DESTINATION-GENERATED CONTENT AND THEIR INFLUENCE ON PERCEIVED IMAGE

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Abstract

Purpose – This research examines which type of destination-generated content (DGC), whether online via social media or offline (brochures and staff interaction at the tourism office), enables us to distinguish between different segments of tourists based on their perceived image of the destination.

Methodology/Design/Approach – The analysis was conducted through a quantitative study involving 300 valid questionnaires collected from tourists in tourism information centres of the Valencian Community. The study employed the CHAID algorithm and descriptive statistical techniques to interpret the data.

Findings – The results reveal four segments of tourists, being those most influenced by the destination's social media and staff interaction the ones that display the most positive image of the destination. Additionally, brochures are not significant on their own.

Originality of the research – The results contribute to distinguishing groups of tourists according to their perceived destination's image, based on the different types of destination-generated content. This differentiation allows for the refinement of promotional strategies for tourism destinations. Thus, this exploratory research elucidates the specific implications of destination-generated content, both online and offline, which have received less attention in the literature compared to user-generated content.

Keywords Destination-generated content (DGC), destination image, segmentation, CHAID.

INTRODUCTION

In recent decades, following the emergence of digitalisation, it is essential for companies and organizations, both public and private, to build two-way relationships with consumers on digital media in order to encourage interaction. After COVID-19, this situation was accentuated, causing more users to turn to social media to create, make viral and consume products, services, brands and, in this case, tourist destinations (Schivinski & Dabrowski, 2016; Akhtar et al., 2021). In this way, online (social media) communications generated by tourist organisations or destinations are considered essential promotional tools as they allow interaction with consumers/tourists and influence their perceptions (Stojanovic et al., 2022; Schivinski & Dabrowski, 2016).

Although nowadays Internet presence prevails, several studies show that there must be synergies between online and offline channels (e.g., Havlena et al., 2007; Naik & Peteres, 2009), giving rise to the integrated effect of omnichannel (Cai & Choi, 2023). Indeed, several authors argue that the offline content generated by the destination, together with online information, allow tourists to form a more complete image of the destination before, during, and after their visit (Beerli-Palacio & Martín-Santana, 2020).

Besides, for a long time, the content and the image of a place were controlled almost exclusively by the destination's marketing organization (DMO) so that the efforts of tourism organisations in building, promoting, and maintaining the destination image have been crucial until these days (Stepchenkova & Zhan, 2013). Notwithstanding, it has been recently emphasized the relevance of electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM) or content generated by the online user/tourist (e.g., Baber & Baber, 2023; Castellano & Dutot, 2017; Guerreiro et al., 2024). In this sense, research in the field of destinations has focused on differentiating the results of destination-generated content (DGC) versus user-generated content (UGC) (e.g., Stojanovic et al., 2022), analysing only the DGC offline (e.g. Molina & Esteban, 2006; Chang at al., 2019) or evaluating the DGC as a whole (Beerli-Palacio & Martín-Santana, 2020), but to the best of our knowledge, there is no empirical evidence on the differentiated impact of offline and online DGC and UGC.

In addition, the recent economic crises have dramatically increased public deficit, so that public spending devoted to the promotion of tourist destinations should be optimized, offering managers of tourism destinations some guidance on how to invest their marketing budget in the most efficient way to attract tourists to these destinations. Since segmentation is considered as one essential marketing tool to support decision making process (Kotler, 1997), DMO's should tailor their targeting strategies to account for the unique characteristics of various market segments to develop efficient marketing strategies according to different groups of tourists (Stepchenkova & Zhan, 2013). However, there is no empirical evidence on the most effective way (offline DGC, online DGC or online UGC) to influence the destination image (as perceived by the tourist). Hence, the aim of this study is to identify the most relevant type(s) of communication to segment tourists based on their perceived image of the destination to support DMO in the identification of the most appropriate promotion strategies. Thus, we aim at identifying different tourist segments to explain their differences based on the perceived image, given the importance of tourist segmentation

to guide communications or content management decisions regarding the destination (Marchi & Raschi, 2022). As far as the destination's marketing strategies can be better customised, investing greater efforts in one type of content or another based on the tourist profile, the budget for promoting the tourism destination and the results in terms of perceived image of the destination may be optimized. Furthermore, from a theoretical viewpoint, the findings of this study are expected to shed light on how the perceived image of a destination in different groups of tourists, is related to different types of destination-generated content.

1. LITERATURE REVIEW

1.1. Destination-generated content (DGC)

Currently, many companies use offline and online marketing contents (e-marketing), the latter facilitating the availability of services and offering an intimate and congenial experience (customer-friendly experience) (Labanauskaitė et al., 2020; Plé & Demangeot, 2020). From the perspective of brand communication, the branding process helps determine whether the brand is really developed in a way that is relevant to the consumer (Wijaya, 2013). Therefore, the communications produced by the organization are highly significant, as they can enhance both customer-to-customer interactions and customer-company relationships. (Ibrahim et al., 2022).

