

THE NEW PROFILE OF THE VIRTUAL TOURIST-TRAVELER: COMMUNICATIVE PERSPECTIVES AND TECHNOLOGICAL CHALLENGES

Scientific paper

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Abstract

Purpose – The wealth of information delivered on the web and the opportunity to access it using different platforms has led to a new profile of consumer of tourist information: a virtual navigator, who represents a hybrid figure between the tourist and traveler. These new kinds of users access the web not only to plan and organize their holidays, but also to search for virtual tours of places and events that, otherwise, they could not physically explore. The purpose of this study is to outline the (new) marketing and communication potential offered by web 2.0, by means of a specific case study, centered on the English version of the official Italian tourism website <http://www.italia.it>.

Design – Our design has two parts: on the one hand, we will analyze, in the light of web 2.0, the profile of the virtual tourist-travelers: their requirements and most common searches, the implications of social apps and possible influence on traditional tourism communication; on the other hand, using the website <http://www.italia.it> as a starting point, we will investigate the functional aspects, together with the linguistic resources used to construct the image of Italy. In particular, examples of evaluative language are selected in order to shed light on the background knowledge the target audience is assumed to have.

Methodology – In our study, two different approaches are combined in a multi-method analysis of the website, i.e. a technological/multifunctional analysis of usability and user experience (sentiment analysis), and a qualitative analysis of texts, within the framework of Discourse Analysis.

Approach – In order to obtain more insight into tourists' trends and preferences we developed a questionnaire. It allowed us to identify the most suitable technological tools to be used to enhance the tourist experience during a visit or a travel, but also in the search phase, prior to the travel.

Findings – From the data collected and analyzed an interesting profile emerged, namely the virtual tourist-traveler. Preliminary results indicate that the search for the ideal touristic destination, the desire to go and experience new places is supported both by strategic, persuasive discourse and by technological choices. An increased use of web 2.0 tools contributes to enhancing the demand for more information and less advertising. Moreover, and surprisingly enough, these users make use of real-time communication tools – the so called “Twitter effect” – to report about their virtual experience as if it were real. A reason might be the need to compensate for the physical absence from the place or the impossibility to perform the trip.

Originality – The innovative feature of our research lies in the results of the website analysis and the results of the questionnaires that contribute to identifying the new profile of the new virtual tourist-traveler. This represents an important stepping stone for future research in the field, both from the broad perspective of linguistic analysis, and from a technological point of view; both contribute to creating a seductive presentation of the destination, thus influencing tourist behavior and attitudes.

Keywords Communication Technology, Tourism, Communication Strategies, Qualitative Analysis, Destination Image, Behavioural analysis, Sentiment analysis, Discourse Analysis, Evaluation

INTRODUCTION

Destination places can be transformed by Internet resources into commodities through an advertising process¹. However travel, tours and holiday cannot be inspected for purchase beforehand. The Internet works as a dynamic mediator of information and suggestions and thus enabling tourists to 'experience' the holiday. Thanks to new advanced technologies, dreams can now be realized in a virtual manner. Travelling may also represent a dream that you cannot always put into practice. In fact, many people because of their illness, disability or economic constraints (or simply lack of time, and curiosity) cannot travel physically as they would like. After all, travel is an ambition of many because it allows to learn about new cultures and broaden one's own horizons. It is said that new technologies have cancelled time and space, but not only. In fact, the Internet - and in particular Web 2.0 - allow us to travel through time, studying and representing virtually bygone eras, but also enables us to visit places otherwise out of reach for everyone. The opportunity to access virtually even remote locations using different platforms has led to a new profile of consumer of tourist information: a virtual navigator, halfway between the tourist and traveler, visiting virtual environments. Today, users access the web not only to plan and organize their holidays. In fact, we have now to acknowledge the rise of a new type of user, who searches for virtual tours of places and events that, otherwise, they could not physically explore.

This work aims to explore this phenomena. In the first section we will analyze the profile of the virtual tourist-traveler. In the second, using the official website for tourism in Italy (<http://www.italia.it>) as a starting point, we will investigate the functional aspects and the linguistic resources used to attract tourists and virtual tourists to Italy. In the third section, we will discuss the technology features used and messages conveyed to attract 'real' and virtual tourists. Finally, in the last section, we will summarize our conclusions, presenting the implications of social apps and possible impact on traditional tourism communication.

