Papers

Online and offline communication for country brands: an exploratory study of the Brazil Brand

Comunicação on-line e off-line para marca-país: um estudo exploratório sobre a Marca Brasil

Comunicación on-line e off-line para marca país: un estudio exploratorio sobre la Marca Brasil

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Abstract

The fierce international competition among tourist destinations forces their managers to offer their public unique value propositions, seeking to improve their images and highlighting their unique tourist experiences and advantages. In this process, the proper management and communication of a country brand becomes even more relevant. The growing number of people who use the Internet to plan their trips causes country brand managers to be concerned with building a solid digital performance for their brands. In this context, this article sought to understand the management and communication practices developed for the Marca Brasil (Brazil Brand) and its activities on the Internet. To this end, a qualitative and exploratory research was carried out by conducting in-depth, semi-structured interviews with Embratur professionals responsible for the management of the Brazil Brand and its online performance. The results of this article describe the core objectives of the brand, its applications, and the activities developed to achieve them, emphasizing their actions through the Visit Brazil website and its social media channels.
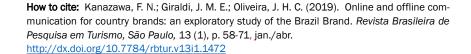
Palavras-chave:

Comunicação on-line e off-line. Marca Brasil. Visit Brasil. Embratur.

Resumo

A acirrada competição internacional entre destinos turísticos força seus gestores a oferecer a seus públicos propostas de valor únicas, buscando melhorar suas imagens e destacando seus diferenciais e experiências turísticas exclusivas. Nesse processo, a adequada gestão e comunicação de uma marca-país se torna ainda mais relevante. O número cada vez maior de pessoas que utilizam a internet para planejar suas viagens gera nos gestores de marcas-país a preocupação de construir uma sólida atuação digital para suas marcas. Diante desse cenário, este artigo buscou compreender as práticas de gestão e comunicação desenvolvidas para a Marca Brasil e sua forma de atuação na internet. Para tal, foi feita uma pesquisa qualitativa e exploratória que realizou entrevistas em profundidade conduzidas de forma semiestruturada com os profissionais da Embratur responsáveis pela gestão da Marca Brasil e sua atuação online. Os resultados deste artigo descrevem os objetivos centrais da marca, suas aplicações e atividades desenvolvidas para atingi-los, dando ênfase às suas atuações através do website Visit Brasil e suas páginas em mídias sociais.

Resumen

La feroz disputa internacional entre los destinos turísticos obliga a sus gerentes a ofrecer a su público propuestas de valor únicas, tratando de mejorar su imagen y destacando sus diferencias y experiencias turísticas exclusivas. En este processo, la correcta administración y comunicación de una marca país és aún más importante. El número cada vez mayor de personas que utilizan la internet para planear viajes preocupa los gerentes de la marca país a construir una sólida presencia digital para sus marcas. En ese panorama, este estudio anheló entender las actividades de administración y comunicación aplicadas a la Marca Brasil y su presencia digital. Para eso, fue utilizado el método qualitativo y exploratorio que realizó una entrevista con los gerentes de la Marca Brasil y sus actividades online. Los resultados de este estudio describen los objetivos principales de la marca, sus aplicaciones y las actividades realizadas para alcanzarlos, enfatizando sus actividades por medio del website Visit Brasil y sus páginas en medios sociales.

1 INTRODUCTION

The popularization of the Internet, the development of new technologies, and the action of contemporary forces that potentiate the effects of the globalization process, have led to the increase in the flow of people between countries, foreign trade, and international financial transactions in recent decades. The growth of the tourism sector has surpassed indicators of world economic growth in recent years. For example, in 2017, world tourism grew by 7% (UNWTO, 2018) while the growth of the global economy was 3.1 % (The World Bank, 2018). In Brazil, the tourism sector accounted for around 7 million jobs in 2016 (7.8 % of the total number of jobs in the country), with growth projected for 2027 to 8.6 % of the total. The sector also accounted for 8.5 % of the country's GDP in 2016, with growth projected to 9.1 % in 2027 (WTTC, 2017).

In this scenario, the competition among countries for investments, tourists, and consumer markets for the export of products becomes increasingly fierce (Fetscherin, 2010; Hynes, Caemmerer, Martin, & Masters, 2014; Stock, 2009). Thus, several countries are using brand and communication strategies to differentiate themselves in this global dispute, making it evident that not only companies but also countries are now seeking prominence and recognition in the global context (Fan, 2006, 2010; Fetscherin, 2010).

