LOS AEROPUERTOS SE HAN TRANSFORMADO EN LOS EMBAJADORES DE LAS ESTRATEGIAS DE MARKETING DE DESTINOS ESPAÑOLES
AIRPORTS AS AMBASSADORS OF THE MARKETING STRATEGIES OF SPANISH TOURIST DESTINATIONS

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RESUMEN

El marketing de destino aeroportuario, ha ganado impulso en la investigación gracias al impacto de las nuevas tecnologías de la comunicación dentro de las responsabilidades de los Organismos de Marketing de Destinos (DMOs). Esta sinergia ha generado importantes oportunidades y desafíos en las estrategias de marketing, donde los aeropuertos se han posicionado como las puertas del paraíso de los destinos turísticos físicos y digitales. Los aeropuertos juegan un rol muy activo en la promoción y entrega de productos y servicios turísticos, es decir, es el primer anfitrión del destino. ¿Por qué? Primero, un aeropuerto es el embajador del destino. Segundo, un aeropuerto exhibe las características positivas de un destino. Tercero, los pasajeros comparan mentalmente su experiencia real de un aeropuerto con el mensaje turístico del destino y, finalmente, los aeropuertos son las Puertas del Paraíso, donde los turistas disfrutan y satisfacen sus sueños en el destino turístico deseado. Este estudio tiene como objetivo analizar el aeropuerto como el mejor medio de transporte y acceso a los destinos turísticos. Otro objetivo a evaluar es la imagen de marca de un aeropuerto como identidad propia y bandera de los destinos turísticos. Al mapear el marketing de los destinos de los aeropuertos y proporcionar ejemplos reales, esta investigación

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contribuye a los fundamentos teóricos de los DMOs y sus estrategias de marketing en el siglo XXI.

Palabras clave: Aeropuerto, destinos turísticos, DMOs, branding aeroportuario, marketing digital

ABSTRACT

Airport destination marketing' has gained momentum in research fostered by the impact of communication technologies on the delivery of DMOs responsibilities. It has produced significant opportunities and challenges in the marketing strategies, where airports have become the gates of paradise of physical and digital tourist destinations. Airports can play a more active role in the promotion and delivery of tourism products and services in their host cities. Why? First, an airport is an ambassador of a destination. Second, an airport exhibits the positive characteristics of a destination. Third, passengers mentally compare their actual experience at an airport with the destination's tourism message and fourth, airports are the Gates of Paradise where tourists enjoy and satisfy their dreams in the desired tourist destination. This study aims to clarify the airport as the best means of transport and access to the tourist destinations. This study also aims to evaluate the brand image of an airport as own identity and banner of the tourist destinations. By mapping out airport destination marketing and providing real examples, this research contributes to the theoretical foundations of DMOs and theirs marketing strategies in the 21st century.

Keywords: Airport, tourist destinations, DMOs, airport branding, digital marketing

1. INTRODUCTION

The digital era provides new challenges and opportunities by changing people's communication, collaboration, consumption and creation patterns, for this reason, the destination management organizations (DMOs) increase cooperation and coordination among stakeholders and contribute to the competitiveness of the destination. Hays, Page and Buhalis (2013) claim that a DMO which can bridge the gap between its need and capacity to use digital platforms for broader stakeholder participation will be able to exploit this opportunity to improve destination competitive advantage. In this study, we define "airport destination marketing", such as those tourist destinations that include airports as a tourist attraction and connection tool between effective demand and tourism supply in their strategic marketing plans, where the brand image of the airport and destination project the values: reliable, efficient, inspiring, hospitable, quality and sustainable, in order to improve the satisfaction, experience and perception of the tourists of the territory they visit.

The airline deregulation in the 1970s and the commercialization of the airport industry increased the

importance of air travelers to the development of airports because they generate large non-aeronautical revenues and have increased the demand for air services (Graham, 2014). This finding demonstrates the significant role of airports for travelers and how airport experience (AE) crucially affects a trip. An airport is regarded as the first and last place visited before travelers leave a destination to travel to by air (Wattanacharoensil, Schuckert, Graham and Dean, 2017).

Nowadays, the master key to a destination is the physical accessibility offered primarily by airports and the digital accessibility offered by DMOs through its master marketing plans and digital tools. The greatest competitive advantages that tourist destinations can have are: natural and artificial resources as the best justification and an airport that offers tourists the possibility to visit them in a space-time as short as possible. A good experience inside the airport as part of the tourist trip is essential in the perception of global traveller satisfaction.

Obviously, in this study for us airports are "The Gates of Paradise "of the tourist destination, in fact, airports are the doors that open and close the tourist trip. However, DMOs manage the airport destination marketing in order to promote a unitary spatial vision of tourist destination, with many natural and artificial resources details and with a virtuous perspective that makes tourists see the trip as a very close and simple whole −airport; hotel; beach; monuments and gastronomy−.

This type of marketing strategy was already done in the Renaissance, the language captivating, soft, and updated to be in line with modern expression, guaranteed to Lorenzo Ghiberti a wide and immediate success with his "Gates of Paradise" to show the whole world the beauty of the Florence Baptistery, also known as the Baptistery of Saint John. Thanks to the competition organized by the Arte di Calimala in 1401, a guild of wealthy wool-cloth merchants and Ghiberti's successful art (Biography.com, 2015), people associate Lorenzo Ghiberti, Baptistery and Florence at present and it will last a lifetime.

Although academics and destination managers have widely recognized the importance of stakeholder engagement in the development of competitive destinations, considerable challenges remain. DMOs play a significant role in destination stakeholder engagement by reconciling the interests of, requests from, and benefits to, multiple destination stakeholders. Various networks of regional institutions and public and private stakeholders contribute to set DMO institutional mechanisms and/or (in)formal processes to legitimize political power, share authority and responsibility for destination decision making, and balance interests and possible conflicts (Atorough and Martin, 2012).

Experience as a process also supports the research of Trunfio and Della Lucia (2019) who determined that certain preliminary, managerial implications pointing toward new ways to define, manage, and monitor evolutionary scenarios in destination management and marketing in the digital era. First, destination managers must combine e-democratic digital platforms and participatory off-line decision-making tools to foster trust and knowledge sharing among community members. Second, DMOs can use digital power to reduce their own control and facilitate interaction between stakeholders and tourists, enhancing destination value cocreation and stimulating marketing innovation by engaging tourists in the cocreation of experiential thematic products. Third, social media indices may be used to evaluate and monitor the performance of DMO social media in tourism engagement, evaluating the effect of destination strategy on audience size, user-generated content, and visitor interaction.

Nevertheless, tourism is closely linked to transportation and this is one of the three fundamental components of tourism, the other two being the tourism product (supply) and the tourism market (demand, or the tourists themselves). Technological innovations in means of transport have been key to the evolution of tourism, with air transport being perhaps the main contributor to the development of tourism in the world (Lohmann, Fraga & Castro, 2013).