1. WHO IS THE VIRTUAL TOURIST-TRAVELER?

Our definition of virtual tourist-traveler comes from a survey submitted online, via questionnaire, on tourists' trends and preferences. A questionnaire was submitted to a sample of 200 people, divided by age, level of education, degree of confidence with technology and economic opportunities. Respondents consisted of 120 men and 80 women, most of them (40%) in the 30-40 age range, 20% in the 40-50 age range, while 6% were under 20; 18% in the range 20-30; 16% over 50. A high percentage (67%) declared to be employed and averagely wealthy. The main purpose of the questionnaire was to identify the most suitable technological tools to be used to enhance the tourist experience during a visit or a travel. For this reason, we did not enquire about favourite places, but we focused on the frequency in using the website to collect tourist information, or online travel services to make reservations, and on technologies used to access the Internet. We also asked about the use of Twitter and

¹ Santulli F., "The Rhetoric of Multimodality: The Persuasive Power of Visual-verbal Interplay". In Garzone, Giuliana, Poncini Gina, Catenaccio Paola (eds.), *Multimodality in Corporate Communication: Web Genres an Discursive Identity*, Milano, Franco Angeli, 2007: 45.

Facebook or similar social platform or websites, to share information, and whether the subjects tend to share information directly from the place visited or when they come back home. Another important question was if they also share opinions on places not yet visited. In this case, the aim was to understand how many users are potential virtual tourist-travelers and if also virtual tourist-travelers may influence others. 26% of the sample declared to use virtual tourism mainly for three reasons: 1) because they can't afford real travels (11%); because of health problems (5%); 3) because they don't feel like travelling by air for long distances (10%). This 26% sample (21% females, 29% males, corresponding to 52 respondents), is the sample mainly characterizing the behaviours of virtual tourist-travelers allowing to better define the virtual tourist-traveler's attitudes.

The questionnaire was developed using the platform Google Docs (Google Forms) and consists of 20 questions, divided into three sections: 'personal data', 'travel behavior' and 'use of the Internet and technology'. It has been submitted to subjects in the period September-December 2013.

From the data collected and analyzed an interesting profile emerged, namely the virtual tourist-traveler, i.e., the user that travels primarily (or only) in virtual mode. These users are not only represented by people who, as a result of economic or physical problems cannot travel, but also from users who simply choose to visit some places only virtually. To identify specific characteristics of virtual tourist-travelers, we asked these 26% respondents to answer another set of questions. In this case, the aim was to investigate what kind of websites they usually visit; what is their favourite technological platform to retrieve and share opinions; their favourite places to visit (especially in relation to distance); whether they were planning in future to transform a virtual travel into a real one. In this specific questionnaire, we also asked people to navigate the website www.italia.it and provide their feedback through questions aimed at evaluating if the website (images, information, events, news) is comprehensive, if it is easy-to-navigate, if places presented resulted appealing and if they judge the presence of multimedia an important content. We also asked if they prefer or not a higher level of interaction and specifically on what elements.

The virtual tourist-traveler presents common traits (curiosity, medium-high culture, medium-high degree of confidence with technology) but also characteristics allowing us to subdivide this typology into three main categories:

- People who use virtual tools to collect information about journeys that they will actually take later;
- Virtual-only tourist-traveler for economic reasons
- Virtual-only tourist-traveler for health reasons

The first ones seem to make use of the virtual world mainly as an information tool, to get as much information as possible about their target destination. Travelers who take virtual journeys for economic reasons are mainly young people, or over-55, who have experience few intercontinental trips. They explore virtually places which could hardly be reached with a little budget. Finally, many only-virtual tourists-travelers, are unable to travel because of their health reasons, and see in new technologies an opportunity to enjoy sceneries, culture and events which otherwise they could not experience.

The question that arises by the emerging of such a profile is whether the current structure of Web sites, Web 2.0 in general, and the adopted communication strategies are adequate to meet the requirements of this type of users. What are their needs and more frequent searches? In the next paragraphs we will try to give an answer to this question, both from a technological and web 2.0 point of view, and from the point of view of language and communication.

2. THE CASE STUDY: WWW.ITALIA.IT

The aim of this study is to evaluate the effectiveness and adaptability of the tools available on the Web to capture the attention of this new kind of user, to identify trends and possible future developments for the benefit of traditional and virtual tourism.

