The Potential of Travel Bloggers in Marketing Tourist Destinations: The Example of The "A Blogger for Italy" Platform

Monica Iorio

University of Cagliari, Italy

ABSTRACT: *The study analyses the role of the travel blogger as a contemporary expression of tourism marketing. In the new digital reality, travel bloggers perform the intermediary function between destination and customer that in the offline world has long been performed by traditional tour operators and travel agents. The message of these influencers can be much more effective than the expensive advertising campaigns implemented by tourism organizations through traditional marketing channels. Establishing a connection between travel bloggers and tour operators, therefore becomes a crucial strategy for exploiting the potential offered by the ITC in the field of tourism promotion. Within this vision, and as an example of good practice, the study illustrates the digital platform "A blogger for Italy" which is one of the first attempts to create, at a national level, a structured network between travel bloggers and tour operators. The study suggests that travel bloggers can become ambassadors of territoriality especially with reference to places away from the usual mass tourism routes and for which a growing segment of tourism demand shows renewed interest.*

KEYWORDS: travel blogger, travel stories, tourist image, marketing.

INTRODUCTION

The spread of the Internet and digital media on a global scale has transformed interpersonal communication by eliminating distances and expanding access to information. The expansion of ITC (Information Technology and Communication) has led to increased knowledge, cultural awareness as well as emotional involvement (Floridi, 2017; Paradiso, 2017). About 4.5 billion people worldwide use the Internet and about 3.8 billion use social media (Hootsuite and We are social, 2021). The electronic device with internet connection has become a crucial tool for working, for shopping, for spending free time, for keeping in touch with friends and relatives, such that there exists no difference between life both online and offline.

New communication technologies have also changed the way businesses operate, consumers behave and conduct their purchasing habits (Jameel et al, 2017). In particular, the tourism industry has experienced substantial changes in terms of structure, organization, and business practices (Petracca, 2019; Sigala et al, 2012). Before the advent of the internet, the tourism industry was organized in a linear way: suppliers (airlines, hotels, etc.) relied on intermediaries (tour operators and travel agencies) to sell

1

their products to final consumers, i.e. to tourists (Buhalis and Zoge, 2007). The decisions to choose and purchase a tourist product were therefore strictly connected to the work of the operators in the sector and to word of mouth, based on the opinions of relatives and friends who had already visited the destination. Today web 2.0, in which the user plays an active role by being able to generate content (User Generate Content - UGC), such as texts, images and videos, offers new frontiers for choosing a destination. UGCs allow potential tourists to familiarise in advance with holiday places and attractions and decide what to see and do (Cox et, 2009; Liu et al, 2020; Simms, 2012; Song and Yoo, 2016). In choosing a destination, potential tourists check its' ratings on the web and read the experiences of those who have already visited it (Andrade and Sobata, 2020; Pourfakhimi et al, 2020). In this scenario, the comments, images, and videos on tourist resorts conveyed by users on the web, subject to the so-called electronic word of mouth, become a powerful bottom-up marketing tool for destinations.

This study examines the world of online tourism marketing, represented by the influence exercised by the travel blogger as a digital professional. The words, images, and videos used by this virtual mediator in his narratives enter the mental maps of those who are preparing to travel, enriching the attractiveness of places in a more effective way than the traditional sales channels managed by classic tour operators.

As evident in past travel literature, the travel blogger is not something new. However, the innovation is the means by which the hiatus of the physical distance between the online potential tourists and experiences shared on the travel bloggers' portals is managed. This study focuses on the digital platform "A blogger for Italy", as an example of good practice, and one of the first experiences at a national level of packaging the travel blogger service according to the needs and expectations of potential tourists, within the mechanisms of co-developing the images of destinations.

This paper will firstly present a brief examination of the role of social networks in tourism communication processes, followed by an illustration of the role of the travel blogger and the digital platform "A Blogger for Italy" and, finally, presenting a case study of a promotional description of Orgosolo, an inland and partially marginalised village of the island of Sardinia.

TOURISM COMMUNICATION IN THE AGE OF SOCIAL NETWORKS

Social networks, or social networking sites, developing on web 2.0 platforms allow users to generate their own digital content. Such virtual platforms, with interactive communication tools, constitute real online social networks grouping users with common interests. Three elements distinguish social networks (Garibaldi and Peretta, 2011): the creation of a profile; the creation of networks with other profiles; the exchange of content. Such elements allow users from all over the world to share photos, videos, opinions, judgements, impressions, and experiences about their travels, thus triggering an extensive network of electronic word of mouth content throughout the web.

The rapid evolution of this form of communication has created various repercussions on the tourism sector, so much so that we speak specifically of "Tourism 2.0" (Petracca, 2019). The recent development of specific virtual spaces such as Tripadvisor or Travelpod, linking together tourists as web users, have provided platforms for the exchange of information, opinions and recommendations on destinations, tourist products and services.