Traditionally, in the tourism sector, specifically in regard to destinations, content has been created by Destination Marketing Organisations (DMO), with the aim of sharing it with tourists (Marchi & Raschi, 2022). In this way, DMOs can use different forms of communication to build a certain image of the destination in the tourist's mind. Regarding offline communications, it is worth differentiating between brochures and the customer service provided by employees in tourist offices, although both contribute to the development of tourist destination economies (Chang et al., 2019). In support of this idea, studies carried out in tourist information offices in Australia and the United States by Mistilis & D'Ambra (2008) and Hwang & Li (2008), respectively, concluded that both (the information provided by tourist information office staff and tourism and promotional materials) influence tourists' perceptions of their experiences at the destination, therefore contributing to the positive or negative generation of destination images. In this way, the quality of brochure information disseminated is defined as how brochure information dissemination is perceived by tourists in tourism information offices (Chang et al., 2019). This offline support contributes to tourists living memorable experiences in the destinations visited (Chang et al., 2019; Tlabela & Douglas, 2022) and it is sufficient to satisfy the information needs of tourists (although due to the use of attractive imagery, brochures may present an image of the destination that differs from the reality) (Beerli-Palacio & Martín-Santana, 2020). Likewise, the quality of brochures can be measured through different variables, such as their content (usefulness) and their design or level of visual attractiveness (Molina & Esteban, 2006).

Regarding the quality of staff service, it is based on the success perceived by visitors of the staff-tourist encounter in tourist information offices (Chang et al., 2019). In this case, the concept of emotional intelligence can be incorporated to improve the tourist's experience and their perceptions about the destination (Prentice, 2020). Likewise, to create competitive advantage in tourism organisations, this quality of staff-tourist service can be a determining factor in creating positive or negative images among tourists, thus influencing their degree of satisfaction and loyalty and their image of the destination (Govindarajo & Khen, 2020).

It is worth highlighting the importance of other factors of the service provided by employees that can contribute to a positive or negative evaluation of the experiences and, therefore, to varying degrees of satisfaction and perceptions of the destination image, namely: the degree of novelty of the service, its complementarity and its effectiveness (Li et al., 2021), employee flexibility, the interaction, or the level of customisation, among others (Barnes et al., 2020). Taking these aspects into account, the way in which tourists evaluate their service experiences can be determined by examining emotional and functional outcomes such as perceived usefulness and entertainment (Barnes et al., 2020; Li et al., 2021). On the other hand, service encounters are a multidimensional component, i.e., it is not only the staff-tourist interpersonal encounter that has the capacity to influence destination image, but also the company service environment of the destination (Zhang et al., 2023a). All of these factors are very important in tourists' experiences, since they influence their perceptions, attitudes, and behaviours in regard to the destination (Zhang et al., 2023a). Furthermore, the collaboration between tourism professionals and local agents is key to the creation of good experiences (Chen et al., 2023).

Regarding online content, it is worth highlighting the differences in tourist perception towards the value of the brand or the destination depending on whether the communications are issued by organisations or by users (online), as highlighted in the work of Schivinski & Dabrowski (2016), and Stojanovic et al. (2022). Firstly, the concept of UGC (user-generated content) is born from the growing popularity and evolution of Web 2.0 to Web 4.0, where this type of content can create online communities of users that provide interactions and recommendations from anywhere and instantly. Secondly, social media communications posted by the company or organisation are considered an essential element of the promotion mix, and it is therefore expected that social media content will be effective in building consumer loyalty and influencing their perceptions (Schivinski & Dabrowski, 2016).

In the field of tourism, this type of destination communication is considered a massive phenomenon (unlike communications from traditional companies) of great relevance in the Internet era, in which any destination or tourist product that is not present on social media runs the risk of not being visible in the market, and therefore, not attracting tourists. All of this happens due to the growing use of digital channels to search for, and immediately find, information about products and brands (or in this case, tourist destinations) (Schivinski & Dabrowski, 2016).

Therefore, online destination-generated content (DGC) significantly impacts the perception of the destination image and tourist intentions. Along these lines, and as suggested by Marchi and Raschi (2022) following the study by Lim et al. (2012), the wide variety of topics and the frequency of posts published by destinations (DGC) on social media (which exceed the content published by the user/tourist, or UGC), could be the reasons why DGC has such an effect on destination image.

In the literature, it has been argued that destination-generated content on social media exposes the tourist to a process of assimilation of new stimuli and information, which affects the tourist's perception of the destination and creates a holistic image. This content also affects the brand image, that is, it has a significant impact on the construction of the destination image through images, graphics, and text (Stojanovic et al., 2022).

It is worth considering that, while previous studies shown in this section have analysed both types of communications separately (offline and online), destination-generated content must be examined together to identify the most effective way to achieve the objectives using omnichannel synergies in marketing communications (Naik & Peters, 2009). To cover this gap in literature, this research analyses this relationship analyses the ability of online and offline DGC, and UGC to segment tourists in terms of their perceived image of the destination.

