Analysis of the perceived and projected image of the West region of Portugal

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Abstract: Tourism is a growing sector in Portugal, and its West region ('The West') represents an important strategic location. The online destination image projected by national tourism organizations and Digital Content Creators play an increasing role in the consumers' destination choice, but their perceived image of the West is yet to be studied. The focus of this article is to highlight the importance of the online image of the West region of Portugal. In regard, the perspective of projected and perceived image was analyzed through direct observation of the sites (i) Visit Portugal, (ii) Tourism Centre of Portugal, and Instagram hashtag #OestePortugal through the accounts of Digital Content Creators. It was concluded that the perceived online image corresponds to the image projected by the agents with tourist responsibilities of the West. It was also concluded that the main characteristic of the West is the maritime beaches as well as its culture.

Key words: West Region of Portugal, image of the online destination; national tourism organizations, digital content creators

JEL code: Z3

1. Introduction

The paper discusses research of the online destination image, focusing on the West region of Portugal. The choice of West as a destination image analysis is due to its tourist importance and strategic location in Portugal. Besides, Sousa and Rodrigues (2019) argue that "The tourism in Portugal has become a sector in constant growth and with a high refection on the region's economy." (p. 39), which reinforces the strategic importance of the region for the study of its image.

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The main question is how national tourism organizations in West projected the image of the online destination, and then how do people perceive this image, in order to choose West region. Therefore, it is intended to analyze websites able to capture the main attractions promoted and which of them correspond to the online image of the west zone. This strand is based on the study of Baloglu and McCleary (1999), named "A Model of Destination Image Formation", which presents the formation of the cognitive image for the process of creating the image in tourist destination. Furthermore, Mak (2017), presents a new model of investigation, that integrates the cognitive and affective image, in order to analyze the *Tourism Generated- Content* (TGC) and *National Tourism Organization* (NTO-generated content), reaching the overall image through an online destination image.

Nowadays the image of tourist destinations has increased its tourist demand, since it allows the consumer to obtain increasingly specialized information of the products they will consume, through the projection and construction of the image that the destinations make about the place (Baloglu & McCleary, 1999; Bigné, Sánchez, & Sanz, 2009; Crompton, 1979; Echtner & Ritchie, 1991; Jenkins, 1999; Kim & Richardson, 2003; Pike & Ryan, 2004). In fact, "The new generation of Web 2.0 tools, in particular, has revolutionized the way destination image is projected and how tourists search for and gather information about tourism destinations" (Camprubí, Guia and Comas, 2013, p.203), since that tourists have become part of the image of an online tourist destination, through sharing their experiences and generate the perceived image, where they share in detail the cognitive and affective component of the destination (Mak, 2017).

The main objective of this study is to understand how the perceived online image corresponds to the projected image by the tourist agents of the West; and to realize which tourist resources most characterize and differentiate the image of the *West* Destination. It is also intended to identify gaps that may exist between the projected image and the perceived image, so that they can, in the future, be corrected by the respective tourist agents.

To our knowledge, there are no studies that examine the online tourism destination image of *West,* highlighting the factors of affective image and perceived image of the destination, offering originality and relevance to the study. We hypothesize that the projected and perceived image of the *West* will distinguish the destination and define their main characteristics. Thus, the following hypothesis are proposed: Hypothesis 1: The projected cognitive image corresponds to the perceived cognitive image; Hypothesis 2: The projected affective image corresponds to the perceived affective image; Hypothesis 3: The projected overall image corresponds to the perceived overall image.

The paper is organized as follows: (i) in the first section, a literature review focuses on the main issues related to online tourism destination image, new technologies as well as tourism websites and blogs. Section two (ii) includes the methodology employed to carry out the study, followed by the research results. Finally, (iii) the main highlights and implications of the online image in *West* for a destination are discussed, considering the cognitive and affective factors of the region, both in projected and perceived image.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Promotion of Tourist Destinations

A destination is "a package of services and tourist facilities which, like any other consumer product, is composed of a number of multidimensional attributes" (Hu & Ritchie, 1993, p. 26).