After an initial general search on the web, we decided to focus on a particular web site (<http://www.italia.it>), which was then analyzed on the basis of the usual parameters normally applicable to tourist sites. After a search for different websites promoting Italy, we decided to select this web site as it is the official Italian tourism website, and also particularly representative of touristic web sites in general. The purpose was to assess if the ICT tools and the language could also be considered suitable for virtual tourists-travelers.

2.1. Website structural and functional analysis

The website www.italia.it was analyzed focusing on different aspects. First, we considered the structural and functional features. From the structural point of view, the site is well organized. It has, in fact, an easy access menu, on the top of the page, constantly updated news on the right and, in the center, some images suggest events or places of interest. The lack of frames makes it extremely easy-to-navigate. In addition, the site is multilingual and shows language labels (ITA, ENGL, DE, FR, ESP) on the top right, thus allowing navigation by foreign users. The menu allows to explore the contents browsing the website, following a geographical division of Italy into different areas (item "Discover Italy") and pathways of interest (menu item "Travel Ideas"). In addition, the menu items "News" and "Media" provide direct access to up to date multimedia information on recommended events. Media not only exert a pervasive influence on our society, but play a major role in the field of tourism, as underlined by Davin²: "as the spread of the entertainment industry continues unabated across the globe, as entire regions are being turned into giant theme parks, as the world becomes a complex web of intertexts and hypertexts, reality, media and tourism are more and more closely intertwined". Thus, tourists' actions are strongly affected by media, providing people with pictures, narratives and representations of potential tourist spaces³.

² Davin, S. "Tourists and the television viewers. Some similarities". In D. Crouch, R. Jackson, & F. Thompson (Eds.), *The media and the tourist imagination. Converging cultures* (pp. 170-182). London: Routledge, 2005.

³ Campbell, N. "Producing America. Redefining post-tourism in the global media age". In D. Crouch, R. Jackson, & F. Thompson (Eds.), *The Media and the Tourist Imagination. Converging cultures* (pp. 198-214). London: Routledge, 2005.

The website seems to meet the needs of potential virtual tourists-travelers. In fact, the respondents to our questionnaire found it very rich in content, both from the point of view of texts and Web 2.0 resources (images, videos, testimonials), thus satisfying the most prominent demand from this kind of users. Most of the interviewed people said that they would recommend the site to others, confirming the "long tail" effect⁴.

A missing part of the website is the involvement of users as co-producers of contents or application developers⁵. It must be considered that tourists are both consumers and producers of media products, making them highly influential in the reproduction of space⁶ that is the so called process "circuit of tourism"⁷.

However, users who were surveyed said that they would use other tools (e.g. social networks, Twitter) to share with others the information found. In addition, we found a good level of utilization of social applications. In fact, users have the opportunity to follow updates using the link on Twitter, Facebook, Google+, Foursquare, YouTube, Pinterest and Joinitaly. The latter is a social thematic portal, where users can directly participate, exchanging opinions and connecting with other people interested in tourism and events in Italy.

From the "info" pages of the website, it is also possible to access a list of mobile apps and retrieve useful information, all associated by in-depth links. Among the analyzed data, we considered analytic ones (visits, places they come from, etc.); subscriptions to RSS feeds and newsletters; traces left by users on the various "social" services; user-generated contents (comments, photos).

We focused in particular on sentiment analysis^{8,9}, however, considering the structural and aesthetic-formal (taking into account the objectives and motivations of the considered user) as well as functional aspects (tasks, goals, interactions), which are needed to identify the function of the site. The sentiment analysis (opinion mining) was conducted both through text analysis, identifying and extracting subjective information in the identified source materials through the use of selected metrics to identify the emotional and the involvement effect of the communication. 85% of the individuals taking the sentiment analysis evaluation test, declared to be highly satisfied (ranging from positively excited to emotionally involved) of the contents of the site. The remaining 15% were fairly satisfied (less emotionally involved) and the 5% were indifferent.

⁴ Anderson, C., "The long tail: Why the future of business is selling less of more", Hyperion Books, 2008.

⁵ O'Reilly, T., "What is web 2.0", O'Reilly, 2009.

⁶ Larsen, J. "Picturing Bornholm: Producing and consuming a tourist place through picturing practices". *Scandinavian Journal of Hospitality and tourism*, 6(2), 75-94, 2006.

⁷ Ateljevic, I. "Circuit of tourism: Stepping beyond the 'production/consumption' dichotomy". *Tourism Geographies*, 2(4), 369-388, 2000.