1.2. Perceived image of the tourism destination

The use of the Internet and social media has brought a change in the way in which consumers give their opinion about products or services as it can be done through online platforms, thus generating a direct impact on the image of an organisation (Castellano & Dutot, 2017). For a long time, image has been conceptualised in different ways by various authors. Based on Aaker's (1991) definition, as cited by Llopis et al. (2018, p. 3): "brand associations or image are defined as something linked to the memory of a brand, whether it is a character, a consumer, a feeling, a symbol, a lifestyle, an object, or a sound, among others". In other words, image can be defined as a collective system of attitudes and thoughts that influence people's decisions regarding an organisation (Balmer, 2001; Su et al., 2018). The image of an organisation represented through one or more digital media becomes the company's electronic reputation (Baber et al., 2022). More specifically, definitions of destination image (as perceived by tourists) or perceived image of the tourism destination have been suggested as early as the studies by Boulding (1956) and Martineau (1958), who recognized that human behaviour tends to respond more to perceived images than to objective reality (Jeong & Kim, 2020). As a holistic construct, it consists of a subjective interpretation of the place by the visitor. Likewise, it works as a tool for destination management within today's globalised and dynamic environment (Llopis et al., 2018).

It should be noted that there are various types of images that tourists can form about a destination, namely: induced image (formed from commercial information in brochures, received from travel agencies or from advertising campaigns in the media); autonomous image (formed by information sources that indirectly influence tourists, such as films, articles, etc.), and organic image (from non-commercial sources, such as the opinions of acquaintances or family members). Likewise, information sources with highly informative content and actively sought by the tourist (such as brochures from tourist offices) constitute an image of the destination that is very close to reality, reducing the gap between pre- and post-images of the destination (Beerli-Palacio & Martín-Santana, 2020). However, other authors emphasise that other online attributes influence the perceived image, namely: the degree of hospitality of online platforms, i.e., the convenience of information, website navigation, and trust that the platform generates for the client (Bataoui, 2022). Furthermore, certain characteristics of the visual content generated by organisations online (such as the narrativity of the images or interactive elements, among others) can cause greater involvement or engagement than other types of content and more positive perceptions of the content (Dhanesh et al., 2022). Likewise, in line with the latest authors, certain features of destination smart apps such as smart information systems (mobile applications, QR codes and Wi-Fi), smart tourism (guides and online maps), e-commerce systems, and smart security create a favourable image (Tavitiyaman et al., 2021). This supports the idea that a good e-marketing strategy tends to influence the creation of favourable perceptions of a destination (Kim et al., 2017a). Rodrigues et al. (2023) also leave aside offline communications to highlight that it is the quality of digital marketing initiatives or online DGC (in terms of quality of information and tools/platforms) the one that will contribute in generating a positive image of the destination, namely: social media marketing (SMM), mobile marketing, search engine optimisation (SEO), web analytics, search engine marketing (SEM), interactive marketing, affiliate marketing, e-mail marketing, and the creation of digital content (Rodrigues et al., 2023).

Regarding the importance of communications, there are studies that have addressed their impact on social media (e.g., Čuić Tankovic et al., 2023; Schivinski & Dabrowski, 2016; Huerta-Álvarez et al., 2020) and on image (e.g., Marchi & Raschi, 2022). In this sense, Giannopoulos et al. (2022) acknowledge that the perceived image of the destination is directly affected by the communications generated by destination management organisations (DMOs). Consequently, DMOs need to be advised to develop appropriate digital strategies, for instance, stimulating co-creation with tourists through social media (Giannopoulos et al., 2022). More specifically, it is considered that the online content created by the destination with human photographs is a key aspect for DMOs to create a specific atmosphere of the place and influence in the perception of the destination (Zhang et al., 2023b). Indeed, the characteristics of the communications (such as the degree of elaboration and vividness) to promote the destination are also relevant to influence in the perceived image (Hernández-Ortega et al., 2020).

1.3. Personality, gender and age

To understand the relationships between the destination's communications and the image perceived by tourists, apart from considering the different types of communications, the literature advises that other elements must be taken into account, for example personality and sociodemographic variables such as tourist gender and age.

First of all, we must differentiate the concepts of "tourist personality" and "destination personality", since, although there is literature that relates the personality of the destination to its image (e.g., Kim et al., 2017b), scarce attention has been paid to date to how tourist personality can influence perceived image. Therefore, we will focus on analysing this particular relationship. The personality traits of tourists can influence the way they perceive external stimuli, as these characteristics have the power to determine if people perceive reality and communications in one way or another. Likewise, they are related to a wide variety of behaviours in both offline and online contexts (Hu & Kim, 2018). The traits proposed by Picazo-Vela et al. (2010) based on the Big Five Personality Traits Model (Goldberg, 2013), include: (1) extroversion: gregariousness, assertiveness, warmth, activity, positive emotions, and excitement seeking; (2) neuroticism: hostility, depression, anxiety, impulsivity, vulnerability, and shyness; (3) agreeableness: trust, altruism, tenderness, and modesty; (4) conscientiousness: competence, compliance, effort, order, and self-discipline and, finally, (5) openness to new experiences: creativity, aesthetics, feelings, actions, ideas, and values (Majláth, 2013).