Of great interest, from a geographical perspective, is to observe how such social networks influence the processes that create and promote the tourist space which, as Miossec excellently stated in one of his famous essays in 1977 (p. 55), is "avant tout une image […]. Image complexe, rêve, reflété par les affiches, les guides, les dépliants, les peintures, les livres, les films. Image et evocation qu'en rapportent et colportent les touristes. Evocation d'odeurs, de sons, de sensations ". The image, therefore, is an integral element in the formation of tourist destinations (Bagnoli, 2014) and has a strong persuasive power. It registers in the tourist's mind and urges him to visit the place captured in the image (Dell'Agnese, 2018). Hence, social networks, such as Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram, by conveying images and videos, have become tools for promoting places. Whilst traveling, photos and videos are shared and, promptly, updates are received on the trips made by the group of followers; so, in addition to giving meaning to one's own tourist experience, suggestions and ideas are produced for new travel destinations, which will be immortalized and filmed again by others thus creating new suggestions, in a potentially infinite cycle.

The taking of photos and posting them on social media is also becoming a form of niche tourism (the so-called "photographic tourism"). Travellers, often participating in photography tours, immortalize unique places, test their skills and share their photographic results on social networks (Zaccomer, 2019).

Social networks have become an integral part of the so-called hermeneutic circle of the touristic gaze. "What is sought for in a holiday is a set of photographic images, as seen in tour company brochures or on TV programs [or those posted on social networks]. While the tourist is away, this then moves on to a tracking down and capturing of those images for oneself. And it ends up with travellers demonstrating that they really have been there by showing their version of the images that they have seen originally before they set off " (Urry, 1990, p. 140).

In a kind of democratization of the means to create touristic spaces, every traveller using the social media becomes a promoter of tourist places and services. Instagram, for example, is one means where the travel theme is very recurring; in fact, the posting of photographs and short videos on travels and excursions on most of the profiles, in real time, can reach a very high number of views, also thanks to the hashtag tool (Gavinelli and Zanolin, 2019).

There are also individuals or travel companies using such social networks to create profiles and share their travel experiences. Through such channels, thousands of followers receive real-time tourist information regarding places located all over the world. But, as

Gavinelli and Zanolin (2019) observe, it is not just a matter of disseminating travel suggestions or ideas to imagine exotic destinations to be visited, but also to influence the behaviour of travellers and the way one travels.

An interesting example of how these travel profiles can influence behaviour at a global level is that of the French traveller Alexìs Dessard, who promotes sustainable tourism practices both through his explorations on foot in remote communities, in order to disseminate their traditions, and through his actions to protect the environment, such as when, in April 2021, he launched a campaign to collect the plastic accumulated in Lake Uru Uru in Bolivia (https://fb.watch/5bxo4ojytn/). His posts have attracted hundreds of people to the place for several days, collecting the plastic and emulating Alexis' behaviour.

Taking advantage of its huge audience, Instagram has even activated functions that allow its users to get in direct contact with airlines and tour operators to buy their holidays; in this way the platform not only serves as a tool for tourism promotion, but also takes on the role of a travel agency.
In such a scenario, tour operators are able to reach their markets by taking advantage of the communication channels resulting from the continuous developments in the ITC.

TRAVEL BLOGGER AND MARKETING DESTINATIONS

According to Young (2006, p. 27) a blog (short for weblog) is a kind of "space in which to write one's ideas so that the world can know them, a space for receiving feedback from others, and even in which to meet". Their use is particularly widespread among consumers who wish to exchange opinions on goods and services on the market, thus taking at a reliable purchase decision based on the suggestions of other people with similar tastes (Filieri, 2016).

In the tourism context, blogs are a relatively recent phenomenon. The first tourist blog was in 1994 by travel writer Jeff Greenwald, who began posting his "dispatches" on the Global Network Navigator, the first advertising website created by the American publishing house O'Reilly Media (Blaer et al, 2020). Since then, travel blogs have become prolific; in fact, in theory, anyone who travels can blog (Banyai and Glover, 2012). Travel bloggers are therefore individuals who keep an online diary in which they relate their travel experiences with the aim of sharing them with their readers. For this reason, generally, the blogger's narrative style is very informal and friendly.

Although a travel blog can be run in an amateur way, generally, travel bloggers are very familiar with the techniques of storytelling and visual storytelling (Ejarque, 2015; Petroni, 2019). Their stories, in fact, are developed, not only through texts, but also through photographs and videos, which are automatically relaunched on social profiles linked to the blog, including Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, Pinterest and the YouTube video platform. Travel bloggers are "facilitators of the tourist dream" (Curzi, 2011). In fact, when the blogger shares a positive tourism experience, at the same time, he inspires his readers to visit the same places; the ability to persuade by means of his story is

4

strengthened when offering suggestions on how to reach the destinations, on the reliable accommodation facilities and tourist services, as well as providing answers to any questions put forward by the public (Andrade and Sobata, 2019; Chen et al, 2014; Peralta, 2019). The blogger's comments, both positive and negative, are considered reliable and authentic, and herein lies the persuasive force of his story: in the eyes of the reader, he is a friend and as such his comments are taken as true (Banyai and Havitz, 2013; Sair, 2017). Whether his stories and suggestions are true or not will be confirmed or otherwise in the feedback given by readers upon their return. Ethics and honesty are essential in strengthening the blogger's reputation and in building a solid community of readers (Ejarque, 2015).