Airports, in their role as getaways, are extremely important and influential in the tourist experience, including by attracting new tourists to destination. Responding to Martin-Cejas (2006) and explained by Wattanacharoensil et al. (2017) passengers mentally associated three aspects with AE and destination. First, the view of the passengers on the role of airports is associated with destination, which can be metaphorically compared with the role of an ambassador or representative of a place, which has been previously discussed in the tourism literature as one of the roles of an airport. Second, airports are the interpretation of a destination's tourism slogan and image, as passengers tend to understand the airport according to their mental perception of a destination's characteristics. Third, passengers evaluate the experience within the airport with the promotion of the destination they received in their country of origin. These findings address two unexplored yet essential issues which become the research questions of this study:

1) Why airports are the best means of transport and access to the Spanish tourist destinations?

2) Why the airport branding is the standard of the Spanish tourist destinations?

These questions are addressed by adapting the literature on DMOs and airports marketing strategies and tourist experiences to evaluate the determination of airports as a differentiating and competitive element in tourist destinations. This study focuses on airport branding and digital marketing, since both are tools in the portfolio of products and services that DMOs have in their marketing plans. It is essential that airports are where their customers are, both in the media and mobile devices, so they have to consider the brand image as another tool in their marketing-mix strategies (Florido-Benitez, 2016).

Traditional approaches to marketing have put emphasis on mass media techniques where customers have access to massive amounts of information about brands, products, companies and in which social networks have. However, with this rapidly growing technology, destination cannot only depend on their traditional approach. New perspectives are needed to understand this fast-changing communication context (Keller, 2008). The rest of this article is divided into four sections, namely, the literature review, which describes the conceptual framework of the study, the methodology, findings, discussion, and conclusions, including implications. Airports are essential infrastructures in tourist destinations, therefore, the scope of study of this research project has been international, collecting data and patterns of success that support the objectives of this research.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1. The airport as ambassador of the tourist destination

Over the last two decades, the airline industry in many countries has moved from a regulated market into a liberalised and business-oriented market in which airports compete for passengers, freight and airlines. In most countries, airports are no longer only a necessary connecting point; instead, they are a source of economic development providing a gateway to cities, states, regions, countries and cultures. Every day in 2018, 12 million passengers are transported, 120.000 daily flights and $18.8 billion worth of goods carried, none of this would be possible without airports (Airports Council International, 2017). Air transport is a major contributor to global economic prosperity. Airports provides the only rapid worldwide transportation network, which makes it essential for global business and tourism. It plays a vital role in facilitating economic growth, particularly in developing countries.

Airport infrastructure is the first and last point of tourists' contact in their holiday destination; thus, it constitutes the mobility axe of tourists. These activities have to be ''processed'' through airport in an efficient way to

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minimize travel time and to enjoy shopping and leisure time in the commercial area of the airport at the end of their holidays. It will be relevant to evaluate airport facilities quality as a factor of tourism service commodity (Martin-Cejas, 2006). Therefore, airport facilities give them the first impression they will have about the expected quality of their holiday time.

Coban and Yildiz (2019) suggests that tourism is developing very fast and this results in changes in tourism products and destinations. Consequently, there is growing interest in new and different destinations. Product diversity is also required to achieve success in tourism. In addition, Jarach (2001) describes airports as "multipoint service-provider firms" in which diverse services and products are offered to a broad group of target customers, not only to passengers. In this regard, five areas of activity can be identified as complements to the traditional core activities of commercial airports: commercial services; tourist services; meeting and incentive services; logistic services; and consulting services. Tourist services, for instance, are important for the development of airport branding strategies since they involve the 'airport as a tourism and leisure destination' concept.

Competition among tourist destinations is an increasing reality, the impact of which has naturally been felt by airports in the development of these. Evidently, airports are the ambassadors of tourist destinations, hence their unitary spatial vision must be aligned with the tourist destination, in order to improve tourist's perception of the airport-destination branding in all parts of the world. For instance, in 2011 Malaga airport in Spain, included in its name the reference Costa del Sol, for reasons of regional and tourist interest and with strategic objective of promoting knowledge of "Malaga Costa del Sol airport" brand in the international tourism market.

Airports have accelerated the economic growth of many cities in the world, in quantitative and qualitative terms. Let's take Doha airport in Qatar as an example. According to Almalki (2019) Hamad International Airport (HIA) has become one of the best in the world in terms of efficiency, service and passenger comfort. The airport is now a major hub and served almost 35 million passengers in 2018 and over 155 million passengers since it opened in May 2014 to the end of 2018. This airport has become a cornerstone of the Qatari economy and has contributed significantly to the acceleration of economic growth through the creation of new jobs in sectors such as tourism, trade and industry.

2.2. Marketing strategies of tourist destinations

Castro (2015) articulated a concept that considers the promotion of destinations and stronger competition among

airports. He proposed the expression "tourist airport branding" defined as: a set of disciplined actions aimed to build awareness and identity of an airport's brand by means of including local elements that convey a sense of place and memorable tourist experiences to passengers and visitors. The marketing of tourist destinations is a complex activity that needs to be carried out in cooperation between the public and private sectors. It involves components that range from physical inventory (infrastructure and entertainment) to the quality of services. At the forefront of these components is the character or flavour of the place that is conveyed to potential tourists, because the positioning of a tourist destination contributes in a major way to the formation of a positive image, by distinguishing a destination according to its use of natural and cultural resources (Zardo, 2003).

Nonetheless, a plethora of sophisticated analytical tools are available for forward-looking DMOs at different levels (local, regional, national) to increase the effectiveness of their destination management, marketing and development strategies, and improve their competitiveness and performance in terms of sustainable development and economic benefits. These tools include tourism destination image analysis, tourism flow forecasts, and branding tools that offer qualitative insights based on aspirational branding analysis, instead of suggesting how to brand the destination, given the selected positioning and images (according to the well-known Position-Image-Branding model). These tools can build on novel assets that are not necessarily part of the tradition of the destination, but instead are created purposefully: for instance, new services, events, and festivals. This approach is crucial in those destinations that have recorded stagnation or a decline in the tourism cycle and need to be rejuvenated by renewing their attraction base and draw new markets (Mariani, Czakon, Buhalis and Vitouladiti, 2016).

Undoubtedly, DMOs plan their marketing strategies in order to innovates destination brand, image, identify and promote its natural and artificial resources for attracting visitors to the territory. Increasing competition between destinations necessitates better management not only for immediate success but also for sustainability. Destination management is important in competing against other destinations but success is possible through cooperation and coordination among stakeholders. To achieve this, a DMO is needed. According to the World Tourism Organization (2004), DMOs are the organizations responsible for the management and/or marketing of destinations. To emphasize the difficulty of coordination among different public and private organizations. Due to its complexity, tourism necessitates the development of strategies by both central and local

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governments. Wattanacharoensil et al. (2017) emphasizes the importance of how passengers can view airports and the tourism destinations as a single entity, thereby indicating that airports are an internal part of the tourism service system.

Therefore, the collaboration between a DMO and an airport management should extend beyond general practices, which primarily involve setting up booths and exhibitions in airport terminals. Destination slogans should be well-conceived and delivered through a good marketing plan. Because of the growing competition among airports for travellers and cargo, airport managers realize the need to invest in innovative and more focused marketing strategies. One of the differentiation strategies adopted by airports is branding (Figueiredo and Castro, 2019). Now in the 21st century we combine physical media with interactive media and the objective is to attract our target customers and satisfy their wants and needs.