For their part, Kovačić et al. (2022) relate tourist personality and sociodemographic characteristics with destination image, reaching the conclusion that certain traits or characteristics of the individual's personality (extraversion, agreeableness, conscientiousness, and openness) and of the destination's personality (sincerity and honesty) significantly influence visitor preferences. They also affirm that the tourist's characteristics significantly influence the perception of the destination image (Kovačić et al., 2022). In this sense, Beerli & Martin (2004a) suggest that the tourist's characteristics (psychological and demographic) affect their cognitive organisation of perceptions and, therefore, the perception of the destination image. Likewise, Chon (1991) corroborates that the stronger the relationship between the tourist's self-image and the destination image, the greater the tourist's satisfaction. We not only have evidence of the importance of personality in destinations but also within the tourism sector, in hotels. For example, some authors confirm that extroversion, agreeableness, and neuroticism (among the Big Five Personality Factors) affect tourist satisfaction and, consequently, significantly impact the hotel's image and customer loyalty (Jani & Han, 2014).

Regarding sociodemographic variables, academic literature shows that individual characteristics, such as gender or age, are inputs that can influence perceptions about places (e.g., Woodside & Lysonski, 1989; Stabler, 1995; Beerli & Martín, 2004a; Han et al., 2021). However, when it comes to the tourism sector, large discrepancies in results exist so, due to this ongoing debate on the importance of sociodemographic factors, more studies are needed regarding the impact of gender and age differences on destination image (Maehle & Supphellen, 2011).

Baloglu's study (1997) concluded that there were no statistically significant relationships between the United States image as perceived by German tourists and a series of demographic variables (i.e. gender, income, and education). However, the age, occupation, and marital status of tourists are related to the perceived image (Beerli & Martín, 2004b). Focusing on gender, the study by Hudders and De Jans (2022) on influencer marketing concludes that there are no significant gender differences in terms of post engagement. Specifically, women identify more with female influencers than with male influencers, so they interact more with female influencers. However, there are no differences in this last aspect in the male gender (they interact in the same way with both male and female influencers). These differences must be taken into account to perceive when positive perceptions and attitudes towards the tourist brand/destination occur (Hudders & De Jans, 2022). Likewise, other works affirm that there are significant gender differences in the relationship between tourists' perceptions of the risk/value of the destination and its image, with gender also playing a moderating role between both variables (Carballo et al., 2022; Han et al., 2021).

Gender and age have been traditional criteria for customer segmentation, which is recognized as a fundamental tool for designing strategies and proposing actions (Kotler, 1997). However, they have become increasingly less valid (Madzík et al., 2021). Indeed, market segmentation based on psychographic criteria, i.e. customer lifestyle and personality, is considered as one crucial marketing tool to support decision making process in view of their influence on perceptions and behavioural intention towards a product or brand (Akkaya, 2021).

In reply to the call of the extant literature for further research to evaluate the appropriateness of targeted approaches versus 'one size fits all' approaches (Tkaczynski et al., 2018), we pose the following research questions:

RQ1: Is destination-generated content (DGC) useful for segmenting tourists into different groups based on the perceived image of the destination?

RQ2: If so, what is the type of DGC that most influences the segmentation of tourists based on the perceived image of the destination?

RQ3: Are there differences in the perceptions of the types of DGC with respect to the different segments of tourists, classified according to their assessment of the perceived image of the destination?

RQ4: Is there an association between tourist segments according to the perceived image of the destination and other variables such as the tourist's personality, gender, and age?

2. METHODOLOGY

The present research adopts an exploratory approach regarding the issue to be investigated. To achieve the proposed objectives, from a quantitative perspective, primary data is obtained through an *ad hoc* questionnaire developed in the tourism field to acquire information on tourists' perceptions of the communications generated by the tourist destination and its image. The sample data is collected through a self-administered online questionnaire, which tourists access through a QR code displayed on a poster at the exit of the tourist office they have visited. A convenience sampling procedure is used, since only the following tourist offices of the Valencian Community (Spain) have agreed to collaborate with the study: Benicàssim, Sagunt, Gandía, Canet d'en Berenguer, Castelló de la Plana, Altura, Riba-roja de Túria, Segorbe, Valencia, and other nearby cities and towns. Data were collected during two different periods of tourist influx: between May and June 2023, and between December 2023 and January 2024, obtaining a total of 300 valid questionnaires.