Promotional marketing has developed, according to Kavaratzis and Ashworth (2008), over time. It was

marked by several historical events but does not follow a specific timeline or area of study, since it encompasses communication, mathematical and statistical, and geographic knowledge.

The relationship of Marketing with the promotion of tourist destinations has been changing, due to the social and technological changes presented. Consumer behaviour is now focused mainly on the opinions and feedback of people who have already experienced the experiences offered by the place. Currently, the presence of numerous applications on social networks has contributed to the change of conventional methods around tourism Marketing (Alghizzawi, Salloum, & Habes, 2018). This is because Marketing will have to aim at a reach, not only through traditional media, but also with new media, to achieve the desired success.

In this context, companies seek to establish long-term relationships by creating connections with websites/ influencers and their consumers. These relationships arise through the trust transmitted by the message at the moment of product demonstration, be it tangible or intangible, as is the case of tourism experiences, an intangible product that, nevertheless, is promoted by websites/digital influencers. The truth is that "the ability to create and publish content is so great that content creators have become media collaborators, not just consumers" (Solis & Breakenridge, 2009, p. 54), since they not only know the product, but also experience and consume it.

In short, it is considered that tourism companies and agents themselves benefit from social networks, improving information for something more concrete, related to travel, prices and the entire offer of services that can make the place more attractive (Alghizzawi, Salloum, & Habes, 2018). This offer of services derives mainly from social networks, where the sharing of information and opinions enhances interaction and enables greater engagement for the promotion of online tourist destinations.

2.2 Tourism Destination Image (TDI) and Online Tourism Destination Image (OTDI)

The tourism destination image (TDI) is the first contact made by the customer at the time of his trip is the image of the destination, comprising the elements that characterize the destination, as well as its representation, like: the type of culture, the monuments, the facilities, the accessibility, among other multiple attributes.

Gunn (1972) and Mercer (1971) defend hat the selection of a tourism destination depends on its image, emphasizing the importance of the image for the choice of a destination. This pre-image creates in the client an expectation before his choice of destination, whether imaginary or real.

Ashworth and Voogd (1994) argue that, in the eighth century, Leif Ericson wants people from his colonies to occupy newly discovered territory. This historical landmark provided the image promotion of a tourist destination, through its good reputation in the eyes of the consumers, be they residents or researchers.

Perinotto (2013) states that the tourist, before buying the trip, immerses the destination through his image conceived by responsible entities or even by the experience of other visitors.

According to Perinotto (2013), "the tourism sector is one of the activities that most uses the image to promote and attract consumers (...)" (p. 8), for the simple fact that it creates the desire in the customer even before he consumes the final product.

Sousa and Rodrigues (2019) argue that "The image in a tourism context constitutes an important part of the brand because it contributes not only toits formation, but also to its success in the market (…)" (p. 43). This point of view seeks to meet the image of a tourist destination and its importance for the dissemination and position in the market, and, according to the authors Sousa and Vasconcelos (2018) the image can be divided into two parameters, the projected image of the tourist destination and the perceived image by the tourists of the destination.

According to Gallarza, Saura, and García (2002), studies related to TDI have some lack in scientific science at 90s, because "researchers have not been successful in completely conceptualizing and operationalizing destination image" (Echtner & Ritchie 1991, p. 10). This reality has changed with the temporal and technological advancement since several studies improving the concept of destination image.

In this context, the Internet factor has changed all the tourism reality since it allows the consumer to do anything without the support of a travel agent. This reality is done only with the use of the internet because the online service permits the connection between reviews, sharing of online images, information promoted by the destination validated by government entities, and also the possibility of marking any service via the internet (Morrison, Jing, O'Leary & Lipping, 2001). The role of social media is also an advantage to tourism digital marketing.

2.3 Cognitive Image

Singh (1991) says that cognitive evaluation is based on a wide range of physical attributes and also an overall emotional value of when the product is consumed by customers.

Brea and Cardoso (2011) state that the cognitive image represents the characteristics, products and services and attributes (tangible and intangible) with the image of the tourist destination, creating the tourist attractiveness of the place.