⁸ de Haaff, M., "Sentiment Analysis, Hard But Worth It!", CustomerThink, 2010, retrieved 2010-03-12.

⁹ Pang, B., Lee, L., Vaithyanathan, S., "Thumbs up?: sentiment classification using machine learning techniques." In ACL-02 conference on Empirical methods in natural language processing, Proceedings, Association for Computational Linguistics, 2002, Volume 10, 79-86.

2.2. Results from questionnaires

Preliminary results indicate that an increased use of web 2.0 tools increases the demand for more information and less advertising. Moreover, and surprisingly enough, these data indicated that virtual tourists-travelers make use of real-time communication tools – the so called twitter effect – to report about their virtual experience as if it was real. A reason might be the need to compensate for the physical absence from the place or the impossibility to perform the trip.

The fact that emerges from the analysis of the questionnaire on the tourist behavior, submitted to a significant number (52 individuals) of users, is that also virtual tourist-travelers do share not only information but also emotions and feelings with others on social networks. It is interesting to note that only-virtual travelers share their experiences, even if only virtual, online, or via e-mail (especially over-55) or via Facebook. Therefore, this type of tourist-traveler might influence trends, transforming the virtually visited places into attractive places for real travelers. This makes them an interesting target group for tour operators to investigate or influence trends.

The additional survey focused on the website <http://www.italia.it> to analyze trends in the virtual tourism suggested that, in general, the judgment on the website by virtual tourists-travelers was very positive, so it could be taken as an example of good practice for the creation of similar web pages. The website, in fact, makes good use of web 2.0 and does not neglect the effect that virtual tourist-travelers can have on the real tourism.

2.3. Language and communication analysis

Tourism has gained a prominent position in international business markets, and the constant flow of information to promote destinations and attract potential clients is one of the most sensitive and strategic keys to success. And this flow is delivered on the Internet, a virtual public sphere, which provides a shared pool of key information and instructions to potential 'real' or 'virtual' travelers. Thus, the tourist destination image is formed and shaped before the trip has even started, or even if it will never start.

The purpose of this section is to examine the way linguistic resources are used to construct a particular image for Italy as a tourist destination, and to what extent this image is suitable to enable the potential tourists to “feel” the holiday experience before (or without) actually living it. Therefore, to address this research issue we have downloaded from the website a dataset of website texts, all spanning from December 1st, 2013 to March 10th, 2014, and consisting of a total of 24,553 words. The English version was analyzed where English is used as a *lingua franca* to address not only native speakers but, more generally, an international audience.

Tourism communication complies with specific rules and shows recurrent communicative aims, strategies and solutions. However, the so called language of tourism is not a monolithic entity as it includes a wide array of domain-specific discourses as well as registers and genres. It offers elements from fictional and factual representation enabling web users to assemble fragments of different information to

construct their own orientation to a sight. Tourism products are, by their nature, experiential, i.e. production and consumption take place simultaneously when tourists consume the product. Therefore, tourists participate actively creating and attaching meaning to the tourist destination's image. Therefore, with the Internet, tourists gain access to interactive multimedia easily enabling them to enter virtual environments and experience virtual tours of a place.

The issue whether tourism discourse should be considered a specialized discourse has been widely discussed, and it rests mostly on the accessibility of its lexis, which seem to lack some of the typical features of specialized vocabulary (e.g., monoreferentiality, lack of connotational meaning, transparency, etc.)¹⁰. In fact, words taken from everyday language act as accessible, but context-functional lexis contributing to the creation of a 'functionally specialized language' and to the specialization of tourism discourse in general. Within the language of tourism destination promotion three main functions are performed: the descriptive/informative and persuasive/promotional functions, as tourist destinations are similar to goods to sell, but also a strong emotional and evocative function providing the "enticing text bits' that may lure the potential visitor"¹¹. Dann¹² gives a metaphorical interpretation of the tourist as a child that is led and controlled by the tourism industry (1996:101). Texts seem to empower tourist to take autonomous and independent decisions about their travel choices, highlighting the concept of journey as freedom. Conversely, texts are aimed "to woo, seduce, inform, project, and sell in one operation"¹³. The Web posts new linguistic challenges as projected and perceived images are influenced by online marketing strategies that are not engaged in conveying the 'true identity of a place' but its 'staged identity'. MacCannel¹⁴ introduced the concept of "staged authenticity", when he argues that the tourist is deceived in his quest for authentic place experiences. Using web resources, potential tourists are engaged in an interactive social process, where fantasy and emotions also play an important role, and are involved in ongoing information search¹⁵. Collecting this information, potential consumers create an 'image' or 'mental portrayal or prototype'¹⁶ of what the travel experience might be like. Such an image is generally based on attributes, expected benefits, and the symbolic meanings or psychological characteristics consumers associate with a specific destination. Therefore, the texts analyzed, not surprisingly, make full use of evaluative terms. This is coherent with their promotional function: attractively describing and presenting the sights. Most adjectives found are intended to highlight all sorts of advantageous qualities of products, as the following examples show: *amazing attractions, enchanting and magical surroundings,*