The variables included in the study have been measured using items proposed and adapted from the review of various previous studies. 7-point Likert scales (where 1 is "strongly disagree" and 7 "strongly agree") have been used to measure the variables of the following sections included in the questionnaire: (1) opinion on the online reviews generated by the user (7 items), adapted from Yadav et al. (2022); (2) destination-generated content (4 items), adapted from Schivinski and Dabrowski (2016); (3) perception of the destination image (3 items), adapted from Schivinski and Dabrowski (2016); (4) service quality perceived by tourist information office employees (12 items), adapted from Chang et al. (2019); (5) quality of the tourist office brochures in terms of content (7 items), of which the first three are adapted from Chang et al. (2019) and, the remaining four are adapted from Molina and Esteban (2006); (6) quality of the tourist office brochures in terms of design or visual appeal (3 items), adapted from Molina and Esteban (2006); (7) tourist intention to communicate online (4 items), adapted from Cheung et al. (2021); and (8) tourist personality traits (10 items), adapted from Hu and Kim (2018). Finally, various classification variables are included, namely: gender, age, nationality, region of origin, level of education, current employment status, personal income, reason for travel, and travel frequency.

Regarding the profile of tourists, the majority are women (67.7%), more than half (52.3%) work as employees and around 70% have completed university studies. Regarding the reason for travel, 88% travel for holidays and 53.3% travel between 2 and 4 times a year.

Table 1: **Research technical details**

| Universe	Tourists visiting Visitor Information Centres of the Valencian Community (Spain)
Sample size	300 tourists
Sampling design	Online questionnaire (scanning QR code) at the exit of the tourist office.
Data collection period	May-June 2023 and December 2023-January 2024
Sampling procedure	Convenience sampling
Statistical techniques	Descriptive analysis
	Exploratory factor analysis
	Reliability analysis
	CHAID analysis
	Analysis of variance (ANOVA)
	Contingency tables
Statistical software	SPSS Statistics 29.0

Source: Authors' proposal

From the data collected in the questionnaire, using the SPSS Statistics 29.0 program, we applied several statistical analysis techniques, i.e. descriptive analysis to characterise the sample, exploratory factor analysis to analyse the factor structure of the scales, reliability analysis of the scales, automatic analysis of interactions based on the chi-square algorithm (CHAID) to segment tourists, analysis of variance (ANOVA) to test the existence of significant differences across segments of tourists, and contingency tables to test the existence of significant associations between qualitative variables and segment of belonging.

3. RESULTS

With the final objective of identifying what type of destination-generated content (online or offline) allows us to distinguish, to a greater extent, tourist segments differentiated based on the perceived image of the destination, the CHAID algorithm has been used. Before this, an exploratory factor analysis is carried out that allows the following constructs to be identified: destination image (3 items); online destination-generated content (online DGC) (4 items); offline DGC (interaction with tourist office staff) (12 items); DGC brochures (content) (3 items) and DGC brochures (design) (10 items). After verifying that the Cronbach's alpha reliability coefficients of these five scales are acceptable, all exceeding the value of 0.8, the homonymous variables from the aforementioned constructs have been generated as the average of the items that load on each one of the factors. Next, the CHAID algorithm has been applied, considering the destination image as the dependent variable, and as explanatory or independent variables: online DGC; offline-in-person DGC; brochures-content DGC, and brochures-design DGC. The CHAID results are shown graphically in Figure 1.

Figure 1: **Classification tree generated by CHAID algorithm**
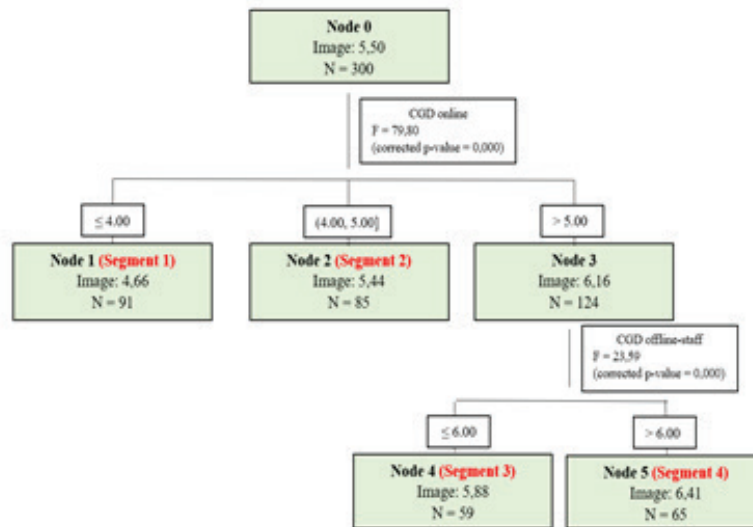
Source: Authors' proposal

As a result of the application of the CHAID algorithm, a classification of tourists who visit tourist offices has been obtained based on the perceived image of the destination, being this explained by the influence of the various destination-generated content (social media, face-to-face service from employees, and content and design of brochures). Firstly, it is observed that the variable that most contributes to the segmentation on a first level is the online DGC, while at a second level it is the offline-in-person DGC variable. In this way, four final segments of tourists are obtained, namely: Segment 1 (tourists with a neutral image of the destination, analogue or little influenced by the destination-generated content on social media), Segment 2 (tourists with a fairly good image of the destination and moderately digitalised), Segment 3 (tourists with a good image of the destination, digitalised and with moderate contact with employees), and Segment 4 (tourists with a good image of the destination, digitalised and with high contact with the tourist office staff). Therefore, the online content generated by the destination and the offline content through the tourist office staff are the variables that explain to a greater extent the differences in the image of the destination perceived by tourists.