The literature highlights the importance for a country to develop a good image with the foreign public, since this can influence positively or negatively decisions such as the acquisition of its products, investments, and intention to visit it (Diamantopoulos, Schlegelmilch, & Palihawadana, 2011; Hynes et al., 2014; Nebenzahl, 2007).

Specifically, regarding tourism, Hakala, Lemmetyinen and Kantola (2013) argue that the image of a country strongly influences the destination choice process, since potential tourists usually have limited knowledge about places they have not yet visited, and their decisions can be affected by stereotypes. In this way, the authors discuss the importance of providing the right amount of quality information to improve the country's image and, ultimately, to convince potential tourists to visit it.

In this process, the Internet assumes a key role, since it has generated great changes in the way of seeking and obtaining information about tourism and products and services linked to tourism. Over the years the Internet has become one of the main sources of tourist information used by individuals (Morrison, 2012). It is therefore imperative that country brand managers focus their attention on this source in brand management and communication so that, by using the tools offered within this environment (such as the creation of websites, mobile applications, and social media pages), they can positively influence the decisions of potential tourists to visit their country, satisfying their information needs (Farias, Aguiar, Kovacs, & Andrade, 2011).

In addition, the interactive and collaborative features of the Internet allow people to seek and share content about their interests in a very practical way, giving them the power to express their opinions, knowledge, and

experiences on any subject (Adamson, 2008). It also opens the opportunity for organizations to participate in this space, in order to get to know their audiences and to better satisfy their needs, and to create and disseminate content to bring them closer to the brand and influence their decisions (Rowles, 2014).

Bringing the present discussion to the Brazilian reality, it is worth noting that Embratur, the Brazilian Tourism Institute, launched in 2005 a national country brand, *Marca Brasil* (Brazil Brand), as part of the *Plano Aquarela* (the International Tourist Marketing Plan of Brazil). Such planning puts into practice several actions to strengthen the image of the country to make it a potential tourist destination abroad (Castro & Giraldi, 2012). However, the way this initiative operates on the Internet, as well as its purposes and practices developed in support of the objectives of the Brazil Brand remain little discussed in the current literature.

In view of this finding and knowing the great importance of the Internet in the context of the international tourism, and more specifically for strengthening Brazilian tourist destinations abroad, it is very important to understand how Brazil, through its governmental initiatives, operates using the tools available to attract foreign tourists to visit the country and meet their information needs when planning a trip to Brazil.

Thus, the objective of this article is to understand the management and communication practices developed for the Brazil Brand, specifically the ways of acting on the Internet. To achieve this, qualitative and exploratory research was conducted through in-depth, semi--structured interviews with Embratur professionals responsible for both the communication and marketing activities of the Brazil Brand, and the creation and management of its exclusive content for the Internet.

The present study is divided into the following sections: after this introduction, a theoretical reference is presented on country image, tourist destination image, and country brand, with emphasis on the Brazil Brand, as well as concepts related to the subject of digital communication. Next, the search method used is described. Finally, we present the results and final remarks, which return to the objective of this study and identify the limitations and contributions of the study to the literature.

2 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

2.1 Country image, tourist destination image, and country brand

Nebenzahl (2007) states that all countries have an image, either positive or negative. The concept of country image is defined as a general impression that consumers have about a country, which is formed from previous knowledge and experience related to it, and is also affected by information (misleading or true) about its population and socioeconomic and political conditions (Hakala, & Lemmetyinen, 2011; Hynes et al., 2014).

Kotler and Gertner (2004) add that the image of a country is made up of beliefs and information (often outdated and exaggerated) related to it, including aspects such as geography, culture, art, history, and celebrities. These beliefs and information often result in oversimplifications and generalizations that are not always factual, and generate stereotypes (positive or negative) about the country. The literature also shows that the image of a country can be a shortcut to processing information in the minds of people, being able to influence people's decisions to buy products from a specific country, the intention to visit or investing in this location (Fetscherin, 2010; Kotler & Gertner, 2004; Nebenzahl, 2007).

Nadeau, Heslop, O'Reilly and Luk (2008) state that there is a conceptual distinction between country image and tourist destination image. The first is more comprehensive, encompassing the country as a whole and focusing on perceptions regarding the acquisition of products whose manufacture is related to that country. On the other hand, the second focuses on the impressions of a particular locality (and may be a country, state, region or city) and intentions to visit it, so that, as Chen and Tsai (2007) add, the image of a tourist destination, in addition to influencing the process of choice of tourism destination by individuals, affects their post-purchase behavior, including their intention to return and to recommend it to other people.