¹⁰ Gotti M., "Specialised Discourse: Linguistic Features and Changing Conventions", Bern, Peter Lang, 2003

¹¹ Askehave I., Ellerup N. Anne, "Webmediated Genres. A Challenge to Traditional Genre Theory", Working Paper n. 6, Aarhus, Center for Virksomhedskommunikation, 2004.

¹² Dann, G.M.S., "The Language of Tourism: A Sociolinguistic Perspective", Oxon, UK, CAB International, 1996.

¹³ Dann, G.M.S., "Advertising in Tourism and Travel: Tourism Brochures", in M. Khan, M. Olsen, T. Var (eds.), VNR's Encyclopedia of Hospitality and Tourism, NY, Nostrand Reinhold, 1993: 893

¹⁴ MacCannel, D. 1989, "The Tourist: A New Theory of The Leisure Class", New York, Schoken.

¹⁵ Decrop, A., Snelders, D. "Planning the Summer Vacation: An Adaptable Process". In *Annals of Tourism Research*, 200431 (4), 1008-1030.

¹⁶ Tapachai, N., Waryszac, R., "An Examination of the Role of Beneficial Image in Tourist Destination Selection". *Journal of Travel Research*, 2000, 39 (1) August, 37-44. 2000.

spectacular mountains, unique setting, impressive mountains and lovely rolling hills, fascinating and instructive experience.

Following MacCannel, as tourism discourse is aimed at recreating authenticity, modifiers such as *actual, authentic, real, truly, typical* and *very* are extensively used, as in these examples: *authentic recipes; real fun, relaxation and wellbeing; truly adapted, typical Mediterranean landscape.*

As Leemans points out, “factual information on objective and often physical characteristics of single items are much less important than the (holistic, non-attribute based) image that is built around items”¹⁷.

Moreover, thanks to the visual, but also textual resources, the travel experience becomes multisensory: tourists build up emotional arousals and mental multisensory imagery, either based on their real prior experiences, or on their virtual experiences, based on what they might expect to – and maybe will never be able to – taste, hear, smell, see, or feel. The following examples epitomize this concept:

Italy is a land of passions: sounds, colors and perfumes; books, art and music; and nature and landscapes. Many are the opportunities for visitors to enjoy the very lifestyle that has made Italy famous throughout the world.

After all, Italy is nothing if not the Italy of Taste, a feast for the senses, and one of the best ways to understand a people, their history and traditions.

Even a superficial reading reveals a significant insistence on the extraordinary quality of Italian cultural and artistic heritage.

Italy is a synonym for music and art in every form.
Italy is also a natural film set.

The Italian art cities are some of the most-visited destinations in international cultural tourism [...] Almost all of them preserve an important historic, artistic and architectonic heritage that narrates the succession of century after century.

but Italy’s gastronomic tradition also contributes to making the visit a memorable experience:

Italy has always been a synonym for "good food," offering an unmistakable explosion of flavors, scents, and aromas. Aside from having one of the most famous cuisines in the world, it also proposes an immense variety of different regional dishes and recipes.

Efforts are made to familiarize potential visitors with the uniqueness of traditional recipes, as in the case of Liguria:

¹⁷ Leemans, H., “The Multiform Book: Using Information in Purchasing Hedonic Products”. Delft: Eburon. 1994.

Seafood and fish dishes are obviously renowned: fish soups like ciuppin and buridda with stockfish, as well as stuffed and fried sardines. Among the meat dishes we can find the cima genovese (cold stuffed veal), veal stuffed with greens and cheese, or stewed hare with famous taggiasche olives, pine nuts and rosemary. The most famous stuffed pie is torta Pasqualina (Easter pie), thin pastry stuffed with greens, cheese and eggs.