The mean values of each final segment, the values of the ANOVA test, and the relationships between Tukey's test groups are shown below in Table 2.

Table 2: **CHAID variables**

	Segment 1	Segment 2	Segment 3	Segment 4	F	Subgroups for $\alpha = 0.05$*
Dependent variable: Image	4.66	5.44	5.88	6.41	59.35	1-2, 1-3, 1-4, 1-5, 2-3, 2-4, 3-4
Independent variables:						
DGC online	3.29	4.71	5.71	6.00	423.28	1-2, 1-3, 1-4, 2-3, 2-4, 3-4
DGC offline - staff	5.39	5.60	5.27	6.70	36.01	1-4, 2-4, 3-4
DGC offline - brochure content	5.34	5.43	5.44	6.53	23.24	1-4, 2-4, 3-4
DGC offline - brochure design	4.90	5.23	4.95	6.09	12.33	1-4, 2-4, 3-4
N	91	85	59	65		
%	30.3	28.3	19.7	21.7		

Note(s): *Only the statistically significant differences between groups (Tukey post-hoc test) at the 5% level are shown.
Source: Authors' proposal

Given the average values of the variables in Table 2, it can be seen that segment 4 is the one that includes the tourists with the best perceived image of the destination and the one that presents a higher average in all the variables. Therefore, this group of tourists places greater importance on the online DGC, on the offline DGC through the service provided by the staff, and on the DGC brochures for their content and design through the service provided by the staff. On the other hand, the first segment is the one that presents the lowest values in all the variables included in the CHAID. The differences between the fourth segment and the others are especially pronounced with regard to the evaluation of the brochures, both in content and design, and in the service provided by the office staff. Thus, we can observe that brochures are valued more when the interaction with the tourist office employee is more positive. This may indicate that employees have a crucial role in selecting the appropriate brochures that the tourist needs and, therefore, that they receive brochures that match their interests in terms of the content and design of the brochures, consequently generating a positive image of the destination.

To complete the characterisation of the tourist segments, Table 3 shows the average scores on the personality traits of the tourists included in the different segments defined according to the perceived image of the destination. The mean values, the ANOVA test statistics, and the significant differences between groups detected from Tukey's test are shown below.

Table 3: **CHAID variables for personality**

	Segment 1	Segment 2	Segment 3	Segment 4	F	Subgroups for α = 0.05[b]
Outgoing, enthusiastic	4.88	4.95	5.22	5.26	1.17	
Critical	4.48	4.93	4.75	5.25	3.02	1-4
Reliable, self-disciplined	5.10	5.48	5.15	5.83	3.99	1-4,3-4
Anxious, easily disturbed	3.24	3.09	3.64	3.06	1.48	-
Open to new/complex experiences	4.66	5.27	4.80	5.40	4.03	1-2, 1-4
Reserved, calm	4.13	4.46	3.73	4.52	2.91	-
Sympathetic, warm	5.02	5.47	5.17	5.78	4.32	1-4
Disorganized, careless	2.76	2.86	2.47	2.29	1.89	-
Calm, emotionally stable	4.78	5.11	4.98	5.45	2.54	1-4
Conventional/uncreative	3.16	3.20	3.22	3.02	0.21	

Note(s): *Only the statistically significant differences between groups (Tukey post-hoc test) at the 5% level are shown.
Source: Author's proposal

Regarding personality traits, it is observed that there are significant differences ($p < 0.05$) between groups of tourists in terms of certain characteristics: critical, reliable, open to new/complex experiences, sympathetic/warm, and calm/emotionally stable. In particular, according to Tukey's test, significant differences at $p < 0.05$ are observed between groups 1 and 4 in all these personality traits in the sense that tourists in Segment 4, the one perceiving the highest scores for destination image, are more "critical", more "reliable, self-disciplined", more "open to new/complex experiences", more "sympathetic" and more "emotionally stable". Tourists in Segment 4 are significantly more self-disciplined than those in Segment 3, whereas Segment 2, similarly to Segment 4, substantially differs from Segment 1 in the personality trait related to openness to new experiences. Therefore, as the most relevant result, destination image is significantly associated with these personality traits. These results are aligned with the notion that tourists' personality traits affect their perceptions of the destination image, as highlighted in previous research (e.g. Beerli & Martin, 2004a; Kovačić et al., 2022).

Next, Table 4 shows the distribution of tourists in each segment based on their main demographic characteristics.