In some cases, the bloggers' stories are not simply a reportage of the places visited but also take on a new dimension: they become an introspective journey in which the blogger shares his personal moods felt during the trip, giving a meaning to one's own tourist experience (Bosangit et al, 2015). This allows the reader to identify with and foresee the emotions, challenges and opportunities for personal growth that the journey itself can offer. After all, the recreational aspect is only one of the elements that characterize the holiday, while the emotional elements capable of attributing meaning to the tourist experience, both in terms of knowledge of the places and self-understanding are gaining importance (Moscardo, 2010).

For some bloggers, the reputation acquired, and measured on the basis of the number of regular and occasional readers of their blog and the "likes" received on social channels, can turn into a source of income. This is achieved, for example, through sponsored posts (paid by a client to advertise on the travel blogger's website), advertising banners, market affiliations using one's website to sponsor travel-related products and receive in exchange a commission for each completed transaction/action (booking a stay, a plane, subscription to the newsletter) and promotions of brands related to the tourism sector (tour operators, accommodation facilities, airlines). Bloggers can also engage in a variety of offline blogging activities, including teaching courses on how to become a blogger and writing travel magazine articles (Azariah, 2016).

An example of bloggers who have been able to turn their passion for travel stories into a full-time profession is that of the American Matthew Kepnes (Nomadic Matt), who tells his readers "how to travel around the world for less than $50 a day and how to live a whole year traveling" (https://www.nomadicmatt.com/about-matt/). In his blog, Kepnes hosts various sponsorships by hotels, tourist services, equipment and sportswear, and keeps an active direct sales channel of the many tourist guides he has written. Similarly, the travel blogger Mark Viens, creator of the blog Migrationology (https://migrationology.com/), who, besides relating his travels in search of the peculiarities of local food, with a particular focus on street food, also sells his own tourist guides and numerous gadgets with his own brand (symbolized by a chili pepper). It is worth noting that his YouTube channel has almost 9 million subscribers! The blogger also advertises a permanent fundraising campaign to finance his travels.

If, as Duffy and Kang (2020) observe, the growth in notoriety can translate into a blogger's self-celebration for commercial purposes, putting the genuineness of the stories at risk, on the other hand there is a varied panorama of "artisan" bloggers (Ejarque, 2015) who are particularly attentive to the narration of the most attractive and unique characteristics of the destinations, from a cultural and identity perspective.

In a scenario where tourists are eager to discover the peculiarities of the places, to immerse themselves in the local culture in all its tangible and intangible forms, as well as to live experiences with a high emotional content, the travel blogger can become an ambassador of the destination (Galvagno and Giaccone, 2018). At various geographical scales, his stories can promote lesser-known destinations, rather than the usual routes of mass seasonal tourism (Bosu, 2021). The travel blogger's message can be much more effective than the expensive advertising campaigns implemented by tourism organizations through traditional marketing channels. Establishing a connection between travel bloggers and tour operators then becomes a fundamental step to exploit the potential offered by the ITC in the field of tourism promotion. In this regard, the digital platform "A blogger for Italy", illustrated below, is one of the first attempts, at a national level, to create a structured network between travel bloggers and tour operators in Italy.

THE "A BLOGGER FOR ITALY" PLATFORM

The "A Blogger for Italy" platform acts as a link between travel bloggers and tour operators wishing to re-launch their territory, or their business, particularly following the great slowdown that tourism has suffered due to the SARS-CoV-2 virus pandemic.
To illustrate the functioning of the platform and highlight its potential, both a qualitative analysis of the website and an online interview with the creator and manager of the platform were carried out. In particular, the semi-structured interview, through Skype in April 2021, which was also recorded with the consent of the interviewee, focused on the following with regards to the platform:
- creation;
- parameters used to select interested travel bloggers;
- type of tour operators who can use it;
- how it works;
- geographical distribution of the participants;
- results obtained and expected.

Creation and function of the platform
The platform "A Blogger for Italy", set up in 2019, was the idea of a professional travel blogger and became operational in the spring of 2020. The idea behind this project is the assumption that the promotion of a destination is a communication process capable of generating an interaction between the actors of the tourist offer and the communication professionals of the destination, who, with their work, can enhance its characteristics and increase its competitiveness. As highlighted by the creator and manager, the "A Blogger for Italy platform aims to raise awareness of the great potential the travel blogger has in the tourism promotion communication strategy".

The participation of travel bloggers on the platform is subject to an accreditation procedure which is based on the verification of the requisites of professionalism; in fact, all requests for membership, as reported in the website, "are carefully analysed by evaluating: registered domain, continuity of publication, positioning on search engines, original content, grammatical correctness" (https://unbloggerperlitalia.it/travel-blogger /).

The success of this phase gives the travel blogger a place within a digital representation of the map of Italy present on the website indicating the region in which he is located and operates. This positioning, however, is not a binding factor in the relationship between the travel blogger and the tour operator; a tour operator operating in Veneto could in fact turn to a travel blogger from Calabria, if the type of service offered by the latter is more in line with his objectives. The purpose of the network is in fact to create the best association between the tour operators using the service and the travel bloggers most suited to their needs.