2.3. Airport branding in the 21st century

Competition in the airport industry assumes a complex form, exerting its main effects at three different levels (Graham, 2014): competition among groups of airports, competition among airports and competition inside airports. The second level is related to competition among airports belonging to the same catchment area. This frequently occurs in the major urban areas where there exists more than one airport. When the airports are operated as a group, the result of competition can be controversial. In fact, for airports belonging to the same catchment area, this has led to a mitigation of competition (Forsyth, 2006). However, the advantages that result from working as a group rely, on one hand, on the adoption of a coordinated development strategy, and on the other, on the reduction of costs through the sharing of resources and expertise and the positive effects due to the economies of scale. The latter level of competition concerns the wide range of airport services that can be provided by both the airport operator and an external company.

Determining how consumers perceive brands is crucial to the development of an effective marketing strategy. Perceptual mapping is a frequently used instrument for this aim, and it allows classification of brands according to how consumers evaluate them with respect to a set of attributes, such as eco-friendliness or luxury (Culotta and Cutler, 2016). In this sense, Nghiêm-Phú and Suter (2018) studied images of airports, focusing on McCarran International Airport in Las Vegas. Their findings showed that this specific airport is directly associated with a series of attributes such as visible, functional, psychological, mixed and affective.

Moreover, they discovered that certain attributes of the airport are correlated with the name of the city of Las Vegas, indicating that the airport plays an important role in creating visitors' first and last impressions of the city. According to the authors (p. 79), "if the city seeks to create positive feelings in its visitors, it must deliver positive images right at the airport." Airports can play a more active role in the promotion and delivery of tourism products and services in their host cities. City tourism administrations may act as the sponsors or consultants for airport activities. Through this cooperation, they will benefit both parties, especially with regard to marketing and branding activities.

Branding is one of the main strategies adopted by airports. It can be used both to increase recognition of the airport and to strengthen the loyalty of customers (Wheeler, 2013). According to Tse (2009), branding differs from the marketing of products and services by including all the experiences, contact points and perceptions that customers have with respect to the particular organization, not just the products and/or services the organization produces and sells. He also states that branding of airports is the process used to create a distinct identity that is both positive and memorable. By creating a distinct, positive and memorable identity, branding can increase the use of terminals and generate greater revenues, mainly non-aviation revenues such as parking, the lease of commercial spaces, and the hosting of cultural events and/or leisure activities (Halpern and Graham, 2013).

Furthermore, according to the authors, there are two types of airport brands: (1) ad hoc brands, which are those formed by the perception of customers or anyone who may have heard or learned about a given airport; and (2) strategic brands, which are those defined, communicated and managed by the airport operator in collaboration with the airport's business partners and stakeholders, such as airline companies and DMOs. According to Arman (2015) destination image in addition to pre-travel behaviour of tourists such as the destination choice, influences both on-travel and post-travel behaviour of tourists such as trip quality, trip value, tourist satisfaction, and revisit and recommend intentions.

The brand image of an airport must be aligned with its own activity and with the influence it exerts on the tourist destination. An airport focused on tourism and connected to the main emerging countries, has to project a clear, luxury, friendly and multicultural image. However, an airport focused more on business and cargo activity should promote a brand image of security, powerful, and dynamics. For instance, the brand image of Singapore Changi airport changes the image depending on the context, means and activity that this carries out –airport group; master brand; operating brands; sub-brands,

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airport website and airport app– All these are embodied in a vibrant brand identity system applied across the airport's operations. This resulted in a new focus for all airport functions expressed in a new purpose. (Figure 1) illustrates the brand image of Changi airport depending the context, means and activity.

Figure 1. Brand image of Changi airport depending the context, means and activity.

Source: Prepared by the authors based on Singapore Changi airport.

As is the case with any other product or service, many airports use logos and slogans as important parts of their corporate brands. Logos and slogans are visible in various areas within the airport, as well as in media advertising, vehicle identification, printed materials such as brochures and other channels. Some airports have been introducing local/regional elements into their logo and/or slogans, for example, Liverpool Airport, which has been rebranded as Liverpool John Lennon Airport. In this case, a drawing of the singer's face was added to the logo, and a new slogan was created using a reference to his song "Imagine": "Above us only sky." (Figueiredo and Castro, 2019). According to Keller (2008), a brand is a set of mental associations, held by the consumer, that add to the perceived value of a product or

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service. An airport's brand, then, is the sum of all the experiences of consumers at a terminal (Paternoster, 2008).

2.4. Airport destination marketing through the digital marketing tool

Nowadays, people need to be connected at all times. Give them access to your online content on their own devices when and where they crave it the most. Your thoughtfulness will be appreciated, and people will be much more inclined to purchase and use additional services and products when they are using a familiar and safe device. The rapid development of New Technologies of Information and Communication (NITC), and the Internet in particular, has produced insightful changes in recent years in practices and communication strategies involving the government and stakeholders. In this new environment, airport management companies are pursuing strategies focalised to improve customer experience of air travel and tourism. The increasing importance of digital experiences implies that further digitalization will be vital if the expectations of tomorrow's consumers.

We consider the importance of digital marketing as mention through literature reviews and the different ways that the marketing has changed. Digital marketing is a valuable tool for distributing information and communication. Maintaining a corporate website is vital for relations between companies and tourists. This bilateral relationship favors the increase of visits digitally and physically in tourist destinations and airports, as well as the projection of the DMO-Airport brand image.

Before going on a trip, most people research the place they're about to visit and the airport of origin and destination. Once they arrive at the destination, the search for the best places to visit continues. Thankfully, the power of Wi-Fi allows travellers to use their devices anywhere from the hotel room to coffee shops and touristic attractions. As a result, planning any trip becomes as easy as visiting a review website and choosing the next destination point. It will be necessary for all the agents involved in the destination offer to expand the range of their offer to offer even more value to customers, so it will be easier to turn frequent visitors into customers.

According to the World Economic Forum (2017) the airport becomes one key element in the consumer process of travel planning, after the initial decision to make the journey. This process, known as the travel ecosystem, is deeply permeated by digital technologies, given their capacity to attract, gather and communicate information to and from consumers. In this study, we are aware that the process of travel planning is much broader and this is conditioned by the digital marketing strategies of tourist destinations and airports through airlines. This process ensures the emergence of joint

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marketing strategies (see Figure 2), which indicates the association between (tourist destinations-airports-airlines-consumers) as "strategies, a decision, a process, and an outcome".

Sample of these joint strategies are the low-cost flight strategies, which have improved connectivity between point A and B, encouraging the visit of tourist destinations that tourists never intended to visit. Another example of joint strategy is airline stopover programmes, IcelandAir was one of the pioneers of this type of programme. IcelandAir launched its stopover programme in 1948, the year the airline made its debut. At the time, the programme was a necessity as the airline did not have a license to operate directly from North America to Europe. The only way the carrier could fly was to offer a layover in Reykjavik. This led to the idea of allowing passengers to stay for a few days in Iceland at no cost. The initiative's goal was to bolster tourism for the country (PATA, 2019).