Given the fierce global competition for investment, business, tourists, and exports, and knowing that the image of a country can influence the outcome of this competition, many countries started to adopt strategies of brand management and communication to differentiate themselves from their competitors. This raises the

concept of a country brand, which addresses the use of brand management concepts, strategies, and practices to improve the image of the country (Fan, 2006, 2010).

The management of a country brand consists in the creation of positive associations for this brand, for its products, inhabitants, and their localities (Florek, 2005). Fetscherin (2010) points out that a country brand comprises several levels, components, and subjects. Because it belongs to the public domain, its actions must cover all parties involved, as it affects different elements of the country's image, such as social, economic, political, cultural, historical, environmental, etc. Through its management, international assessments regarding the country are expected to improve, in addition to the objectives already mentioned, as a stimulus to exports and attraction of investment, business and tourists.

Anholt (2005), regarding country brand management, proposes a model that gathers the six categories of communication used by countries to express and promote themselves with their audiences. Adequate country brand management gathers as many of these categories as possible in communicating and delivering the defined strategy; if properly operationalized, such a strategy can improve both internal confidence and the country's external performance.

The six categories are: tourism (usually the most visible and most worked in country brand management); exported brands (one of the most powerful ways to create and sustain a strong image about the country); external and domestic policies (political behavior, the countries with which it relates and how their leaders are evaluated by foreigners, and their activities must be in tune with the other categories of communication); investment and immigration (involves the country's efforts to attract talent, investment, and business); culture, historical heritage, and sports (promotion of wealth, dignity, trust, and respect for the country abroad); and people (involves diplomats, politicians, celebrities, the way their inhabitants behave abroad and the treatment they give foreigners). These categories should be managed together, including through diplomacy and other integrated public policies (Anholt, 2005).

While in the past country brand management was characteristic of developed countries, today developing countries also devote their efforts and resources to create a more attractive and positive image of themselves, and therefore this is an urgent task to reduce their disparities with developed countries (Herstein, 2011).

In the current world tourism panorama, the great competition between the various tourist destinations makes them no longer differentiated by the quality of their accommodations and local scenery. In view of this, it became necessary for each destination to seek to distinguish itself from others by offering and communicating a proposal of original value, highlighting its cultural characteristics, unique features, and experiences that can only be experienced there (Campelo, Aitken, Thyne, & Gnoth, 2014).

In this context, the Internet has become a key element in ensuring that this information communicated by countries is quickly and easily received by their target audiences. Thus, the contents developed for the promotion of tourist destinations and made available on the Internet should be created in order to attract tourists to the promoted destination and supply users' tourist information needs, taking advantage of all the potential of the online environment (Farias et al., 2011; Fernández-Cavia, Rovira, Díaz-Luque, & Cavaller, 2014).

2.2 *Marca Brasil* (Brazil Brand)

Bringing this discussion to the Brazilian reality, Embratur created the Brazil Brand in 2005 through *Plano Aquarela* – Brazil's International Tourism Marketing Plan, which was developed in three stages: (1) diagnosis of the Brazilian tourism situation in the world context; (2) creation of strategic planning, which defined a vision of the future for the sector, the strategies adopted, and its objectives; (3) and the elaboration of an operational plan, which defined the actions, tools, and programs put into practice to achieve the proposed objectives (Ministério do Turismo, 2009).

Despite the different benefits that can be generated from the proper management of a country brand, Khauaja and Hemzo (2007) criticize the fact that the Brazil Brand acts with a major focus on tourism, limiting or placing in the background the role that the brand may play in encouraging the export of Brazilian products.

In analyzing the development and management of the Brazil Brand, Castro and Giraldi (2012) point out some shortcomings in this process: absence of analysis of the main threats and opportunities for Brazil in the international tourism scene; non-use of celebrities in shaping the brand's strategic base; financial resources were not specifically allocated to brand management; lack of control of exports of products that use the Brazil Brand abroad; problems in brand communication for the local population; and lacking in the differentiation of the Brazil Brand compared to the others, since the artistic, historical, and architectural elements of the country were left in the background. As suggestions to the brand for the future, the authors highlight: investment in tourism infrastructure, communication, training, and security; conducting studies that anticipate possible threats to the country, covering political, social, economic, and environmental aspects, both internal and external; use of world-renowned personalities that convey credibility, helping in the task of persuading potential tourists to visit Brazil; allocation of specific resources for brand management; control of the image that exporting companies convey regarding the Brazil Brand abroad; promotion of the brand more intensely within the Brazilian territory; and better exploration of the elements of Brazilian art, history, and architecture, in favor of the Brazil Brand.