According to Stylidis, Shani and Belhassen (2017) Cognitive Image can be assessed through five dimensions: Natural Environment, Facilities, Attractions, Accessibility, and Social Environment.

So, it can be concluded from the statements that the cognitive image of the destination is intended for the knowledge generated by the destination that promotes its attractions and facilities, projecting a positive image about the place, with the aim of creating the image perceived by the tourist equally positive.

2.4 Affective Image

The affective image of the destination consists of all the feelings and emotions generated at the time of visit (Stylos, et. al., 2017), since it reflects intangible components, mainly the feeling of welcome, emotional closeness and sympathetic understanding.

In this way, a feeling of attachment is created towards the tourist destination. (Hallmann Zehrer, & Müller, 2015). This image may be perceptible, either positively or negatively, depending on the tourist experience and the relationship that the tourist has with the place (Loureiro & Araújo, 2015; Stylos et al., 2017).

In this manner, Ageeva and Foroudi, (2019) argues that one of the great achievements of this component is that due to the emotions created, it allows people to create a unique connection with the place, which consequently helps create a favorable place image, concluding that, from the authors' perspective, the affective image becomes extremely relevant for the creation of the image of a tourist destination, since it interferes with the desire to return to the destination and feel the emotions that the place provides.

Through the literature review, it is understood that the cognitive and affective factors for image promotion of a tourist destination, in the online environment, are important in that they influence the image and consumer behavior. For this, it is essential to satisfy the tourist and understand their needs and desires (Gomes, 2012).

2.5 Projected Image: National-Tourism Organizations

National-Tourism Organization (NTO) is governmental entities that promote a tourism destination and their good and services, that represent the ideal characteristics of tourism products and offerings in a destination (Li &

Weng, 2022).

Hunter (2012) states that the projected image is all the relevant attributes and aspects of a tourist destination, built through electronic means for private purposes, highlighting a singular and ideal image of the place. Thus, the image is promoted by digital marketing organizations (DMO's) and is mainly related to the visual representativeness of the place in the most diverse forms.

Hsu and Song (2012) agree with Hunter (2012) and claim that this image is projected through ideas or expectations that entities build on digital, of full access to the visitor, so that he accesses several viable sources before visiting the place.

In this way, the projected image may have an intentional meaning and, thus, is produced and projected by organizations with economic and tourist interests (National-Tourism Organization), generating national trade through marketing techniques in the digital environment.

2.6 Projected Image: Tourism-generated Content

TGC or Travel Influencers are a segment of digital influencers, meaning that they are part of the influencer category, but focused on travel and promotion of tourist destinations, through partnerships, lived experiences or just for fun. This type of content, carried out by Travel influencer marketing, allows tourism marketers to create strategies that connect the product created with its audience (Femenia- Serra et al., 2022).

The concept of influence is described through the way a certain message is transmitted, i.e., it is necessary to have a certain importance in what we are showing (Ribeiro, 2021). According to Caldini (1987), an influencer is one who can change the behavior, actions, or thoughts of other members of his group.

Technological development and the strong following of users on social networks triggered the concept of digital influencer or digital content creator that, according to Ribeiro. (2021), emerged considerably recently (about 12 years ago), in parallel with the creation of the social network Instagram. These users could categorize themselves through their reach of followers (Raposo, 2020).

According to a study by Schouten et al. (2020), "instafamous" influencers are more quickly trusted by users compared to classic celebrities. This factor is associated with the communication techniques used, creating greater proximity with the thin consumer before the product presented.

Therefore, consumer behavior is highly influenced by the information written by TGCs, since all the information circulating in the online medium will interfere with the reality of the followers and/or consumers of the digital content (Acuti et al., 2018). So, the perceived online destination image is mainly defined as the holistic impressions, perceptions, and feelings that tourists shared online with regard to the tourism products and offerings in a destination (Li & Weng, 2022).