As the creator of the platform reports, "the needs of the customer is the starting point. If a tourist organization needs to promote a lesser-known part of the territory in which it operates, it relies on us, "A Blogger for Italy", and we take care of selecting professionals in line with the customer's requests (bloggers who deal with family trips, or adventurers or, bloggers specialised in gastronomy). At that point, after having submitted our choices to the client, we proceed with the assignment of the professionals who - following a detailed briefing about the publications to be made and the objectives to be achieved - visit the territory in question and tell their community about it through their blog and social media". The bloggers' narratives, as pointed out by the manager, must be inspired by the principle of honesty: "bloggers are professionals, not mercenaries at the service of tour operators". Therefore, the bloggers will also have to report on the less positive aspects of their experience in the area (if any), because their audience also expects to know any critical issues that may arise during a stay at the destination. The credibility of the blogger is a crucial factor in this relationship with the readers.

Whilst travel bloggers are admitted to the platform once they succeed the selection, on the other hand, tour operators do not have such constraints; in fact, all operators can register on the website and express their interest in being put in contact with a travel blogger; this ensures initial visibility, as the operator receives a report on the platform. The link between the tour operator enrolled in the program and the travel blogger is established by the platform staff, as stated by the creator: "the collaboration between the two figures is established mainly through "A blogger for Italy" which handles the entire process including quotes and setting up of the briefing ". Through this briefing, the managers of the platform explore, together with the tour operator requesting the service, a series of fundamental aspects, including the salient characteristics of the activity and the territory, the type of markets to be reached and the objectives to be achieved. Based on these factors, the most suitable blogger is identified to promote the destination, or the activity, through a style capable of generating the emotional involvement of its audience. At this point, a promotional tour is organized where the travel blogger visits the destination and writes a story about his experience there. Then, the story will be launched

on his blog, on the "A blogger for Italy" platform and on the client's or company's website. According to the creator, the platform has an estimated visibility of around 2 million readers.

Geographical distribution of the participants

In March 2021, the platform had about 200 bloggers and membership requests, according to the manager, are growing daily. Their geographical distribution is illustrated in figure 1, showing the blogger's reference region and a number indicating his ability to influence, technically measured by the Zoom Authority (ZA) parameter on a scale of zero to a maximum of 100[1].


---
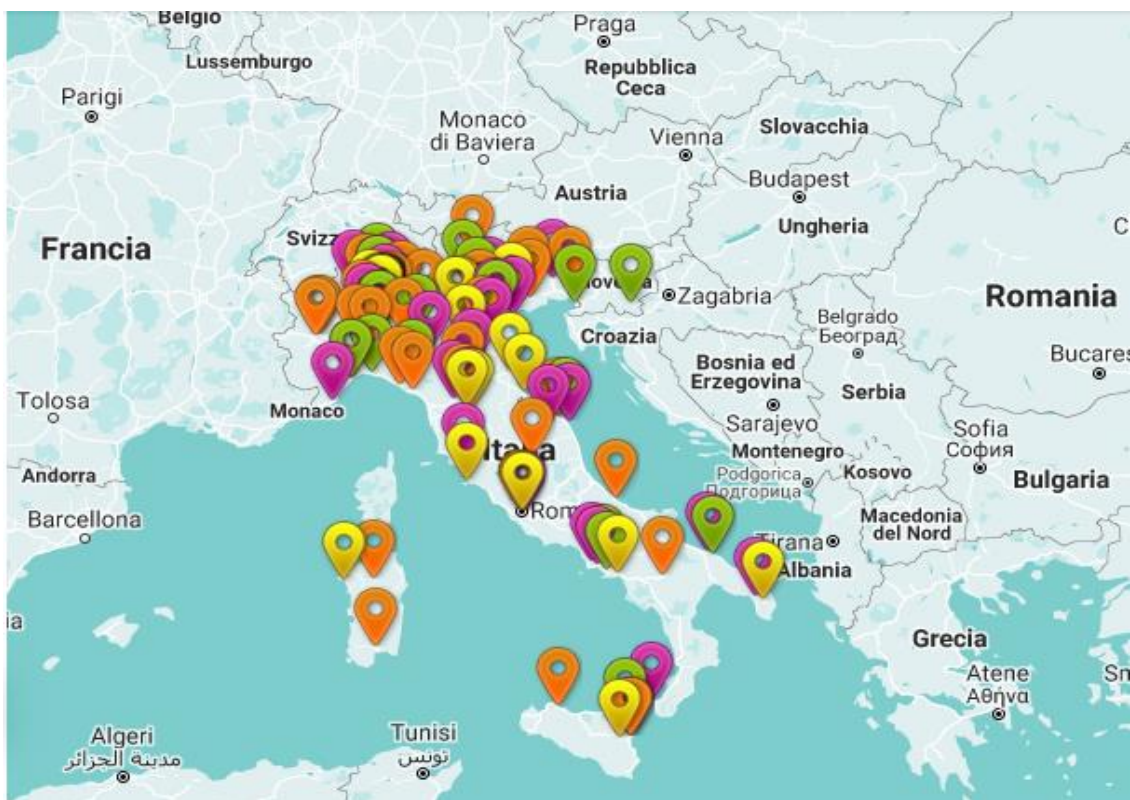
[1] The ZA (Zoom Authority) parameter is extrapolated from SeoZoom, the most authoritative Italian tool that offers an overview of the blog's indexing activities taking into consideration numerous data, including: keywords, SEO writing, Url, images. The ZA is defined on a scale ranging from 0 to 100. The managers of the platform carry out periodic checks on the ZA of the bloggers and, if there are any improvements along the scale, the colour of the flags is revised.