Mariutti and Giraldi (2011) state that the positioning of the Brazil Brand, in harmony with the companies of the tourism sector, plays the strategic role of dimensioning the brand as an offer of tourist destinations, exposing its identity in its entirety so that potential tourists may recognize and value it, thus differentiating it from others. In addition, aware of the fact that more and more people are using the Internet to plan their trips, they suggest that the Brazil Brand should follow the innovations of the Internet, social media and other tools, so that strategies for building and managing the brand are continuous and lasting, highlighting the standardization and control of brand use in the online environment.

2.3 Communication of tourist destinations through digital tools

The era of online marketing has led to profound changes in the way tourists obtain information on tourism and hospitality services, a fact that has led in recent years to the development of websites aimed at meeting the information needs of tourists using the Internet to plan their trips (Farias et al., 2011; Morrison, 2012)

In addition, a positive browsing experience of tourism contents on the Internet, by helping to disseminate information on tourist attractions and experiences available in a given destination, and by presenting a well-defined identity of the locality, is capable of making positive and attractive impressions of it and influencing individuals, by shaping both the image of a tourist destination and individuals' intention to visit it (Carvalho et al., 2016; Farias et al., 2011).

In this context, Embratur considers the following to be advantages of the use of digital communication tools in the dissemination of the Brazil Brand: wide geographic range; high number of people who will have access to information; easy availability and access; cost-effectiveness due to the high impact caused; interactivity with the public; and ability to measure the results provided by such tools. The Visit Brazil website is an important pillar in the work of promoting Brazilian tourist destinations and products to millions of tourists around the world, providing potential tourists with information about the experiences available in the country, as well as practical travel tips and information about Brazilian destinations. In addition, to meet information needs of the press and tourism professionals, this website provides news, reports, market studies, and materials to support the dissemination of Brazilian tourist destinations (Brasil, 2014).

3 METHOD

In order to achieve the objective of this article, a qualitative and exploratory research was carried out, the latter being recommended when there is little knowledge about the topic, aiming to generate greater familiarity and proximity of the subject, and to promote the improvement of ideas or the discovery of intuitions (Raupp & Beuren, 2003). The qualitative research was aimed at discovering unanticipated findings and reactions about the research problem and bringing the researcher closer to the problem (Hair et al., 2014). This choice is also justified by the novelty of the subject studied and the lack of work related to it making it impossible to use fully structured methods for data collection (Malhotra, 2012).

We conducted in-depth, semi-structured interviews with professionals and managers of the Brazil Brand at Embratur, and discussed the guidelines for the creation and management of the Brazil Brand and the actions carried out specifically for the brand's performance on the Internet. The interviews were held at the Embratur building in Brasília (Federal District, DF) in November 2015. The General Coordinator of Advertising and Publicity of the organization (responsible for the brand's activities both online and offline) and two other professionals were present. This team of three people is responsible for the performance of the Brazil Brand on the Internet, thus all employees of Embratur who could contribute to achieving the results of this research were interviewed. Dates and durations of the interviews were scheduled by the interviewees, according to their availability.

The interviews were conducted by a single researcher who had no previous relationship with Embratur, and were scheduled in an e-mail exchange with one of the interviewees. The email address of this professional was obtained from the Embratur website, and contact was initiated with the sending of an interview request along with a letter of presentation by the researcher.

The interview script was developed based on topics highlighted by other authors in their work on digital communication aimed at tourism and country brand management. For example: during the interview, questions were asked about the way Embratur works to manage the different categories proposed in the hexagonal model of Anholt (2005) mentioned above; to differentiate the Brazilian tourist destinations from the others and to communicate a proposal of original value for the country (Campelo, Aitken, Thyne, & Gnoth, 2014); to generate web content able to provide individuals with tourism information and convince them to visit Brazil (Farias et al., 2011; Fernández-Cavia, Rovira, Díaz-Luque, & Cavaller, 2014); to overcome the failures in brand management highlighted by Castro and Giraldi (2012), etc.

The qualitative data collected were analyzed following the guidelines of Bardin (2011), who divides the content analysis into three parts: pre-analysis; exploitation of the material; and treatment of results, inference, and interpretation. Qualitative analysis allows data to be analyzed as they are iteratively collected, allowing for modifications and adaptations to the questions for further analysis (Hair, Celsi, Ortinau, & Bush, 2014). The data collected from the interview responses were transcribed and analyzed together with the field notes created during the interviews.