Digital marketing enables companies to offer services instead of products. As an industry, aviation, travel and tourism has a head start, because of its position as a heavily service oriented ecosystem at the "new economy" end of the spectrum. According to Arman (2015) destination image in addition to pre-travel behaviour of tourists such as the destination choice, influences both on-travel and post-travel behaviour of tourists such as trip quality, trip value, tourist satisfaction, and revisit and recommend intentions. Therefore, destination image can be viewed as the prerequisite for successful tourism.

We have to point out in this study that tourist destinations, airports and airlines have planned joint and individual strategies in the short and long term. With respect to the yellow zone, these actors have an iteration process with the digital marketing tool, in order to improve the experience and satisfaction of the tourist, as well as achieve other objectives that they planned in their master marketing plans. Considering the themes identified in the literature review, and the relevant topics for this research, the travel ecosystem of consumer through digital marketing in this study were coded according to the proposed elements, as shown in (Figure 2). Airports are organizations with particular characteristics of their own, whether in commercial, logistical, safety, or security terms, and even as a basic infrastructure for regional development (Fernandes and Pacheco, 2007).

Figure 2. Travel ecosystem of consumer through digital marketing.
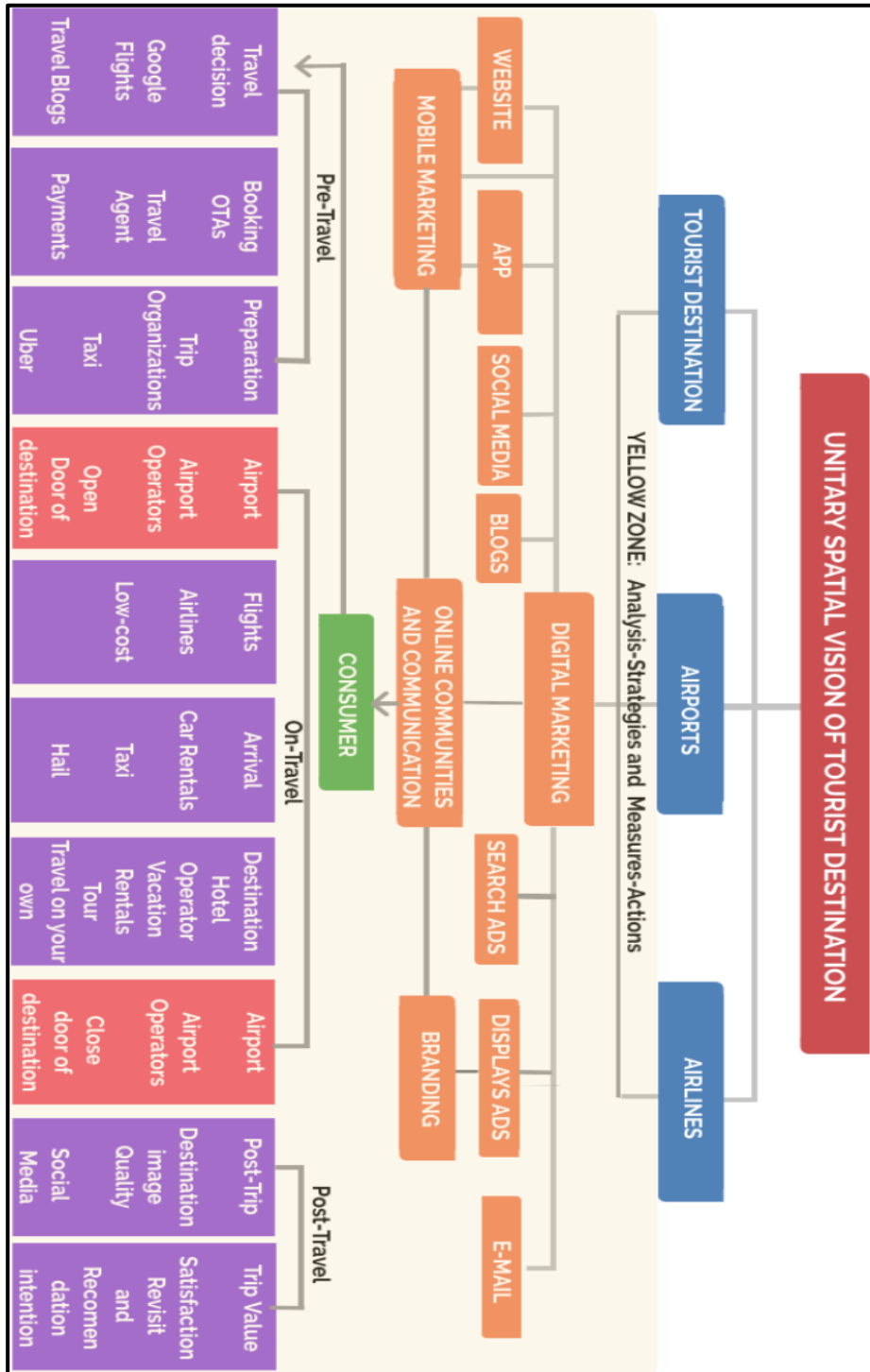
Source: Prepared by the authors.

2.5. Theoretical framework underlying the study

Leading on from this background context and literature review, three key areas have been selected to assess the

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impacts of airports and DMOS through digital marketing strategies. The data collection has shown how airports have become ambassadors and gateways for tourist destinations. These are identified in the following tables and images with the data sources used. The data used in this study were collected from Turespaña, National Institute of Statistics of Spain (INE), Airports Council International, World Economic Forum, World Tourism Organization (UNTWO), Dublin Airport, etc.

In the airport marketing literature, several data mining approaches have emerged, primarily based on text analysis of user-generated content (Halpern and Regmi, 2013; Castro and Lohmann, 2014) and sentiment analysis (Lee and Yu, 2018) of customer perceptions of products or services. However, such algorithms contain several limitations: the accuracy rates of classification algorithms are variable and inadequate (Culotta and Cutler, 2016), and only posts and active content-producing consumers are analysed. This means that passive users, those who follow airport brands on social media but do not produce posts after consuming them, are excluded. These passive consumers are the majority of Twitter, Instagram, Facebook and Linkedin users, and they have a substantial impact on airport-destination branding through digital marketing strategies.

Let us take Dublin Airport as an example, this airport has been named the world's best airport Twitter feed in an international digital media awards competition by The Moodie's Award, the best Airport Twitter account, which is the fourth time it has picked up this award in the past six years. It uses its Twitter account for news, passenger information, sharing engaging content, answering customer queries and rewarding its followers with regular competitions (Dublin Airport, 2019).

Figure 3. shows the number of followers that Dublin airport has on social media, this was reward best practice in social and digital media among airports and airport retailers globally. The major reason airports and tourism companies are so successful at adapting digital marketing strategies is because they carefully analyse how people interact with surrounding environments while travelling. These insights help them recognize existing customer needs and give travellers what they want to create the "wow" effect and ensure repeat sales.

Figure 3. Airport branding through social media (2018).