@ECRTD-UK: https://www.eajournals.org/
Publication of the European Centre for Research Training and Development -UK

Figure 1 Geographical distribution of the travel bloggers. Source: https://unbloggerperlitalia.it/travel-blogger/ - screenshot on 10.04.2021.

Most of the accredited bloggers are located in the Northern regions, probably due to a greater diffusion of digital culture and related professions in these regions.

Approximately thirty tour operators have joined the platform; their geographical distribution is illustrated in figure 2, showing the operators'reference region and the type of activity exercised, as indicated in the legend.
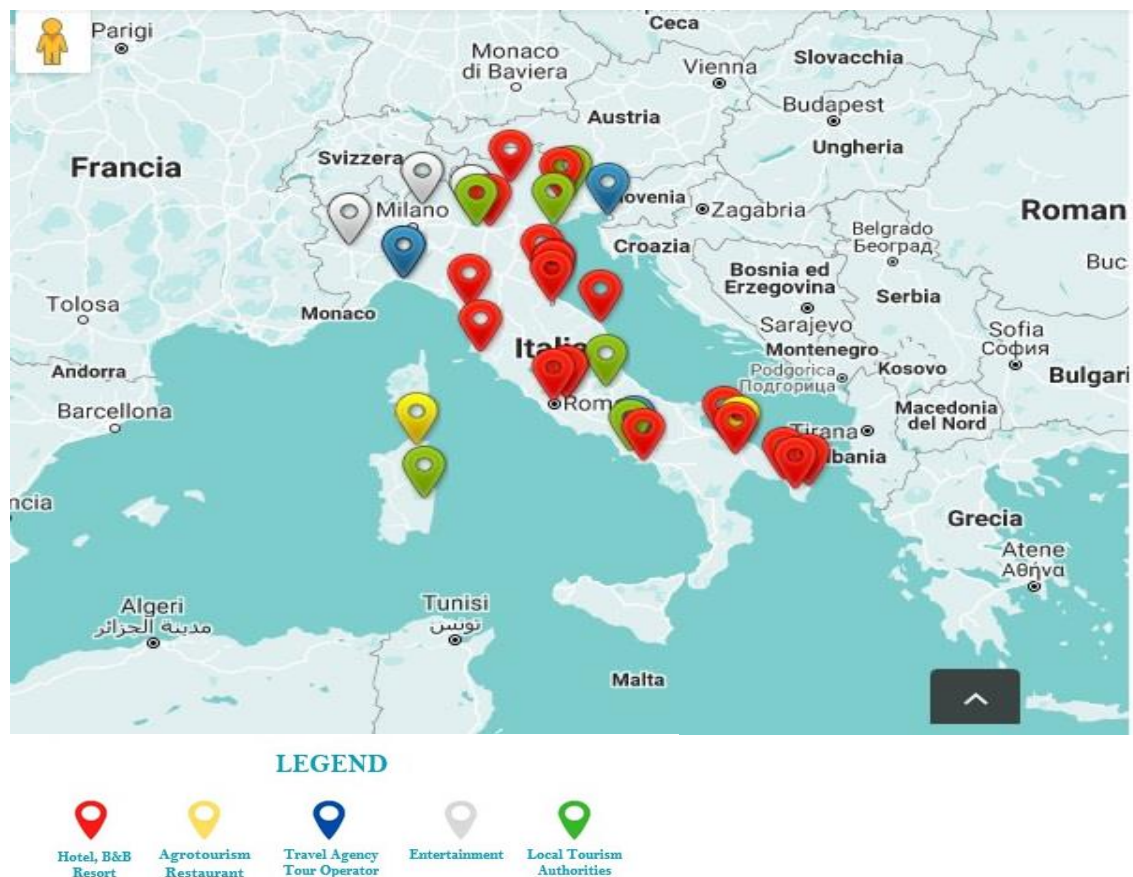
Figure 2 Geographical distribution of tourism operators. Source: https://unbloggerperlitalia.it/travel-blogger/ - screenshot on 10.04.2021.

The main operators using the platform are hotels, resorts and B & Bs, followed by local authorities, travel agencies, entertainment events and finally restaurants and farmhouses. The distribution by region appears to be more equal than is the case with the bloggers,

9

although an absence is evident in some southern regions, such as Basilicata, Calabria, and Sicily.