4 PRESENTATION AND DISCUSSION OF THE RESULTS

4.1 Communication and management of the Brazil Brand

The presentation of the results begins by addressing the purposes of the Brazil Brand defined by Embratur. Although the Brazilian country brand has been used in the past by the Brazilian Agency for the Promotion of Exports and Investments (*Agência Brasileira de Promoção de Exportações e Investimentos* - APEX) for the dissemination of export products such as cachaça, coconut water, and guaraná, the Brazil Brand is currently used exclusively for tourism, information in line with the previously mentioned statement by Khauaja and Hemzo (2007).

According to the interviewees, the activities related to the Brazil Brand operate on different fronts, covering three areas within Embratur: the marketing department, responsible for the activities of public relations, advertising and publicity, and digital communication; the product and destination department, responsible for structuring the products that will be released by Embratur abroad, for promoting and participating in trade shows (an important point of contact of Embratur with the tourism trade, one of its main audiences, formed by tourism agencies, transportation companies, lodging organizations, and companies related to the tourist activities of each destination, event centers, among others) and for the promotion of events (to enable the realization of major events in Brazil with international repercussions); and the international markets department, responsible for Embratur's relationship with the tourist trade in international markets.

The fact that Brazil is a vast country, in which there are different economic activities, geographical features, tourist attractions, and cultural differences between regions, makes the promotion of Brazilian tourist activities abroad a very challenging task. For brand managers, the fact that Brazil encompasses a wide range of

tourist characteristics (such as sun and beach, ecotourism, adventure tourism, cultural tourism, business tourism, etc.) makes working and promoting this diversity essential, as explained by one interviewee:

> We have the Products Department which lists the main products to work with, and we promote each of them depending on the opportunity. For example: we participate in exclusive trade and business tourism fairs, in which we seek to promote business tourism. That is, we participate in specific fairs to promote a certain segment. For culture, we seek to identify opportunities to promote Brazilian culture, such as film festivals, and recently we promoted Rock in Rio, and so on. We use the big events and look for opportunities to promote specific segments and niches.

In line with Campelo et al. (2014), Embratur recognizes that the great international competition among tourist destinations forces each of them to offer unique value propositions and, for that purpose, strives to communicate Brazilian diversity, in addition to the unique features and exclusive experiences of the country. In order to promote this diversity, Embratur communicates the different Brazilian attractions, according to the advertising opportunities that emerge, and makes a diagnosis of the best product to be promoted at any given moment, occasion or place. For example: the promotion of business tourism is usually undertaken in exclusive fairs for this segment; cultural tourism is advertised at events such as film festivals and musical shows.

A similar strategy is used by the brand on the Internet, since general content (available worldwide) and segmented content (exclusive to a particular country, continent, or region) are published daily in order to communicate the best Brazilian tourist products for each locality, according to a previous diagnosis made by the organization.

It is known that the local population plays a key role in the country brand success (Anholt, 2005; Fetscherin, 2010). Thus, Embratur highlights the great importance of Brazilians in the process of consolidating the country as a successful tourist destination, notably their joy and hospitality to foreigners. This fact was proven through research conducted after the 2014 World Cup, which showed that the aspect that most surprised those who came to the country for the event was the receptivity of the local population. Therefore, the Brazilian people are gaining increased relevance in the communication campaigns of Embratur, aimed at the foreign public.

As discussed previously, country brand management should try to improve the country's image abroad to attract more tourists, as well as the benefits of attracting investment and stimulating exports (Diamantopoulos et al., 2011; Hynes et al., 2014; Nebenzahl, 2007).

From the interviews, the image of Brazil that Embratur tries to convey to foreigners is that of a diverse country, with a vibrant culture, and very welcoming and receptive people, aspects strongly promoted in the branding strategy. In addition, the clichés about Brazil are also remembered, being considered important to work with and impossible to leave aside. An example of this is sun and beach tourism in Brazil, an activity with worldwide fame, and based on the great natural wealth of the country in this respect.

On the other hand, Embratur seeks to combat some clichés, and the main example is the non-exposure of the female sensual figure in their campaigns. This is a major stereotype of Brazil abroad, and there is a concern of the organization to depict women in their promotional materials only in family context, as maternal figures, and not as sensual objects, to dissociate Brazil from the practice of sex tourism.