Source: https://www.dublinairport.com
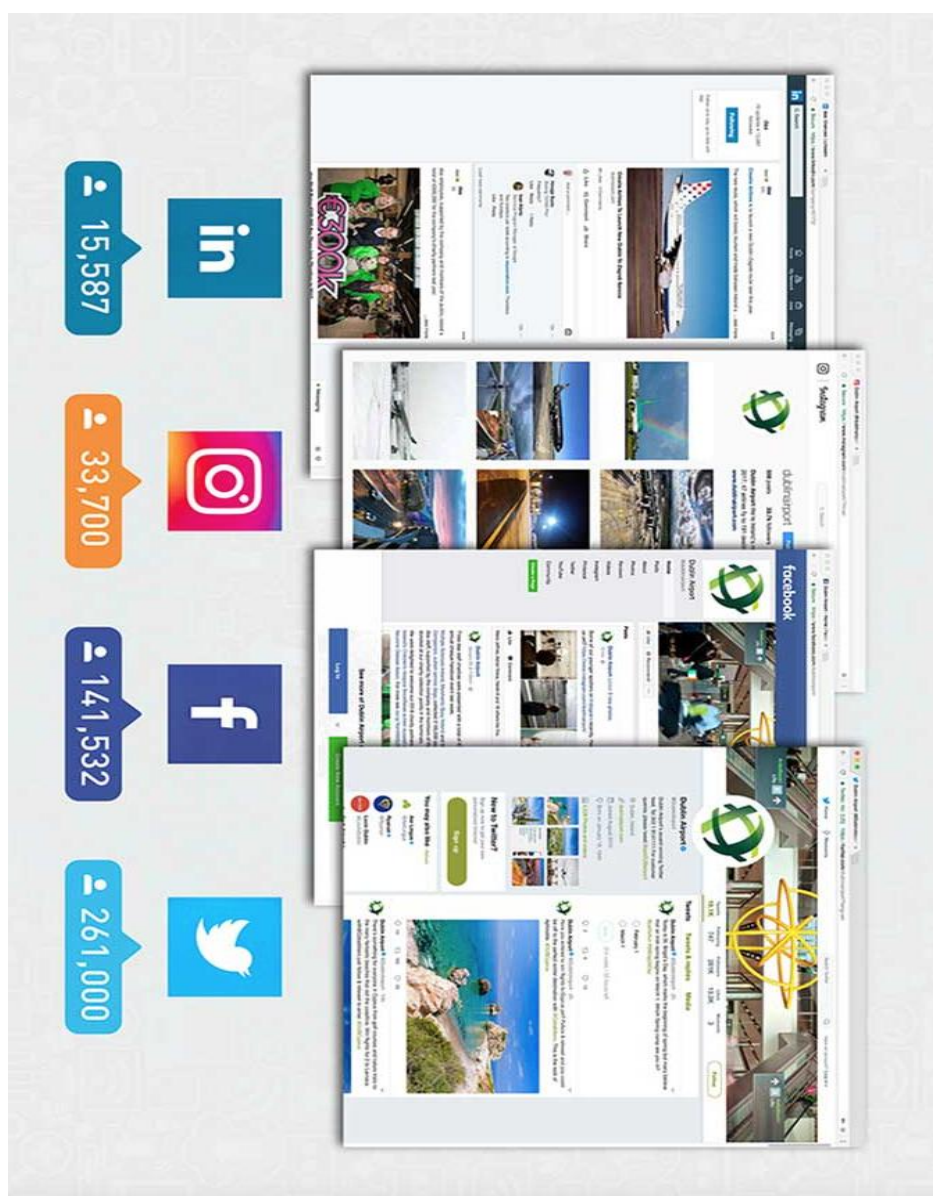
The ever-increasing volume of comments and reviews on the Internet offers new opportunities to capture passengers' perceptions and expectations of airport branding on a global scale. Recent research in text mining and data science makes this possible through various computational, algorithmic alternatives. There has been a recent up-rush of endeavours exploring the possibilities of using (often unstructured) information from online resources to investigate travel and transport related issues (Lee and Yu, 2018). For example,

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Költringer and Dickinger (2015) presented an automatic web content mining approach to compare destination branding information from: 1) the official websites of DMOs, 2) local news media sites, and 3) User Generated Contents (UGC) from review pages and travellers' blogs. In the dominion of destination branding, social media profiles are the (cyber/virtual) spaces where users can be encouraged to engage with a destination and turn their momentary, physical location of "self in the place" into an enduring inscription (Thurlow & Jaworski, 2011). One of the main objectives of DMOs and airports is to interact with tourists, analyse their behaviour patterns, needs and payment methods, because in the end we will obtain a complete profile of them, which will help us offer them personalized services and products and they will have a better experience in the tourist destination.

3. METHODOLOGY

The aims of the research method adopted here is to review the specific paradigm of research which discusses, investigates and evaluates the airport as the best means of transport in the specific context of DMOs. The research will conceptually classify focuses of research and will analyse papers discussing these subjects. The outcomes will provide longitudinal perspective around research themes and trends, and areas of greater and lesser research. This collective intelligence will cover the papers identified (but not limited) in Tourism Management, Journal of Hospitality and Tourism Management, Annals of Tourism Research, Journal of Hospitality and Tourism Research, Journal of Travel Research, Journal of Travel & Tourism Marketing, Journal of Airline and Airport Management, Journal of Air Transport Management, Tourism Management Perspectives, Current Issues in Tourism, etc. Data was collected from journals using University of Malaga databases and verified with reference to Google Scholar searches (Buhalis & Law, 2008), an approach also adopted by Leung, Law, van Hoof, and Buhalis (2013) and Standing, Tang-Taye and Boyer (2014).

Upon completion of this initial data collection, each selected article was further reviewed through a process of content analysis in order to ensure the focus of its research is placed upon the brand image of an airport as own identity and banner of the tourist destinations. The final analysis of the documents is, therefore, based upon a conceptual content analysis, based upon a grounded approach which allowed the key themes to emerge from the literature. This mitigates any issues of trying to make this analysis 'fit' and existing set of categories or classifications. Moreover, this research also uses

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empirical data from Turespaña, National Institute of Statistics of Spain (INE), UNTWO, etc.

This data represents quantitatively the basic core of why airports are the gateway to tourist destinations and their importance in DMOs master plans. The data also proves that digital marketing can open wider possibilities to any businesses, airport or tourist destination. Therefore, the scope of study of this research project has been international, collecting data and patterns of success that support the objectives of this research. Following Halpern (2008) airports act as operational spheres of influence, which along with the tourist centres that they serve, form the starting point of the regional structure for tourism. The vicinity is a noticeable competition factor and supports the competitive advantage of the region.

4. MAIN FINDINGS OF THE RESEARCH

4.1. Why airports are the best means of transport and access to the Spanish tourist destinations?

In order to assess the importance of airport as the best means of transport, the results shown in Table 1 are more than obvious, the distribution of the means of transport that tourists used to visit Spain from 2001 to 2018. As can be seen, ¾ of tourists arrived in Spain through airports, the second means of transport has been the motor vehicle through road with 20% of average. Third, ports with 2.5% of average and fourth railway with 0.5%, both occupy residual positions as a means of access to the tourist destination. In order words, airports are and will be for a long time, the main gateway to most tourist destinations. We have to point out that we have selected Spain to support our hypothesis, because Spain ranked second on the World Tourism Organizations list of most visited countries in the world, with its number of international visitors amounting to nearly 83 million in 2018 (Turespaña, 2019). The results of table 1 are plotted in figure 4.