Or with events promoting special local food:

Fiori d'Inverno ("Winter's Flowers") invites guests to get to know and taste the prized gastronomic specialties based on the Red Radicchio of Treviso IGP (Protected Geographical Indication). The event is a series of market-exhibits that center on the most characteristic and appreciated vegetable products [...]originating from the Venetian tradition. Gastronomic stands proffering tasty and radicchio-based dishes will be on hand, allowing visitors to get a sense of local traditions and typical recipes.

Some authors, as Gretzel and Fesenmaier¹⁸ argue that besides using traditional forms such as metaphor and narratives, new emerging technologies will further exploit virtual tours incorporating sensors for taste, smell and touch to make visitors actually "feel" the experience.

The concept of diversity, meaning different from familiar¹⁹, is also of key importance. The positive quality of diversity is conveyed by key words representing different values that characterize Italian regions as ideal destinations, such as preservation (*untainted, simple, natural*), continuity (*genuine, timeless, unchanging, traditional*), novelty (*different, thrilling, adventurous*), distance (*remote*), exclusiveness (*exclusive, incomparable, unique*), and attractiveness (*colourful, magnificent, astonishing, picturesque, gorgeous, fascinating, breathtaking*).

The adverbial comparative *more* (e.g., *This region has many more surprises*) and the superlative *most* (e.g., *The Italian art cities are some of the most-visited destinations in international cultural tourism*), and *best* (e.g., *the best example of a Roman town that we can still observe today*) help convey the exclusive quality of the destination, highlighting the strongly evaluative and therefore promotional character of texts.

The uniqueness and authenticity of the places are also underlined by the verbs employed in the texts. The verb *offer* is widely present when Italy plays an active role and is used to describe the characteristics of the regions. The verbs *discover, explore, experience, enjoy, find, find out, see, visit*, mainly expressed in the imperative form, suggest a fascinating exploration to which the tourist-traveler is lured and support the wealth of recommendations, invitations, suggestions, and advice provided by texts.

The frequent use of *can* and *will* completes the picture:

¹⁸ Gretzel, U., Fesenmaier, D.R. "Experience-based Internet Marketing: An Exploratory Study of Sensory Experiences Associated with Pleasure Travel to the Midwest United States". in: A. Frew, M. Hitz, and P. O'Connor (eds.) *Proceedings of the International Conference on Information and Communication Technologies in Tourism*. (pp. 49-57), ENTER2003, Helsinki, Finland: January, Wien-New York: Springer Verlag, 2003.

¹⁹ Cohen E., "Towards a Sociology of International Tourism" in *Social Research*, 39/1, 1972: 165.

Visitors can have fun
Tourists can enjoy an unforgettable experience
Nature lovers can go on excursions
you will see boundless landscapes
Music lovers will enjoy Ancona Jazz
Art lovers will not want to miss...

Thus, the tourist-traveler is given the possibility - and certainty - to explore the places described.

On the other hand, *must* is not frequent and is occasionally used in nominalizations such as a *must-see*, *must-do*, a *must*, as in the following example:

Two other *must-sees* are the Late Baroque cities of the Noto Valley, and the Villa Romana del Casale in Piazza Armerina.

The most frequent nouns (*hotel(s)*, *museum(s)*, *events*, *church*, *restaurants*, *accommodation*, *food*, *tour*, *culture*, *theatre*, *art*, *history*, etc.) pertain to the domain of tourism and are used to inform and promote the destination.

As to personal pronouns, it is important to note the prominent presence of *you* to highlight that the focus is on the potential tourist-traveler who is empathically involved and strategically persuaded to take advantage of the experience offered:

whether you want to watch nature or seek the thrill of water sports, you can enjoy a variety of activities in both the protected areas of Cinque Terre and Poets' Gulf.

you can begin a virtual journey into some of the most fascinating among them, those that evoke an experience rich in life, passions, and dreams.

This envisaged scenario seems to confirm the concept of 'staged authenticity' introduced by MacCannell²⁰, a commoditized identity of a place reflecting desirable experiences, for tourism consumption.

CONCLUSIONS

This work represents part of a wider interdisciplinary research project aiming to investigate how the image of Italy as a tourist destination is linguistically realized in web-texts, and to evaluate the response of individuals to media stimuli, to enhance positive experience in tourism and cultural heritage, measured with traditional methods used in Psychology and Cognitive Science and with innovative brain imaging methodologies (such as the EEG).