Applying Anholt's (2005) country brand management model to the Brazil Brand, it is noted that the focus of the country is on the tourism category, and in many of its actions the components of the culture category, historical heritage, and sports are exploited as tourist attractions, while the promotion of exported brands is no longer part of its activities. In addition, it was evidenced that: the category "people" in the Brazilian case, plays a fundamental role in the evaluation given to Brazil by foreign tourists visiting the country, who are positively surprised by the pleasant treatment received from local population; Embratur, being a public agency, is responsible for translating government policies defined for the sector into the activities related to tourism; and with regard to the category of investment and immigration, Brazil concentrates its efforts in attracting world class events to the country.

Castro and Giraldi (2012) suggest that brand management activities in Brazil should involve studies that anticipate possible threats and opportunities to the country in terms of tourism, covering political, social, economic, and environmental aspects, both internal and external. Thus, questioned about possible threats

to the strengthening of Brazil in the international tourism scene caused by the negative economic and political situation in the country in the last years, the interviewees recognize that these factors are not beneficial to the success of their activities. Despite this, they state that foreign tourists have the capacity to treat tourism and political and economic aspects as distinct entities, so that problems in the present situation of the country do not discourage foreign tourists from coming. To reinforce this idea, they report that foreigners' comments on social media regarding the current situation of the country are rare.

Regarding the Brazilian economic situation, the positive and negative aspects of the devaluation of the real exchange rate against the dollar were discussed during the interview. On the one hand, the rise in the dollar is clearly a threat to the Brazilian economy and to the work of promoting Brazil abroad by Embratur, since any communication campaign outside the country is paid in dollars. But on the other hand, this situation allows foreigners to visit Brazil at a much more competitive price, and so the arrival of a greater number of foreign tourists to the country is expected and has already been seen.

Another threat to Brazilian tourism mentioned on the interview is the strengthening of competing countries, notably in terms of the presence of resorts, an aspect in which Brazil is far behind other countries that have shown strong growth in recent years. Finally, another obstacle faced by Embratur in the management of the Brazil Brand is the fact that, because it is linked to the federal government, the organization cannot participate in the marketing of tourism products, being limited to communication with the target public. On this point, one of the interviewees explains:

> We do all the communication work with the tourists, and when we managed to convince them to visit Brazil, we came across the barrier of commercialization of the products. We work on a relationship with the tourist trade, but we cannot make a direct bridge: we can promote marketing, but not directly market. This is indeed a weakness we have.

For Embratur managers, the mega-events of the World Cup in 2014 and Olympic games in 2016 were great opportunities of this decade for Brazilian tourism. Therefore, the focus of the work of the organization was not on the events themselves, which manage to promote themselves, but on the dissemination of the country's tourism diversity, in order to show those who came to the country for the competitions that Brazil has a lot more to offer than the clichés of sun and beach, samba, carnival, Rio de Janeiro etc. For this communication, the different platforms that Embratur has available (both online and offline), involving the tourist trade, the press, and the target audience were used.

4.2 Brazil Brand Digital Communication Actions

Focusing now on the digital performance of the Brazil Brand, the discussion begins by stating that all the occurrences of the brand on the Internet are carried out through "Visit Brazil" social media and website. Embratur's activities on the Internet are aimed at three different audiences: the tourist trade, press, and target audience.

Aiming to exploit the potential of the Internet to create and make available content to attract foreign tourists to the promoted tourist destinations and to meet the tourist information needs of these users (Farias et al., 2011; Fernández-Cavia et al., 2014), the Brazil Brand acts with the following digital platforms:

- Social media: Visit Brazil pages on Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, Flickr, and Google Plus. The focus of these instances is on the foreign audience, although many of its followers are Brazilian;
- YouTube video channel: displays videos that explore different destinations, events, and Brazilian tourist experiences;
- Mobile applications: there is the Brazil Quest game, which tries to show the country in a playful way to foreigners, inspired by the tourist attractions of the 12 host cities of the 2014 World Cup; and the Fellow Trip application, which is a travel tool that allows the user to view tourist tips (such as restaurants, hotels and other attractions) shared by other users;
- The Visit Brazil portal: a website that aggregates information about several Brazilian tourist destinations and their attractions. It underwent a major restructuring in its content, design, and organization in April 2016, and the new version consists of a less contemplative portal (the previous version was quite visual, with a marked presence of images and photos but few

informative texts) and with more information (improving the quantity, quality, and ease of access of Brazilian tourist information). This diagnosis came after a usability study was conducted to understand how foreign users behave on the website and improve the way information is presented to users while trying to persuade them to visit the country. Thus, its central objective is to transmit and explore the unique experiences that can be enjoyed in tourist destinations, and for this purpose, Embratur seeks to maintain close contact with the Brazilian states in order to obtain content and information on the unique features of each attraction.