Table 4: **Demographic variables per segments**

	Seg.1	Seg.2	Seg.3	Seg.4	χ2
Gender (%)					
Male	35.2	43.5	18.6	26.2	11.391*
Female	64.8	56.5	81.4	73.8	
Age (%)					
18-23 years	9.9	15.3	20.3	16.9	
24-38 years	23.1	23.5	20.3	26.2	
38-58 years	34.1	36.5	37.3	36.9	11.331
59-72 years	31.9	21.2	22.0	20.0	
>72 years	1.1	3.5	0.0	0.0	

Note(s): * Statistically significant at p < 0.01
Source: Author's proposal

It can be seen that gender is a variable that is associated with the segment that the tourist belongs to, and this association is statistically significant (p<0.01). Specifically, the male gender is concentrated in segments 1 (35.2%) and 2 (43.5%), representing tourists with a neutral image of the destination, analogue, or minimally influenced by the destination's content on social media and, above all, those that present a moderately good image of the destination and are moderately digitalised. On the other hand, women are concentrated in segments 3 (81.4%) and 4 (73.8%), so the female gender is more associated with the destination's content on social media (with more or less attention from the tourist office staff) and usually have a good image of the destination. Likewise, it should be noted that the most extroverted, critical, trustworthy, open to new experiences, friendly/warm, and calm people are present to a greater extent in these segments as well.

Regarding age, although older tourists compared to younger ones are those who prefer not to consult online contents, having greater weighting in segments 1 and 2 (analogue tourists and moderately digitalised tourists), age is not significantly associated with the segment to which the tourist belongs, which could be explained by the gradual reduction of the technological gap in the older generations after Covid-19.

CONCLUSION

Tourism organisations need to segment visitors in order to execute effective marketing strategies. To this end, this work aims to contribute to academia by exploring whether different groups of tourists can be segmented from the different destination-generated contents, based on the perceived destination image.

In response to the first research question, (Is destination-generated content (DGC) useful for segmenting tourists into different groups based on the perceived image of the destination?), the results of the study suggest that DGC can help to define segments of tourists and thereby facilitate the decision-making of managers and competent bodies in tourism matters since strong correlations are observed between all communications attributes and the destination image. Furthermore, with regard to the results of the second research question, a clear differentiation emerges in the CHAID algorithm according to tourist type, dividing them into four segments from least to greatest influence of the destination's content on social media (degree of digitalisation) and from worst to best image of the destination (Segment 1 to 4 respectively). From the resulting classification, it is observed that it is the online content generated by the destination that segment tourists to a greater extent, with those who perceive the best image of the destination presenting higher averages in online DGC. Likewise, tourists' perception of offline DGC through contact with tourist office staff is the second most important variable for classifying tourists.

Regarding the third research question, a clear difference is observed between segments 1 and 4 with regard to the evaluation of the brochures (in content and design) and the service provided by the tourist office staff. Therefore, employees have a very important role in selecting relevant brochures for tourists, thus generating positive interaction and a better image of the destination. Consequently, although brochures do not emerge as a relevant variable to differentiate across segments, there are significant differences across segments of tourists based on the perceived image, and the influence of the staff together with the use of brochures is strongly associated with image of the destination. Finally, in response to the fourth research question, it is observed that critical, reliable, open to new/complex experiences, friendly, and calm/emotionally stable people present significant differences between the different tourist segments. Therefore, the perception of the destination image is related to the tourists' personality traits. Furthermore, gender is the only sociodemographic variable that is associated with the tourist's segment, with a greater representation of women in the most digitalised segments (3 and 4) and of men in segments 1 and 2, with women placing greater importance on destination-generated content on social media and having a more positive image of it.

Theoretical implications

From a theoretical perspective, this work provides evidence of the usefulness of the CHAID algorithm to identify the most relevant contents that explain the differences in the perceived image of the destination between tourist segments. The CHAID technique, compared to the well-known cluster analysis, not only generates relevant tourist segments, but also sequentially identifies the main communications that contribute to explaining the differences between tourists in the key variable (destination image). Therefore, unlike previous studies (e.g., Stepchenkova & Zhan, 2013; Beerli-Palacio & Martín-Santana, 2020; Giannopoulos et al. 2022), the definition of several groups allows us to identify, through CHAID, which ones have the communications that are most relevant to the destination image.

These results provide academia with an explanation of the different perceptions of the destination image depending on the degree of importance that tourists attribute to the different DGCs (online or offline). At the same time, as it is mentioned in the next subheading, they help tourism managers define appropriate marketing strategies for different customer segments. In short, these results help to explain how DGC influences the perceived image and the existence of differences and similarities between tourist segments.