Initial results of the project

In its first year of operation the platform was largely influenced by the pandemic which paralyzed the tourism sector. Nonetheless, research carried out in June-July 2020, coinciding with the restart of the tourism sector, after the first wave of the pandemic, presents a positive picture. Based on a dozen promotional tours on tourist destinations and services, which involved 17 travel bloggers, over 300,000 positive reactions were obtained with respect to the published content (photos, videos, stories) with more than 3,500 requests for information (Carbone, 2021) (table 1).

Table 1   Report on the activities carried out during June – July 2020

Activity	
Professionals involved 17	
Tours and projects initiated	10
Content produced	
Articles	33
Videos	20
Posts	84
Stories	600+
Engagement	
Likes of posts	300.000+
Hashtag clicks	65.000+
Sponsor clicks	36.0000+
Requests for information	3.500+

Source: Carbone, 2021.

Worth noting is that the tours concerning the destinations focused on the lesser explored tourist areas, highlighting aspects related to cultural, natural, sporting and food and wine attractions, as in the case of tours in some villages in the province of Pordenone and in the municipality of Cavallino Treporti, in the province of Venice (https://unbloggerperlitalia.it/blog-tour-video-reportage/).

The new requests to join the platform by both travel bloggers and tour operators are encouraging. This is an indication of the success of this project which aims to re-launch the tourist image of a destination or a tourism activity that attempts to re-emerge and survive the pandemic. This is coupled with the need people feel to travel again, to discover the diverse natural and cultural landscapes in the Italian territory.

PROMOTING ORGOSOLO, SARDINIA: AN EXAMPLE OF A TRAVEL BLOGGER'S STORY

The promotional ability of the travel bloggers' stories stimulates the tourist's imagination and instill in their readers emotions which encourage them to visit the same places.

The narration of an excursion to Orgosolo by a travel blogger accredited to the portal "A Blogger for Italy" is an example of a story promoting a destination. Orgosolo is a mountain-hilly town of just over 4,000 inhabitants, located in the island of Sardinia, an Italian region, characterized primarily by a summer-seaside tourism, which constitutes a critical factor for the coastal environment. Although the inland areas of the island are characterized by a significant historical-cultural heritage and identity, they are still least impacted by tourist flows. Yet, their enhancement would be crucial to the rebalancing of the Sardinian tourist system.

Although Orgosolo is already well known thanks to the murals painted on the facades of the houses in its historic center, the blogger's story focuses on the intangible aspects of the cultural identity and in particular on the local knowledge linked to bread-making. The trip to Orgosolo was held on the occasion of the inauguration of the *Carasau* Bread Museum in Orgosolo, in May 2019 (https://www.leplume.it/il-museo-del-pane-carasau-di-orgosolo/).

The story is accompanied by a series of beautiful photographs transporting the reader on a journey to the past among the ovens, bread, flour, women working on the dough, cutting boards with ham and local sausage, wicker baskets, weaving looms but also the streets of the town with their colourful and suggestive murals.

The narrative enhances the emotion generated by a land that lovingly welcomes its visitors inviting them to get in touch with its most intimate and hidden elements: "I will never cease to amaze myself at the hospitality of certain places in Sardinia even though I am a Sardinian, too. But it is in the inland territory that this peculiarity becomes more real and strongly felt, something tangible in the air, which is also reflected in the proud and watchful eyes of the people you meet on the street. We are in Orgosolo ".

The narrative offers an image of Sardinia as a land with an immense identity, where traditions and the knowledge of the past live and are perpetuated every day. The gestures and signs of an ancient craftsmanship are evoked. These include the processing and baking of *carasau* bread, a symbol of the island's food and wine culture: "*Carasau* bread [...] is an ancient tale. It is a feminine tale. It is a story that smells of family and neighbourhood ". The blogger underlines the involvement of the local population in the process of welcoming visitors inside the Bread Museum, through a series of social dynamics that reveal a precise stratification of roles: "[...] we were welcomed by a family. Three women and one man. But don't be fooled by the male presence. This is a pink story. Where husbands, fathers and brothers do not have their own defined role ". The preparation of bread is described as a moment of social interaction and collaboration in which museum visitors were not only invited to observe but also to learn and actively participate in its preparation and to finally taste the result of an extremely complex and

refined work: "[…] What I learned in one day in Orgosolo is that making *carasau* bread is a demanding task, requiring more than one person. In fact, I discovered that it takes at least three women to prepare it. […] I must be honest. I didn't even want to try to divide the baked bread in two after the first cooking. I looked at that *carasau* bread and I saw it so fragile to be destroyed by my inexperienced hands. Of course, I didn't hold back when it came to tasting ".

The description of the genuine taste of bread baked in a wood oven and the images of the golden sheets of *carasau* come together in symbiosis to form an extremely simple and inviting promotional message for the reader: "I had never tasted this freshly baked bread. A delight for the palate. An ecstasy of the senses. The firm and sweet sound of the bites. How can you not appreciate it? And if it is served in the *guttiau* version, well then you are really in heaven".