The literature highlights that country brand management involves different sectors, organizations, and individuals (Fetscherin, 2010). Thus, to perform its marketing activities both online and offline, Embratur has the services of seven agencies, including: three for public relations work; two for advertising, which are responsible for creating campaigns, promotional materials, and media buying; and two digital agencies, which work on building the organization's digital presence.

The digital agencies carry out the construction of the online tools of the Brazil Brand, since Embratur, having a team of only three people, could not perform this work alone. This small team is responsible for dialoguing, creating briefings, and screening and approving the contents.

Mariutti and Giraldi (2011) highlight the importance of standardization and control of Brazil Brand use online. Faced with this need, nothing is published online without the approval of Embratur managers, who seek to ensure that all content reinforces the image of Brazil that the organization wants to convey, and to avoid certain stereotypes and clichés that one wishes to discourage. Within the agencies, there are no exclusive employees to work with the Brazil Brand. Embratur briefs the agencies on what it wants, and receives, and provides suggestions. Given this, the agencies allocate professionals who will be responsible for carrying out this work.

Embratur's interviewees point out that the main purpose of the Brazil Brand's digital presence is to provide information to potential foreign tourists about the country, highlighting the unique features of each destination, and the unique and exclusive experiences that only exist here, as one of the interviewees explained:

> We have the objective of providing information about Brazil as a tourist destination, as well as highlighting the reasons for choosing to visit our country and not some other, underlying Brazil's unique features. For example, we know that other countries also have beaches as good as those in Brazil, but we seek to put in all our activities what enriches a certain Brazilian destination, the experiences that can only be experienced here. And this involves the question of the unique and exclusive experiences of Brazil.

Previous studies have pointed out that persuasively addressing these unique features in each country through the Internet is a great challenge for country brand management, since this environment allows limited sensory stimuli, only visual or sound (Farias et al., 2011; Morrison, 2012). In order to transmit the unique Brazilian experiences, events, and attractions through the Internet, Embratur uses the various interactive and multimedia resources provided by this environment, in addition to communicating with users in a more personal and friendly way, different from the more serious and traditional tone normally used by government agencies. In other words, the organization claims to use content such as videos and images and texts in a more informal way in this environment, inviting users to interact and participate in the discussions and polls proposed by Embratur.

With respect to the origin and selection of the contents published in social media, they come from different sources. The Embratur team proposes ideas based on the reports they receive from their overseas offices, identifying issues, and trends that may be opportunities to be worked on. Information is also received from the tourist trade, which, knowing what the target audience from abroad is looking for at that moment, provides suggestions on what is best to communicate to a specific country and how Embratur can help in the activation of this demand. This information is then communicated to the agencies that work on ideas and produce communication, advertising, and non-journalistic contents. Based on this, the content that they think is most appropriate for each region of the world is disseminated. In addition, as is common in social media, content published by users is used, which generates great interaction with the public and is highly appreciated by these individuals. This source is searched for images and videos that show the experiences of the

users themselves in the destinations, which brings greater interaction, transparency, and trust in the communication between Embratur and the target audience.

In the following, explanations will be given about the performance of the Brazil Brand in the main social media in which it is present and that were obtained in the interviews, bearing in mind that all these social media channels are called "Visit Brazil":

a) Instagram: Since the main target of this media is the United States public, the publications are all made in English (although most of its followers are Brazilian). It uses beautiful photos with strong colors, showing Brazilian experiences (presence of people in many of the images), not just monuments and landscapes. It seeks to be cool and friendly while interacting;

b) Facebook: with content in English and Spanish, usually photo albums are published, in order to show more photos of the same destination, addressing their different aspects;

c) Twitter: using English and Spanish, mainly images and videos of people are published, with the people enjoying different experiences, such as sports, festivities, and landscapes;

d) Google Plus: a social media on the rise in Europe, and is also very important to improve the indexing of the contents of the Brazil Brand in Google results. It publishes different types of content (large and small texts, images, videos) and all of them usually have a good performance, taking advantage of the good moment of this channel abroad.