In addition, Castro and Lohmann (2014) explain that airports are one of the major tourism stakeholders in most destinations because tourism generally consists of small and medium sized enterprises. Whereas certain airports emphasize the creation of experiences that connect customers with destinations and that develop the region as a destination, promotion of the destination, other airports focus on attracting customers to the terminal, either as inbound or outbound travellers. However, airport managers who strategically weave customer-centricity into the fabric of how business is done at their airports, and who are focused on achieving the buy-in of business partners, stakeholders and airport employees by using this iterative, holistic and programmatic approach, will enjoy

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more delighted customers, a more positive airport image and a beneficial impact on the bottom line (Paternoster, 2008).

Table 1. Number of tourists arriving in Spain, by main means of access (2001-18).

Year	Railway	%Railway	Port	%Port	Road	%Road	Airport	%Airport	Total
2001	239.401	0.5%	1.256.239	2.6%	11.738.611	24.2%	35.331.092	72.7%	48.565.344
2002	286.251	0.6%	1.225.427	2.4%	13.872.392	27.6%	34.946.554	69.4%	50.330.623
2003	291.549	0.6%	1.521.376	3.0%	12.118.005	23.8%	36.922.885	72.6%	50.853.815
2004	297.785	0.6%	1.511.156	2.9%	12.097.005	23.1%	38.523.886	73.5%	52.429.832
2005	290.133	0.5%	1.772.354	3.2%	13.121.460	23.5%	40.729.830	72.8%	55.913.778
2006	280.619	0.5%	1.459.895	2.5%	13.818.656	23.8%	42.445.292	73.2%	58.004.462
2007	146.265	0.2%	1.456.254	2.5%	12.738.968	21.7%	44.324.017	75.6%	58.665.504
2008	143.015	0.3%	1.452.178	2.5%	11.199.926	19.6%	44.396.895	77.6%	57.192.014
2009	139.343	0.3%	1.398.278	2.7%	10.407.355	19.9%	40.232.663	77.1%	52.177.640
2010	171.861	0.3%	1.441.523	2.7%	10.504.672	19.9%	40.558.917	77.0%	52.676.973
2011	140.328	0.2%	1.416.311	2.5%	10.006.661	17.8%	44.613.583	79.4%	56.176.884
2012	127.896	0.2%	1.078.502	1.9%	10.098.671	17.6%	46.159.427	80.3%	57.464.496
2013	115.816	0.2%	907.604	1.5%	10.889.147	17.9%	48.762.922	80.4%	60.675.489
2014	304.210	0.5%	858.984	1.3%	11.953.093	18.4%	51.822.657	79.8%	64.938.945
2015	342.863	0.5%	1.066.123	1.6%	12.466.246	18.3%	54.278.441	79.6%	68.153.673
2016	362.849	0.5%	1.635.428	2.2%	12.973.078	17.2%	60.343.653	80.1%	75.315.008
2017	373.662	0.5%	1.965.673	2.4%	12.889.671	15.7%	66.639.515	81.4%	81.868.522
2018	338.418	0.4%	1.970.083	2.4%	12.933.364	15.6%	67.531.290	81.6%	82.773.156

*The number of tourists is shown in millions and percentages.
Source: Prepared by the authors based on data of Turespaña and INE.

Figure 4. Millions of tourists arriving in Spain, by main means of access (2001-18).
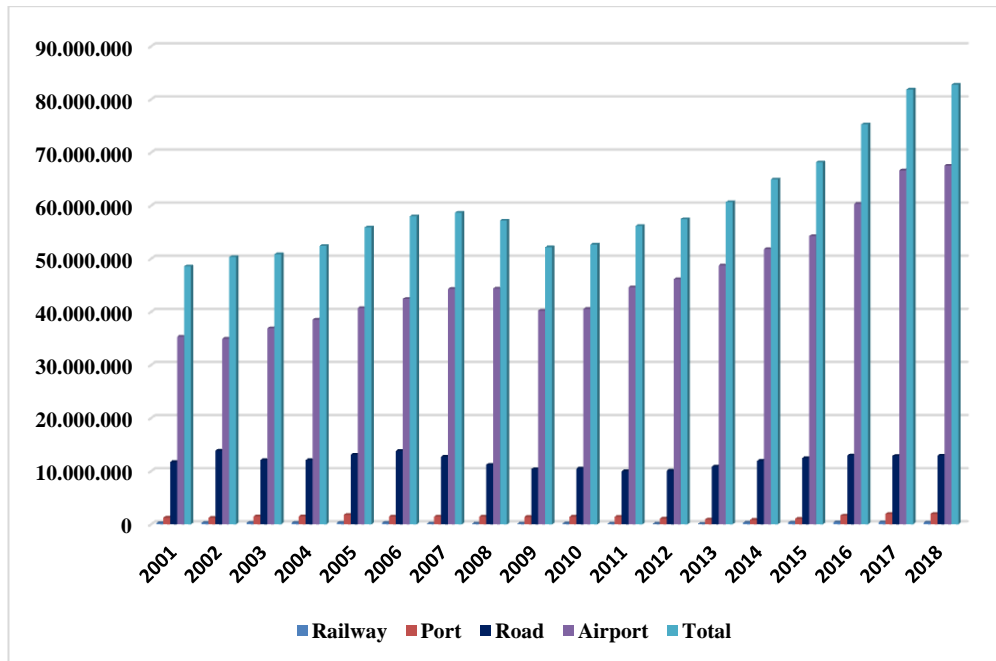
Source: Prepared by the authors based on data of Turespaña and INE.

The first and last perception of quality in a tourist destination takes place at the airport. This essential service has to be provided at a reasonable standard; otherwise, its poor quality will detract from overall experience. Average waiting time and crowding level for airport facilities are two relevant aspects in quality perception of tourists when arriving at their destination (Martin-Cejas, 2006). These results have many policy and managerial implications. From the point of view of the airlines serving the tourist destination, these offer great opportunities for new air routes, and thus be able to reach new market segments. The DMOs are aware of this reality, therefore, some airports along with the DMOs offer to install operational bases of some airlines in their airports, in order to open new air routes and bring a greater number of tourists to the tourist destination. To get a more global view of the relevance of an airport and the airlines that operate in a tourist destination, the table 2 shows inbound tourism in the world by mode of transport from 2015 to 2017. These data provided by (UNWTO, 2016-18) clarify the correlation with table 1, that is, more travel by air than surface transport.

Table 2. Inbound tourism in the world by mode of transport (2015-17).

Year	Rail	Water	Road	Air	Total
2015	2%	5%	39%	54%	100%
2016	2%	4%	39%	55%	100%
2017	2%	4%	37%	57%	100%

Source: Prepared by the authors based on data of UNTWO.