2.7 Mediating Hypothesis

Nowadays, online destination image is an important factor to support the tourist's decision making. This is due to the contents shared by the companies that create expectations in the client's mind. With this, it is decided to analyze the online image of the tourist destination through Baloglu and McCleary (1999) model investigation (Figure 1), where it is present a study of how the image of a tourist destination is formed, through the cognitive factors of the place (e.g., accommodation, tourist attractions, gastronomy, or natural resources), and the affective aspect. Hanyu (1993, p. 161) suggests that the affective image "(…) refers to the appraisal of the affective quality of environments while perceptual/cognitive quality refers to the appraisal of physical features of environments", but Gartner (1993) refers that the affective image means the feelings experienced by individuals' visitors in tourist

destination. In that way, "(…) cognitive component is an antecedent of the affective component, and the combination of these two components leads to an overall image of a destination" (Mak, 2017).
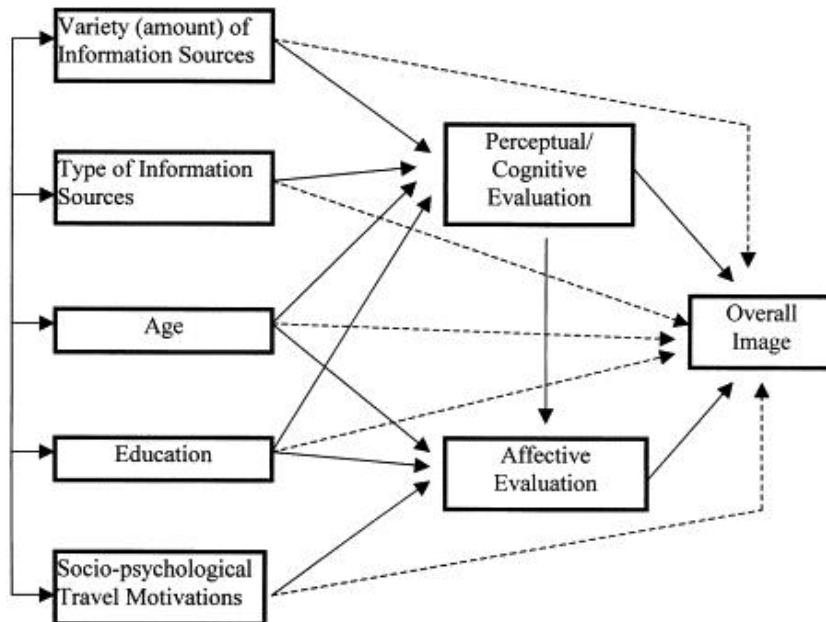
Figure 1   Model of Destination Formation
Source: Baloglu & McCleary (1999)

Considering the literature review, we hypothesized that visitors would have a perception of the place they intend to visit through the projected image that the destination promotes, in order to enrich local tourism and strengthen the main tourist attractions.

The model of Mak (2017) (Figure 2) was selected to evaluate the online image of a tourist destination, since it presents characteristics based on the Baloglu and McCleary (1999) model and adds to the investigation a way of analyzing online content. Thus, official websites will be analyzed, by the NTO, for the projected image of the destination and, at the same time, blogs written by TGC, to understand the perceived image.
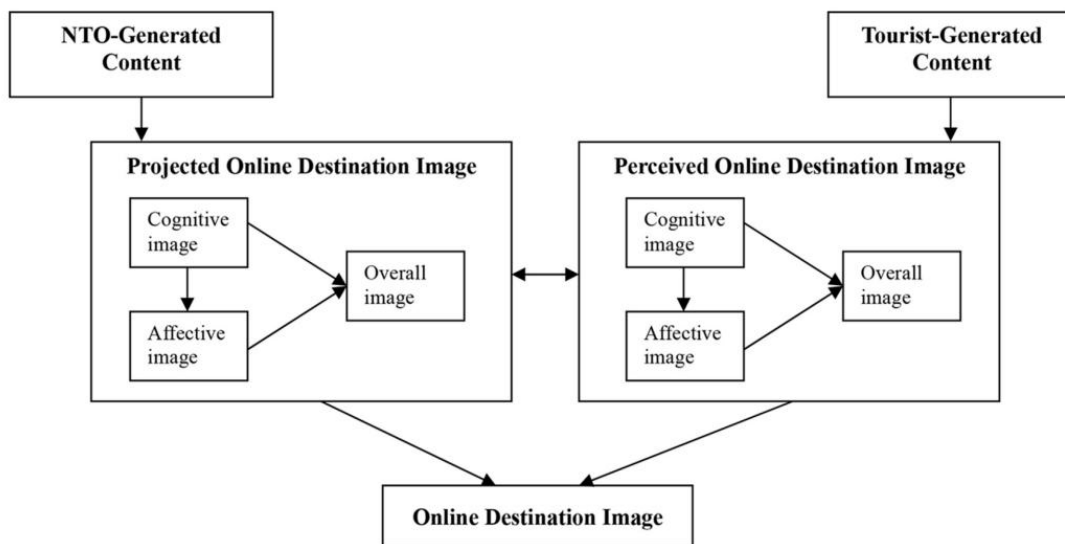
Figure 2   Proposed conceptual model