²⁰ MacCannell, D., "Staged Authenticity: Arrangements of Social Space in Tourist Settings". *American Journal of Sociology*, 1973, 79 (3), 589-603.

In other works we tested the user reaction to monoscopic and stereoscopic movies²¹ and colours²². We also tested the effectiveness of priming, in order to have guidelines to use Digital design and 3D Virtual Environments appropriately, to promote engagement of users^{23,24,25}. Results from this study gave us interesting feedback concerning the appropriate use of general communication in different languages and suggested important guidelines for the choice of supports and devices that are likely to be more appreciated by participants to our experiments.

The website <http://www.italia.it> has been selected because it shows structural characteristics that make it attractive from the point of view of the use of the elements for the multimedia communication. The website seems to be positively fulfilling the needs of the virtual tourist-traveler, and shows that a virtual place able to catch the attention of users of this profile must be constructed not depending only on predetermined choices and strategies. In this case, in fact, a website should be designed and oriented more to listening and monitoring, and to the production of relevant contents and services, and not advertising. It must be also multi-platform, because the practices adopted by users are different.

By way of summary, the aim of this study was to evaluate the effectiveness and adaptability of the tools available on the Web to capture the attention of this new kind of user, to identify trends and possible future developments for the benefit of 'non virtual' traditional tourism.

Today, the web has transformed the old arMachair traveler into a virtual tourist-traveler who – still – gaze at destinations, while staying comfortably at home. Many users consider more natural a reservation for their holidays made directly from the personal computer. The online dialogues are used by other users at any stage of their journey. Purchasing decisions are mixed with the social aspect of the Network. In addition to the type of tourist that resorts to the network to plan and organize a trip, a new type of user is emerging: the virtual tourist-traveler. This type of users usually do not turn the result of their search into a real physical journey, but they are undoubtedly, for tourist operators, an attractive target area because they not only can be "captured" as future potential travelers, but more importantly, they are very active in sharing opinions, in judging more or less desirable the presented locations. These kinds of tourist make a massive use of web 2.0 to form a personal opinion on the presented resort and are very keen on sharing their views on social media as well as the tourists who physically go

²¹ Calore, E., Folgieri, R., Gadia, D., Marini, D., "Analysis of brain activity and response during monoscopic and stereoscopic visualization", In: IS&T/SPIE's 24th Symposium on Electronic Imaging: Science and Technology, Proceedings, San Francisco, California, January, 2012, 82880M-82880M.

²² Folgieri R., Lucchiari C., Marini D., "Analysis of brain activity and response to colour stimuli during learning tasks: an EEG study", In: SPIE-IS&T Electronic Imaging, Proceedings, San Francisco Airport Burlingame, California, February 3-7, 2013.

²³ Folgieri R., "VR for cultural heritage valorization: a communication problem", In: Electronic Imaging & The Visual Arts, Proceedings, Firenze, Italy, May 4-6, 2011, 146-151.

²⁴ Banzi, A., Folgieri, R., "Preliminary Results on Priming Based Tools to Enhance Learning in Museums of Fine Arts", In: EVA 2012 Florence, Proceedings, Firenze, May 9-11, 2012, 142-147.

²⁵ Bait, M., Banzi, A., Folgieri, R., Minetti, S., "Introducing a Virtual Reality EEG-BCI and priming-based tool to make art interactive: a technological and linguistic challenge", In: EVA 2013 Florence, Proceedings, Firenze, May 15-16, 152.

on site. In this case, it is obvious that the media should be designed with greater care and that the websites oriented to the promotion of tourism should be more focused on listening and monitoring the opinions of visitors delivered on the website.

Web 2.0 Virtual tourists-travelers satisfy the need to communicate accomplishing the desire to explore all the possibilities offered by the Network: share information and opinions on locations, facilities and services, influencing other potential clients and contributing to determine, along with the physical community, the success of a tourist location than others.

On the one hand, the website selected as our case study partially responds to the requirements needed to satisfy the virtual tourist-traveler. On the other hand, it contributes to identify, by difference, the elements of improvement to retain and capture the attention of this kind of users.

Future work will include improvements aimed to solve some research limitations, namely to increase the size of the corpus to allow a quantitative analysis of texts as well as the number of respondents. Another limitation we aim to overcome is related to the use of more websites, to get a wider overview of the phenomena, possibly including on line traveling service website.

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