In 2017, slightly over half of all visitors travelled to their destination by air (57%), while the remainder travelled by surface transport (43%), whether by road (37%), rail (2%) or water (4%). The trend over time has been for air transport to grow at a somewhat faster pace than surface transport, thus the share of air transport is gradually increasing. The leader's role in communicating a tourist destination is important. but tourist destinations show other weaknesses, these have a great dependence on airports as shown in tables 1 and 2. It would be convenient to invest in more efficient and sustainable means of transport such as trains and electric buses to access tourist destinations. This research study would not be valid, if the data shown were not projected in the socio-economic context in which we live. Could you reflect the importance of an airport in a tourist destination?

Let us show you Ryanair as an example: this company has decided to close its Spanish bases in Las Palmas, Tenerife South, Lanzarote and Girona from January 2020, putting the jobs of more than 500 pilots and cabin crew at risk (Reuters, 2019), due to the delay in the reception of Boeing 737 Max aircraft, the drop in results due to the rise in fuel and the increase of labour costs, this forces the airline to cut costs that goes through the closure of these four bases (Muñoz, 2019). The crew want to strike over Ryanair's plans to close its aircraft and crew bases at Tenerife South and Las Palmas airports on the Canary Islands. Tourist industry leaders on the Canaries have also expressed their concern at the decision as the airline handled 3.7 million passengers across the two airports in 2018. This number could fall if the base is closed, but it would not mean that routes would be axed, according to the airline (SurinEnglish, 2019).

This close relationship with tourist destinations could provide a good support system, but that can be a double-edged sword, particularly when conducted in the context of the big companies investing and/or relocating in migrants' countries of origin, and taking account of the seriousness of the economic-social effects of company relocation on people and regions. We point out that airports are into the tourism the tourism supply

chain. From the point of view of local tourism authorities, would be convenient that DMOs assists stakeholders in developing crisis management plans, with explicit knowledge of the effects, barriers and facilitating factors in relation to the implementation of these plans.

Growing demand for travel brings a great opportunity, while challenging ecosystem stakeholders to rapidly adapt their strategies to capture growth. Since the 1980s, the amount of air traffic has doubled every 15 years, and is expected to continue to do so (see Figure 5). Appetite for travel is increasing due to demographic developments: the growing influence of millennials, who are more likely to travel; and the expected doubling of the middle class in high-growth global regions, and the corresponding rise in their disposable income. Furthermore, travel itself has become more affordable (World Economic Forum, 2017).

Figure 5. Inbound tourism in the world by mode of transport (2015-2017).
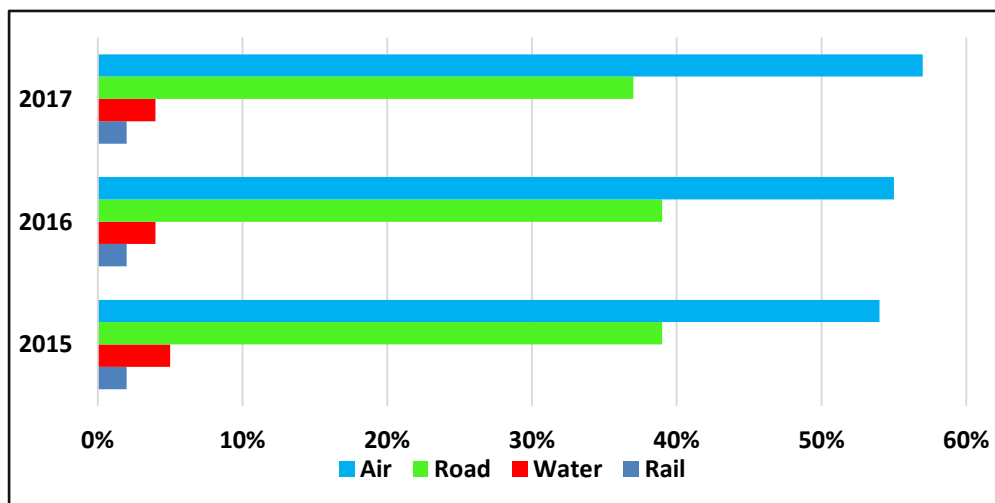
Source: Prepared by the authors based on data of UNTWO.

Furthermore, when the airports are operated as a group, the result of competition can be controversial. In fact, for airports belonging to the same catchment area, this has led to a mitigation of competition (Pagliari & Graham, 2019). Let's take Malaga and Seville airports in Spain as an example, these two cities geographically limit each other in the territory of Andalucia, each has its airport and belong to the AENA group (Spanish Airports and Air Navigation). There is a possibility that Seville airport could be the origin and destination of new intercontinental routes and this digged up the war hatchet of territorial rivalry so frequent in Andalusia between Malaga and Seville (SevillaABC, 2019).

We have to highlight that the Malaga Costa del Sol airport has the most intercontinental routes in Andalusia and the fourth in arrivals from Spain with 19.021.704 passengers, therefore, it would be convenient for the Malaga airport to continue expanding on new intercontinental routes, in addition of being a tourist reference in the world Malaga and Marbella. On the other hand, the advantages that result from working as a group rely, on one hand, on the adoption of a coordinated development strategy, and on the other, on the reduction of costs through the sharing of resources and expertise and the positive effects due to the economies of scale.

4.2. Why airport branding is the banner of the Spanish tourist destinations?

Excellent customer service is the synergy created when an airport's ability to exceed its customers' needs and expectations consistently matches its customers' perception that their needs and expectations are well met. This is particularly challenging in the airport environment where, although many are responsible for the delivery of services, the customer and other stakeholders often hold the airport operator accountable for the level of service provided airport-wide. If airport management takes a strategic and holistic approach to customer service and airport branding, customer satisfaction with the airport experience can be significantly improved (Paternoster, 2008). In this context, the objective of the present paper is to analyse the ability of tourism-oriented airports and as the brand image of these have become the standard of tourist destinations. Therefore, joint strategies must be established between airport-destination that support the brand image and address the drivers of customer satisfaction.

However, other airports may glean several lessons from this single case. First, the location and design of each airport must consider passengers' potential evaluations/perceptions since they are the major users of an airport. In other words, comfort and convenience for passengers should be an important objective of airport location and design. Second, an airport is the work environment for different providers of services and products (e.g., insourcing, outsourcing; business, public); each of which has a different purpose and employs different working methods. Thus, total quality management at airports should be implemented to guarantee quality and consistent delivery of services and products across providers.

In addition, umbrella branding may be considered when branding airports. With total quality management and umbrella branding, the airport authority should be the overseer of all the involved parties since the majority of airport attributes are

under its control. Third, airports and local tourism administrative bodies can and should cooperate to create positive impressions of the airports and the host cities in their passengers and visitors. Airports are the gateways to cities and the creators of the first and last impressions of those cities. Thus, each airport can attempt to create one unique attribute of their own to imprint a unique impression on their users. However, a landmark attribute should be a neutral or positive one. Fourth, airports have the image of being high-priced place and passengers often complain about high prices at airports. Thus, pricing to create a good image and pricing to satisfy users should be carefully balanced (Nghiêm-Phú and Suter, 2018).

By the same token, the pre-travel phase, destination image affects both on-travel and post-travel behaviours of tourists (Tavitiyaman & Qu, 2013). For example, Bigné, Sanchez & Sanchez (2001) concluded that destination image positively influences trip quality, tourist satisfaction, revisit intention and recommend intention.