Therefore, the following hypotheses were proposed:

Hypothesis 1: The projected cognitive image corresponds to the perceived cognitive image;

Hypothesis 2: The projected affective corresponds to the perceived affective image;

Hypothesis 3: The projected overall corresponds to the perceived overall image.

3. Case Study

3.1 Methodology

The research is based on the online image of *West*, encompassing 12 municipalities: Alcobaça, Alenquer, Arruda dos Vinhos, Bombarral, Cadaval, Caldas da Rainha, Lourinhã, Nazaré, Óbidos, Peniche, Sobral de Monte Agraço and Torres Vedras. These municipalities are looking for promotion, showing their products and services, into online sector, in order to gain more visibility and dynamism to their own products, like socioeconomic, patrimonial, historical, touristic, and natural resources. The choice of *West* is related to its importance for national tourism, since the main question: "what is the online image, projected and perceived, that characterizes the *West*?", frames all the characteristic elements of the area, namely the climate, beaches, monuments and culture, gastronomy, and accessibility, among other important factors (turismodocentro.pt).

The objectives of this paper deal, on the one hand to understand if the online image of the projected *West* corresponds to the perceived online image, and from there see if exist any gap in shared information in digital communication. On the other hand, it is expected to identify the principal online image of *West*.

3.1.1 Sampling

The research will be mixed methodology, beginning with a literature review and survey of the literature, followed by a qualitative analysis. Considering the significant impact of online social networks, this paper was based on the analysis of information present on the official tourism websites in Portugal, in order to understand the image projected by the official entities. These sites (visitportugal.pt and turismodocentro.pt), meet the objectives previously presented, since they intend to abandon the traditional campaigns of promotion of destinations, and focus their strategies through the online medium, as a source of business. This analysis of the content generated by the websites is intended to reflect the projected image of the *West.*

By the other hand, this study highlights the use of new media, in a way to analyze the costumer's interaction with the content created by social influencers. According to different research, the perceived image can be analyzed by several methods, one of which is: to resort to the analysis of photographs or digital content published by tourists on social networks, through content analysis and sample selection (Hunter, 2016).

Having in mind the strong impact of social media nowadays, this research is based on the analysis of information present on the Instagram platform, since, according to the global report *We are Social*, Instagram was evaluated as the most used social network to post or share photos and videos, and to follow or search brands or products, being that, "The infographic shows that 53% of Instagram users follow their favourite brands — more than any of the other main social platforms." (Weise, 2015, from *We are Socia*). Furthermore, internet users are also reported to have an Instagram account (Valk, 2016), showing a growth in their activity to, approximately, 50%. So, for the analysis of the perceived cognitive and affective image, I turned to the social network Instagram and selected #OestePortugal to qualify the online image of the destination, with a sample of the 500 most recent publications, mainly integrating the months of May, April, and March.

