales (CI1-DE3)
CI1. From unfriendly to friendly	7-point scale from strongly disagree to strongly agree (DE4-5)
CI2. From stagnant to lively	7-point scale from extremely uninteresting to extremely attractive (DE6)
CI3. From boring to interesting	
CI4. From overcrowded to uncrowded*	
CI5. From familiar to novel*	
<i>Affective Image</i> (Study 1)	
AI1. From ugly to pretty	
AI2. From unpleasant to pleasant	
AI3. From gloomy to exciting	
AI4. From distressing to relaxing	
<i>Destination Experience Image</i> (Study 2)	
DE1. From terrible to wonderful	
DE2. From boring to interesting	
DE3. From unpleasant to pleasant	
DE4. In my opinion, the activities described on the webpage (included in the entrance ticket) are good value for money	
DE5. The activities described on the webpage would be the best way for me to experience Kinderdijk	
DE6. From extremely uninteresting to extremely attractive	
<i>Overall Image</i> (Study 1)	7-point scale from extremely negative to extremely positive
What is your overall impression of Kinderdijk?	

Table 9.2. (Continued)

Constructs and items	Type of scale
<i>Willingness to Visit</i> (Study 1)	7-point scale from strongly disagree to strongly agree
WV1. If I were in Amsterdam, I would like to visit Kinderdijk	
WV2. At the price shown, I would like to visit Kinderdijk	
<i>Willingness to Visit</i> (Study 2)	
WV1. If I were in the Netherlands, I would visit Kinderdijk in the same way as described on the webpage	
WV2. At the price shown, I would visit Kinderdijk in the same way as described on the webpage	
<i>Online Trust</i> ** (Study 1)	
OT1. Official tourism destination websites are reliable	
OT2. Reviews by other tourists are trustworthy	
<i>Online Trust</i> (Study 2)	
OT1. Official tourism websites are trustworthy	
OT2. Official tourism websites are reliable	
<i>Heritage Interest</i> (Study 1 and 2)	5-point scale from not interested at all to extremely interested (HI1)
HI1. How much are you interested in heritage tourism?	
HI2. As a tourist, I usually visit cultural attractions	5-point scales from strongly disagree to strongly agree (HI2-3)
HI3. As a tourist, I value visiting UNESCO attractions	

* Excluded items because of low reliability ($\alpha < 0.7$)

** Items of this scale were treated separately as they had a weak correlation ($r = .29, p < 0.01$)

Table 9.2. Cross-tabulation of COL-IND and mise en scene: chi-square analysis.

	COL ^a (img)			IND (img)			χ^2 Test
	N	% (COL)	A.R. ^b	N	% (IND)	A.R. ^b	χ^2 ^c (df)
<i>Composition</i>							2093.356(8)
None	11	3.6	-15.8	7	1.2	-25.8	
1 Person	27	8.7	-9.0	477	80.8	33.0	
2 People	92	29.8	16.4	31	5.3	-2.6	
3 People	29	9.4	8.2	12	2.0	-1.1	
4+ People	150	48.5	17.5	63	10.7	-4.1	
<i>Angle</i>							52.902(6)
Low	99	32.0	1.2	175	29.7	.4	
Eye level	129	41.7	.4	252	42.7	1.2	
High	69	22.3	.3	141	23.9	1.6	
Bird's Eye	12	3.9	-3.2	22	3.7	-5.1	
<i>Scale</i>							167.376(10)
Extremely long	75	24.3	-4.4	168	28.5	-4.1	
Long	140	45.3	2.0	329	55.8	9.4	
Medium Long	67	21.7	3.4	75	12.7	-2.2	
Medium	16	5.2	-5	5	0.8	-6.3	
Medium Close-Up	6	1.9	1.7	3	0.5	-1.5	
Close-Up	5	1.6	-9	10	1.7	-1.3	

^aValue "None" for COL-IND (image) not reported.

^bAdjusted residuals in bold = significant association ($p < 0.001$).

^c $p < 0.001$.