Practical implications

The evidence obtained on the importance of the different destination-generated contents (firstly, those online and, secondly, those of the tourist office employees) in the explanation of the perceived image, suggests some implications that the management of tourism organisations should take into account to implement appropriate destination promotion strategies. Firstly, emphasis should be placed on digital marketing strategies, for example, through social media marketing, search engine optimisation, influencer marketing, and storytelling, among others. Likewise, it is recommended to invest in the training of tourist office staff to obtain knowledge about the place, communication skills, and digital competencies, in line with what has been indicated by previous works (Rodrigues et al., 2023; He et al., 2022; Jang et al., 2021; Han & Chen, 2022; Pachucki et al., 2022). The research carried out supports the relevance of providing Destination Marketing Organizations (DMOs) with the most suitable recommendations based on different tourists' segments, so that tourism organisations could define a customised promotional strategy of the destination for each group of tourists, according the type of destination content that they are more willing to consume and their perceived image.

LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE RESEARCH

The study has a number of limitations that, in some cases, offer opportunities for future research. Firstly, the available sample is limited, which does not allow for comparative analysis between tourists of different nationalities, for example. Furthermore, by using a QR code as a method of accessing the questionnaire, the subjects in the older age group who responded to it may not be representative of their contemporaries. Likewise, convenience sampling has been carried out, that is, only certain tourist offices in the Valencian Community took part and not all of them are have high number of visits, so there could be varying degrees of development regarding DGC.

Another limitation of the study is that, for recently arrived tourists in lesser-known destinations, the references shaping their image are primarily those received at the destination itself. However, in well-established destinations, the image may have been formed over years from various inputs.

Regarding future lines of research, although from this work it is observed that the online destination-generated content has a great influence on the tourist's perceptions that allow them to shape the image of the destination, the exploratory methodology adopted does not permit evaluation of the explanatory capacity of this variable. Future research could measure the fit using other techniques, such as the estimation of a structural equation model using partial least squares (PLS-SEM), incorporating other variables into the model, such as, for example, constructs related to the characteristics of the publications generated by the destination (both online and offline) or variables such as the intention to visit, in the framework of the S-O-R (stimulus, organism, response) model proposed by Mehrabian & Russell (1974). Additionally, the perceptions of tourism organisations and their managers (tourism technicians) could also be analysed, comparing the perceptions of the supply and demand sides (tourists). Finally, other lines of future research should focus on analysing the previously mentioned aspects of digital marketing of tourist destinations that contribute to tourists' perceptions.

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APPENDIX. ITEMS ADAPTED TO MEASURE THE VARIABLES IN THE STUDY

Constructs	Authors	Items
DGC online – social networks	Schivinski & Dabrowski (2016)	**DGCon1** I am satisfied with the communication of the destination on social networks **DGCon2** The level of communication of the destination on social media meets my expectations **DGCon3** The destination's communications on social networks are very attractive (The level of elaboration of the communications is high: the texts, images, or videos make you want to revisit the website) **DGCon4** The content generated on social networks by the destination itself performs well compared to other destinations
Perceived image of the destination	Schivinski & Dabrowski (2016)	**IMAG1** I have a pleasant idea of this destination **IMAG2** This destination has a good reputation **IMAG3** I associate positive characteristics with this destination
DGC offline – tourist information office staff	Chang et al. (2019), as adapted from Parasuraman (1991)	**DGCstaff1** When the tourist office employees promise to do something for you or give you information about the destination, they have done so **DGCstaff2** When the tourist (you) has a problem, the employee has shown sincere interest in solving it or helping you **DGCstaff3** The employee provides the service correctly the first time **DGCstaff4** The employee provides their services at the time they promise **DGCstaff5** The employees inform tourists when services/activities will be carried out (guided tours, excursions...) **DGCstaff6** The employees provide prompt attention to tourists **DGCstaff7** The employees are always willing to help tourists. **DGCstaff8** The employees' behaviour instils confidence in tourists **DGCstaff9** The employee has been courteous to you all the time **DGCstaff10** The employees have the necessary knowledge to answer your questions **DGCstaff11** The employees provide personalized attention. **DGCstaff12** The employees who serve you have the tourist's best interests in mind
DGC offline – brochures/posters	Chang et al. (2019), as adapted from Mistilis and D´Ambra (2008). Molina & Esteban (2006).	**DGCbrochure1** The brochures from the tourist office are easy to understand **DGCbrochure2** The brochures from the tourist office gives a sense of credibility **DGCbrochure3** The brochures/posters from the tourist office are very useful to me **DGCbrochure4** Easy to understand **DGCbrochure5** Easy to open **DGCbrochure6** Easy to read **DGCbrochure7** Pleasant to look at **DGCbrochure8** With clear descriptions/information **DGCbrochure9** The brochures are very illustrative **DGCbrochure10** The brochures are very colorful **DGCbrochure11** The brochures are attractive **DGCbrochure12** The brochures are innovative **DGCbrochure13** The brochures are well designed
Personality traits	Hu & Kim (2018)	**PERSON1** Extraverted, enthusiastic, dynamic **PERSON2** Critical **PERSON3** Reliable, self-disciplined **PERSON4** Anxious, easily upset **PERSON5** Open to new experiences, complex **PERSON6** Reserved, calm **PERSON7** Friendly, warm **PERSON8** Disorganized, careless **PERSON9** Calm, emotionally stable **PERSON10** Conventional, uncreative