Most access to the contents of the "Visit Brazil" initiative comes from Latin America (Argentina), Europe (notably the United Kingdom and Germany) and the United States. As previously stated, in the different online media, general content for the whole world is published, as well as segmented content (specific to a given location), since different audiences react differently to published content.

Continuing the discussion of the previous paragraph, Embratur managers recognize the importance of using metrics and indicators to evaluate the results of each initiative and the achievement of its objectives. In this way, the organization affirms to diligently monitor the performance of each Visit Brazil activity, meeting with the service providing agencies monthly to discuss it.

For the work in social media, the main data analyzed are: number of followers, content performance, number of accesses, "likes" on social media, comments, and shares. Specifically, for the portal, the number of accesses, rejection rate (users who access the website and leave it after a few seconds), dwell time, survey of the most visited pages, source of hits, and others metrics are used. The measurement of social media results is considered easier and more agile since they provide data and feedback more quickly, which makes it possible to know which published content has greater or lesser success, whereas the website does not allow obtaining information of this nature. On the measurement of the results of activities in social media, the interviewees explain:

> We monitor these numbers closely and we meet monthly with the agencies to discuss them. What are the best and worst contents we publish? What worked and what did not? We analyze trendy content to be covered. And this is done together in integrated way between Embratur and the agencies, to guarantee the integration and synergy between topics.

Following the suggestion of Castro and Giraldi (2012) regarding the need to monitor and evaluate the main opportunities and threats for the Brazil Brand in the international tourism context, the presentation of the results of this article will end by addressing this subject, specifically on digital brand activity.

An issue treated by the interviewees as a kind of obstacle to Embratur's digital communication activities is the excessive number of Brazilians following Visit Brazil in social media, who commonly publish various criticisms related to security, infrastructure, and other problems of the country, impacting the international audience. The managers point out that those who criticize and despise Brazil on the Internet are the Brazilians themselves, not foreign users, which is a problem that Embratur currently has: a large part of the local population, instead of contributing to the promotion of the country abroad, prefers to disrupt it.

Mariutti and Giraldi (2011) argue that given the growing number of individuals who use the Internet to plan their trips, it is necessary to constantly monitor the evolution of social media and other internet tools, considering such innovations in the definition and adjustment of country brand construction strategies and management. In this context, in the future, Embratur intends to take advantage of the opportunity brought by the

emergence of new social media. To this end, it plans to carry out studies to understand the functioning of each of them, and then to define where it will act and in what way. For managers, it is important to verify the relevance that each social media platform has for the Brazil Brand and its target audience, if that audience participates in these media, and if Embratur has content to work within them. In addition, monitoring of the activities of other countries is carried out to verify in which media they develop activities and in what form.

5 FINAL REMARKS

This article aimed to understand the management and communication strategies developed for the Brazil Brand and its presence on the Internet. Following the research method, it was possible to describe the central purpose of the Brazil Brand (promotion of the country as an international tourist destination), brand applications, and activities developed for three different targets: the press, tourism trade, and final consumer.

In view of the strong international competition in the tourism sector, Embratur is aware of the need to seek differentiation regarding competitors, no longer in relation to the country's natural beauty, but mainly for the unique and exclusive experiences offered by Brazil to its visitors, exploring its remarkable diversity, the joy and receptivity of its people and seeking different opportunities to promote each of its tourist segments.

Given the importance of working to improve Brazil's image abroad to attract a greater number of tourists, Embratur wishes to promote in the international scene the image of a diverse country, with a remarkable culture and a very welcoming and receptive people, aspects addressed in their communication campaigns.

Aware of the increasing number of people who use the Internet to plan their trips, Embratur works the Brazil Brand through its website and various social media platforms, all of which are called "Visit Brazil". In line with the central objective of the Brazil Brand and the strategies employed to achieve it, the digital presence of the brand is aimed at selecting the best partners and the most appropriate sources of information, creating and disseminating content aimed at meeting the information needs of foreign tourists and attract them to visit the country, and interacting with users in a personal and friendly way. It is also important to measure the results of each action.

With the information and discussions presented, it can be stated that the objective of this article was achieved. The results of this study may contribute to academic literature on country brands (notably the Brazil Brand), and more specifically on country brand web communication strategies.

The results can also contribute to organizations involved in both the management of the Brazil Brand and its applications for the tourist trade, press, and final consumer, to generate a better understanding of the brand's activities to find and seize opportunities to enhance applications and benefits. As a suggestion for future research, the comparison of the strategies and practices used in the management and communication of the Brazil Brand with other country brands is indicated, focusing on their Internet strategies.

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