Therefore, the sample will be based only on online content, excluding traditional communication such as radio, TV ads, or physical media like magazines and newspapers. In short, it is considered that tour companies and agents themselves benefit from social media by improving the information to something more concrete, related to travel, prices, and the whole offer of services that could make the place more attractive (Alghizzawi, Salloum, & Habes, 2018). In this way, sampling is collected to respond to the cognitive and affective image in the *West*, both projected and perceived.

3.2 Data Collection and Analysis

For data collection, cognitive and affective variables were selected based on several authors. The cognitive dimensions presented in this study are also used in the study by Mak (2017), Kuhzady and Ghasemi (2019), Sousa and Pais (2021). Data collection began in March 2023 and ended in June of the same year. This provides up-to-date data for valid conclusions.

In cognitive image analysis, both the photographs and the written content were treated as a unit and then coded into subcategories, from the direct analysis of the theme addressed and also from the analysis of the captions and description of the photos. All the images collected were counted in a maximum of two subcategories. The subcategories are comprised of 6 dimensions, Nature, and Wellness; Leisure and Recreation; Culture, History, and Art; Infrastructures; Events; Health and well-being.

Regarding the affective image, the analysis was textual, using the frequency of words, gathering the most used adjectives to describe the West as a tourist destination, both in the projected and perceived image. In the Linguistic Skills variable, we used the availability of languages available in the websites, to evaluate their effectiveness for the attractiveness of the destination.

Table 1   Variables Used in This Study

Variable							
Cognitive						Affective	
Nature and wellness	Leisure and recreation	Culture, history and art	Infrastructures	Events	Health and well-being	Social environmental	Atmosphere of the place
Climate	Thematic parks and leisure	Museums	Public and private transport	Sports	Health services	Hospitality	Adjective of the place
Mountain range	Sport activities	Heritage buildings	Telecommunication	Featured events		Life quality	
River beaches		Monuments	Commercial infrastructures	Gastronomy and wines		Linguistic skills	
Thermal		Crafts	Accommodation	Music			
SPA		Religious buildings	Catering and bar				
Caves		Thematic routes					
Dams							
Sea beaches							

Source: Based on Mak (2017), Kuhzady and Ghasemi (2019), Sousa and Pais (2021)

A qualitative approach was used to collect data, in order to define the online image of the West region, and also respond to the following hypothesis: (i) The projected cognitive image corresponds to the perceived cognitive image; (ii) The projected affective corresponds to the perceived affective image; (iii) The projected overall

corresponds to the perceived overall image.

The climate of the *West* is defined by the projected image as being a territory of intense light, where the seacoast and the countryside come together, creating a very mild climate (visitportugal).

The cognitive projected image is distinguished by its hotel diversity (Table 2), since the representativeness of the sector is increasing compared to the total number of accommodations inserted in the tourist destination in the year 2021, presenting a rate of 11.3% (promoted by the site turismodocentro.pt) and 8.5% (promoted by visitportugal.pt).

Table 2　Accommodation in West projected by TurismodoCentro and VisitPortugal

Projected Image (TurismodoCentro)		Projected Image (VisitPortugal)		Total (2021)
Classification	Total accommodation	Classification	Total accommodation	
No classification	19	No classification	11	
*	0	*	0	
**	0	**	0	
***	4	***	5	247 (Pordata)
****	1	****	4	
*****	4	*****	1	
Total	28	Total	21	

Then, the variable with the greatest significance in the projected cognitive image are the maritime beaches, with approximately 52.4% of the tourist promotion on the sites, showing its importance for the *West*. The river beaches, dams and spa are not promoted on the sites, creating here a gap in digital marketing communication. The thermal springs are 50% promoted by the organizations, as well as the mountains.

In terms of leisure and recreation, the *West* has a strong online tourist promotion, since, out of a total of 7 theme parks, 5 are mentioned in the online image projection, as well as sports activities, with 75% promotion compared to the total number of activities carried out. Culture is defined by the promotion of museums, with a total of 100% online representation, as well as its monuments, with about 43.7% of mentions on the tourism site center of Portugal. Visit Portugal only promotes 25% of museums in the west. Events are the least expected factor, because out of a total of 756 events, only 8 are designed by the webSersites, corresponding to 1.05%.