In the words of the blogger, a strong sense of community and family emerges, and the guest almost ends up feeling immersed as if he were really at home and amongst his people. The visit continues with equally new suggestive experiences: "In the invitation to the cellar. With its barrels and its strong and pungent aromas. In the artisan workshop of a silk master. […] This is the beauty of my job. Discover things and then relate them ".
Through this narrative, full of amazement and emotions, the reader is offered the opportunity to project one's imagination into a small world made of tradition and culture that the blogger explicitly invites to discover: "I believe that a visit to Orgosolo is a must. Because it is one of those places capable of kidnapping the soul. To enter the soul ". The story reveals an image of the territory firmly anchored to specific cultural activities that can not be reproduced, an image that projects Sardinia away from the monolithic label of an island for beach holidays.

CONCLUSION

The depiction of a destination has always assumed a central role in the tourist's holiday selection decision process, be it on the glossy paper of a tourist brochure, or in the pages of a novel, or in a film, or from self-made travel movies shown by relatives and friends on their return from a holiday. Today, tourists increasingly refer to the internet to organize their vacation and, even before that, to choose the destination for their holiday.

In this scenario, the experiential narration of the places carried out by travel bloggers shapes the tourist's imagination. Travel bloggers enjoy a strong following and their opinions, as well as their travel advice, influence the travel choices of their followers, at least the most loyal ones. In the new digital reality, they therefore act as intermediaries between the destination and the customer which in the offline world has long been carried out by traditional tour operators and travel agents.

The functions of the travel blogger within the marketing practices of tour operators and territorial promotion agencies provide the potential for an effective marketing and promotional strategy, especially when it comes to enhancing the less explored resources and places, for which there is a growing demand. Moreover, as is currently the case, with

the resumption of tourism activities particularly in nearby destinations, a slow tourist experience can be enjoyed (in the sense of profound enjoyment) whilst procuring benefits for local communities. Therefore, the activity of the "local" travel blogger, as an expert in the peculiarities of his territory and people, becomes valuable.

The online platform "A Blogger for Italy" is a testimony of the importance to create a permanent and structured link between the narrators of the destinations and the tour operators who, in various capacities and at various levels, participate in the promotion of the Italian territory.

This study does not claim to be exhaustive and complete and therefore has its limitations, nonetheless, it offers ideas for new research in this field. For example, an aspect that has not been investigated and which deserves a specific study, also in relation to the platform "A Blogger for Italy", is the evaluation of the real influence of the travel blogger with respect to the travel decisions of readers, in terms of choice of destination, itineraries, travel styles and their behaviour.

In fact, travel blogs, accessible for free and without temporal and spatial limits, offer a valuable source of data for market analysis by tour operators and local promotion agencies interested in studying the profile of visitors, their opinions, their requests, and expectations, in order to improve the quality of the product offered, conscious of the fact that the reputation of the destination will be increasingly conveyed by these new mediators of the tourist image of the destinations.

REFERENCES

Azariah, D.R. (2016) *Tourism, travel, and blogging: a discursive analysis of online travel narratives*, Routledge, London.

Bagnoli, L. 2014. *Manuale di geografia del turismo. Dal grand tour ai sistemi turistici*, Utet, Torino.

Banyai, M., & Glover, T. (2012) Evaluating research methods on travel blogs, *Journal of Travel Research,* 51(3), 267–277. https://doi.org/10.1177/0047287511410323.

Banyai, M. & Havitz, M.E. (2013) Analyzing travel blogs using a realist evaluation approach, *Journal of Hospitality Marketing & Management*, 22(2), 229–241. https://doi.org/10.1080/19368623.2012.680239.

Blaer, M., Frost, W., & Laing, J. (2020). The future of travel writing: Interactivity, personal branding and power, *Tourism Management,* 77, 1–10. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tourman.2019.104009.

Bosangit, C., Hibbert, S. & McCabe, S. (2015) If I was going to die, I should at least be having fun: Travel blogs, meaning and tourist experience, *Annals of Tourism Research,* 55, 1–14. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.annals.2015.08.001.

Bosu, D. 2021. *Travel blogger e promozione turistica dei luoghi*. [Degree thesis not published], Università degli Studi di Cagliari.

Buhalis, D. & Zoge, M. (2007) The strategic impact of the Internet on the tourism industry. In Sigala, L. Mich, L. & Murphy, J. (Eds.), *Information and Communication Technologies in Tourism*. Wien: Springer, 481–492. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-211-69566-1_44.

Carbone, V. (2021) *Report Giugno-Luglio 2020 - Un blogger per l'Italia*, Unpublished manuscript.

Chen, Y. C., Shang, R. A., & Li, M. J. (2014) The effects of perceived relevance of travel blogs' content on the behavioural intention to visit a tourist destination, *Computers in Human Behavior*, 30, 787–799. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.chb.2013.05.019.

Cox, C., Burgess, S. & Sellitto, C. (2009) The role of user-generated content in tourists' travel planning behaviour, *Journal of Hospitality Marketing & Management*, 18(8), 743–64. https://doi.org/10.1080/19368620903235753.

Curzi, F. (2011) Alessio Carciofi, travel blogger. *Saluti dal Mondo,* 09.12.2011. Available at: http://www.salutidalmondo.com/2011/12/alessio-carciofi-travel-blogger/.

Dell'Agnese, E. 2018 *Bon Voyage*, UTET, Torino.