Finally, health services and telecommunications infrastructures are not mentioned on websites, concluding that their projection to the consumer does not materialize.

For the projected affective image, the destination is defined above all by its diversification, uniqueness of municipalities, typical, art (hiring the handicrafts of the region), impressive and united. In this way, it is understood that the projection carried out by digital marketing organizations (DMO's) is quite positive. The Carnival of Torres Vedras is also highlighted, since it is distinguished by the characteristics of color, brightness, and joy, in addition to history. This feeling of belonging promoted by the entities ends up emphasizing the importance of the event and uniqueness of the municipality to the *West*.

In addition, the linguistic capacity is strongly defined by the projected image, since it has at the disposal of the visitor 6 different languages on the sites, namely: Chinese, Portuguese, English, Spanish, French and Italian.

Bearing in mind the sample of 500 most recent publications (photo format) on Instagram, mostly in the months of March, April, and May, it is possible to draw some conclusions. The selection of publications was carried out according to the type of photography that Instagram promoted, considering the most recent metric, and the qualification of the same is based on the variables defined a priori in the present study.

In a first perspective, as can be seen in Table 3, not all variables are mentioned by tourists, determining the perceived image more segmented than the projected image. On the other hand, the percentages have strong disparities between them.

Highlighting Figure 3, the significance of the beach as image perceived by tourists is very significant with a percentage of 58.8%, and the most mentioned beaches are in Santa Cruz and Berlengas, since Santa Cruz it is the area with the largest number of beaches in the West. This finding is based on the description of the publications where people mention, not only the #OestePortugal, but also the location and name of the beach (e.g., Praia de Santa Rita/Formosa).

Table 3   Results of Perceived Online Image Using Instagram Hashtag #OestePortugal

Variables	Posts	Representativeness %
Sea Beaches	294	58.8%
Sports events	14	2.8%
Culture	43	8.6%
Events	37	7.4%
Gastronomy and wine	35	7%
Landscape	56	11.2%
Accommodation	12	2.4%
Sports	2	0.4%
Thematic parks and leisure	4	0.8%
Health services	1	0.2%
Thermal	1	0.2%
Public and private transport	1	0.2%
Total	100	100%
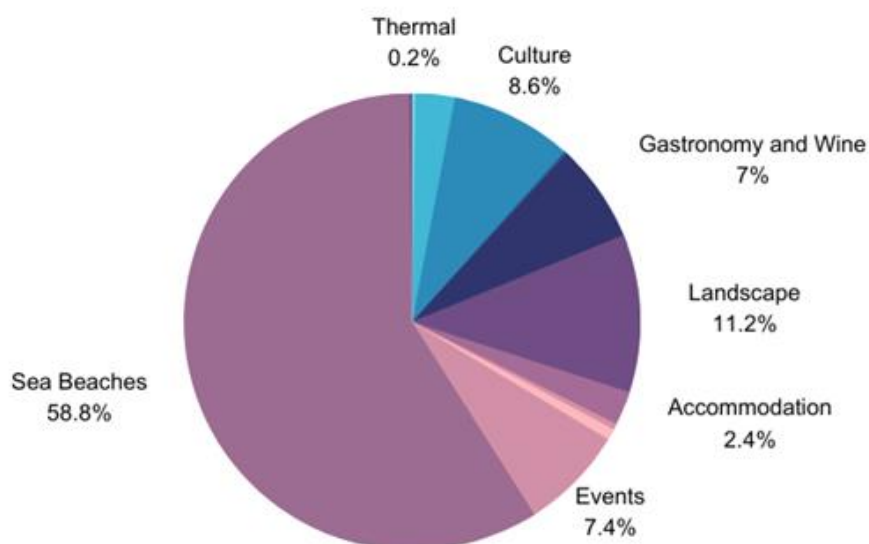
Figure 3   Representativeness of Online Perceived Cognitive Image

Also, the landscape variable, with a representativeness of 11.2%, shows a prominent position, with most

publications being in Caldas da Rainha and Óbidos and includes all posts alluding to the western region, such as natural fields, historical elements characterizing the destination, housing buildings, statues, among others.