Duffy, A. Kang, H.Y.P. (2020) Follow me, I'm famous: travel bloggers' self-mediated performances of everyday exoticism, *Media, Culture & Society,* 42(2), 172–190. https://doi.org/10.1177/0163443719853503.

Ejarque, J. (2015) *Social media marketing per il turismo. Come costruire il marketing 2.0 e gestire la reputazione della destinazione*, Hoepli, Milano.

Filieri, R. (2016) What makes an online consumer review trustworthy? *Annals of Tourism Research*, 58, 46–64. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.annals.2015.12.019.

Floridi, L. (2017) *La quarta rivoluzione. Come l'infosfera sta trasformando il mondo*, Raffaello Cortina, Milano.

Garibaldi, R. & Peretta, R. (2011) *Facebook in Tourism. Destinazioni turistiche e Social Network*, Franco Angeli, Milano.

Galvagno, M. & Giaccone, S. (2018) *Il turismo creativo. Fondamenti teorici ed esperienze di valorizzazione del territorio*, Giappichelli, Torino.

Gavinelli, G. & Zanolin, Z. (2019) *Geografia del turismo contemporaneo. Pratiche, narrazioni e luoghi*, Carocci Editore, Roma.

Hootsuite & We are social (2021) *Global Digital Overview 2020*. Available at: https://wearesocial-net.s3-eu-west-1.amazonaws.com/wp-content/uploads/common/reports/digital-2020/digital-2020-global.pdf.

Jameel, A.S., Mohammed, A.K. & Mahmood, N. (2017) A Review of the impact of ICT on business firms, *International Journal of Latest Engineering and Management Research*, 2(1), 15–19. http://dx.doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.2906774.

Liu, X., Mehraliyev, F., Liu, C. & Schuckert, M. (2020) The roles of social media in tourists' choices of travel components, *Tourist* Studies, 20(1), 27–48. https://doi.org/10.1177/1468797619873107.

Miossec, J.M. (1977) L'image touristique comme introduction à la géographie du tourisme, *Annales de Géographie*, t.86, 474, 55–70.

Moscardo, G. (2010) The shaping of tourist experience: The importance of stories and themes. In Morgan, M., Lugosi, P. & Ritchie, J.R.B. (Eds.), *The tourism and leisure experience: consumer and management perspectives*. Channel View Publications, Bristol, 3–26.

Paradiso, M. (2017) *Abitare la terra al tempo di internet, Luoghi, comunicazioni, vita umana*, Mimesi, Milano-Udine.

Peralta, R.L. 2019. How vlogging promotes a destination image: A narrative analysis of popular travel vlogs about the Philippines, *Place Branding and Public Diplomacy*, 15, 244–256. https://doi.org/10.1057/s41254-019-00134-6.

Petracca, M. (2019) *L'immagine turistica nell'era del travel 2.0. Il ruolo degli user-generated content e dell'electronic word-of-mouth*. Milano: FrancoAngeli.

Petroni, A. (2019) *Professione travel blogger. Trasforma la tua passione per i viaggi in un lavoro*. Palermo: Flaccovio Dario Editore.

Pourfakhimi, S., Duncan, T. & Coetzee, W.J.L. (2020) Electronic word of mouth in tourism and hospitality consumer behaviour: state of the art. *Tourism Review*, 75(4), 637–661. https://doi.org/10.1108/TR-01-2019-0019.

Sair, A. (2017) Travel blogs and perceived destination image: theoretical background. *World Scientific News*, 67(2), 189–200.

Sigala, M. & Gretzel, U. (2012) *Advances in social media for travel, tourism and hospitality*, Ashgate, London.

Simms, A. (2012) Online user-generated content for travel planning – different for different kinds of trips? *Review of Tourism Research*, 10(3), 76–85. Availablea at: Archive). 13. https://ro.uow.edu.au/buspapers/13.

Song, S.J. & Yoo, M. (2016) The role of social media during the pre-purchasing stage, *Journal of Hospitality and Tourism Technology*, 7(1), 84–99. https://doi.org/10.1108/JHTT-11-2014-0067.

Urry, J. (1990) *The tourist gaze. Leisure and travel in contemporary societies*, Sage, London.

Young, M.L. (2006) Blogging: an introductory look at an old pastime in a new medium, *Library Hi Tech News*, 23(8), 27–28. https://doi.org/10.1108/07419050610713691.

Zaccomer, G.P. (2019) *Il turismo fotografico. Viaggiare per scattare e postare. Esperienze sul campo reale e virtuale per una ridefinizione del framework teorico di un turismo di nicchia*, Forum Editrice, Udine.

WEBSITES

Leplume <https://www.leplume.it/il-museo-del-pane-carasau-di-orgosolo/ >
Migrationology <https://migrationology.com/ >
Nomadic Matt <https://www.nomadicmatt.com/about-matt/ >
RAI uno (L'appello di Alexis per salvare l'Uru Uru, 11 Aprile 2021) <https://fb.watch/5bxo4ojytn/tg1.rai.it>
Un Blogger per l'Italia <https://unbloggerperlitalia.it/home >
https://www.travelbloggeritalia.it/ - Associazione Italiana Travel Blogger.