Likewise, culture is well perceived by tourists, with an average of 8.6% of mentions in publications, where attractions such as Óbidos Castle, the Torres Vedras churches, the Torres Vedras Arts and Creativity Centre, and Alcobaça Monastery stand out.

From another perspective, the cognitive perceived image also represents health services, transportation, and thermal, but with a very low percentage (0.2%), which may mean that the services do not correspond to the projection made by the entities and, therefore, may function precariously at the destination.

On the other hand, it appears that the cognitive projected image promotes the local accommodation and commercial infrastructures of the West a lot, something that is not perceived by consumers.

Figure 4   Representativeness Main Characteristics of West Made by Perceived Affective Image

As far as the perceived affective online image is concerned, the following words that define the tourist destination: attractive, traditional, diversification, and sunsets (Figure 4). These are some of the adjectives most mentioned by Instagram users, followed by the word West, which is strongly present in the description of the posts because it is believed to define well the characteristics present in the images. These words are in line with the projected image; however, the linguistic ability of the population is not mentioned, questioning the form of communication between locals and tourists.

4. Conclusion

The online image of the West results in the search for data designed by national entities and perceived by tourists. Thus, the following points stand out: The image projected by the NTO (National Tourism-Organization) prioritizes the sun and sea tourism of the region and it's perceived by TGC (Tourist Generated-Content), with, about 52,4% of mentions of sea beaches by NTO and the perceived image is 58.8%, considered the highest percentage of perceived image variables; The culture is designed by the websites and perceived by the Tourist Generated-Content; The website turismodocentro.pt properly projects the infrastructures in the *West* (hotels, roads) but tourists do not always mention them, since that the only mention made by tourists is the accommodation factor, with 2.4%, approximately, and it is mainly in Óbidos municipality.

Also, it should be noted that culture is still at a precarious level, both in terms of projection and perception,

since there are monuments and historical routes that are not mentioned by the entities, eventually falling into oblivion. I mention, for example, the Lines of Torres, the Battle of Vimeiro or the Peniche Fort.

In relation to the perceived affective image, the *West* is characterized by being a destination with a good local hospitality as well as a good quality of life, since the words that most define the destination: attractive, calm, diverse and traditional, are the ones that stand out the most in the description of the publications. The entities, on the other hand, reinforce the destination as being adaptable to tourists, through the diversification of languages available on the websites, as well as an accessible, sustainable destination, with exceptional beaches and rich in culture (Visit Portugal; Turismo Centro de Portugal).

Thus, it is possible to conclude that the projected cognitive image corresponds to the perceived cognitive image (hypothesis 1), especially through the number of beaches mentioned by both. In addition, it is conferred that the projected general image is the same as the perceived general image (hypothesis 3), since the characteristics promoted by the entities over the West go against the characteristics mentioned by consumers who visit the place, except for accommodation and means of transport, which end up suffering disparities in the perceived image. This factor may be linked to the lack of conditions felt by tourists, a gap being committed by the tourist destination. Regarding hypothesis 2, the projected affective image does not correspond to the perceived affective image, given the lack of data before the perceived image, since the content creators do not characterize the tourist destination or the sensation they felt at the time of visit, making it complex to evaluate the affective characteristics of the place.

Although the study presents valid conclusions, there were some limitations for analysis and data collection, namely:

- Online websites data collection: This limitation is basically information that is sometimes outdated and furthermore difficult to find, since websites do not always have the best search layout and it becomes complex to search for keywords.
- Lack of affective information in perceived image, since tourists mention the place and the hashtag, but do not always describe their experience or emotions.
- Big data since West doesn't have an official website with all the tourism information and websites from the municipalities have a lot of information, making the database very extensive and complex to analyze.

In this way, it is concluded that, for future investigations, the theme can focus only on the online cognitive image of *West*, in order to make a complete search of the data, based only on information made by municipalities websites. Alternatively, it is possible to investigate only the online perceived image of *West* to understand the main strategies used by online content creators and with this, conclude the type of image that influences promote the most.

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