This result was also observed by Chen and Tsai (2007) found that destination image has a significant effect on trip quality and behavioural intentions (revisit and recommend intentions). Therefore, the concept of tourist airport branding enables an understanding of how the branding strategies help create a singular identity, setting it apart from other airports based on the positive and memorable experiences of passengers and other users. Exposed the themes identified in the literature review, and the relevant topics for this research, the global vision of airport destination marketing in this study were coded according to the proposed elements, as shown in (Figure 6).

Nevertheless, passengers can view airports and the tourism destinations as a single entity, thereby indicating that airports are an internal part of the tourism service system. Therefore, the collaboration between a DMO and an airport management should extend beyond general practices, which primarily involve setting up booths and exhibitions in airport terminals.

Some noteworthy examples of research in this area are the works of Florido-Benítez, del Alcázar, and González, E. (2016) complaints and claims give companies the opportunity to improve their services and maintain their customers, as those who complain are also showing their interest.

The perception of the image of the airport will have a positive or negative impact on the level of satisfaction. Authors stated that satisfaction is influenced by the environment, the image, the experience, the expectations, and so on, and that image can be considered a premise in customer satisfaction.

Figure 6. Global vision of airport destination marketing.
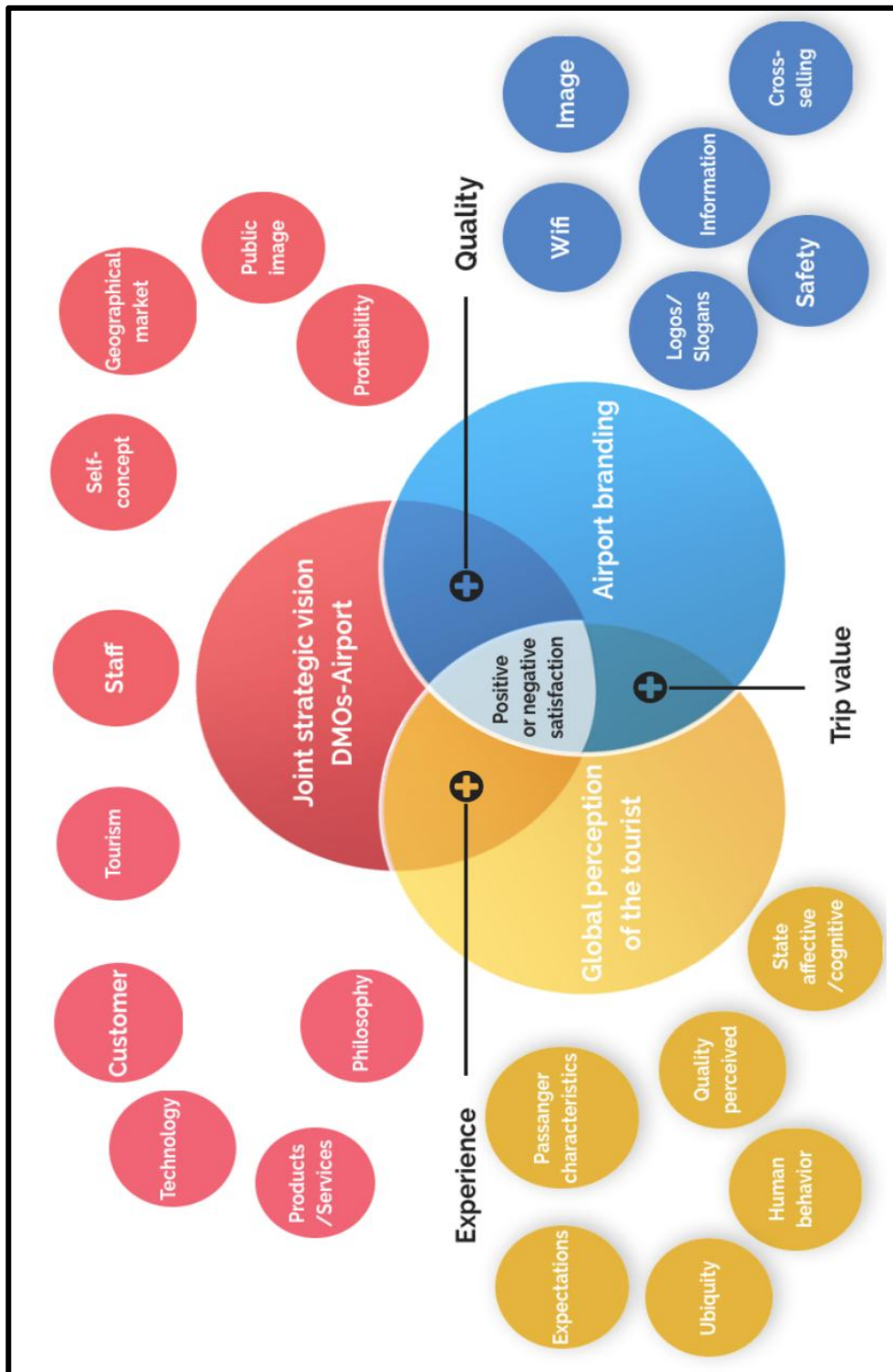
Ultimately, what will impact passengers positively will be a good airport app brand image, the contents and images provided by said app, and the image of the services supplied at the airport and by the companies coexisting in the airport microenvironment. Tse (2009), established the elements (tangible and intangible) that constitute the branding strategies of airports. According to him, airports can offer distinct, positive and memorable experiences by using strategies that involve the following elements: (1) retail pricing; (2) selection of retail outlets; (3) choice of food and beverage outlets; (4) architectural layout and design; (5) artwork; (6) services and entertainment; (7) service staff; and (8) airport logos, slogans and wordmarks.

Because of the importance of airports in the development of tourist destinations, airport managers realize the need to invest in innovative and more focused marketing strategies. Following Figueiredo, T., & Castro, R. (2019) showed that airport's management company has been employing tourist branding strategies using a mix of elements, but it is possible that these actions have had the main objective of raising the airport to international service standards, whereby the operation of terminals by large companies is a trend. Their study examines the passenger's perceptions of Tom Jobim International Airport – RIOgaleão branding strategies and its impact to their experiences in light of the airport branding elements proposed by the literature. It was also concluded that some of the airport branding elements (i.e. logos and slogans) are well developed and represent a higher impact on passenger experience, while others (i.e. retail pricing strategies) require further attention and new approaches in order to improve passenger experience in the terminal.

If an airport wants to obtain better results in overall passenger satisfaction and be competitive, it should develop according to Gil, Ruiz, Berenguer and Corraliza (2012) strategies and actions for achieving better positioning and superior value delivery to the consumer. These strategies must cover all aspects (functional and well as emotional) connected to the airport that can generate image, perceived value, or notoriety among consumers. In this way, the airport will be able to influence consumer perceptions and impressions and achieve greater satisfaction (Yoo, Donthu and Lee, 2000). According to Neuhofer and Femenia-Sera (2018) the agility in response, higher personalisation and contextualisation are key in smart destinations. Developing innovative practices like the ones the examples demonstrate might help companies and DMOs to discover their improvement possibilities for improvement.

5. CONCLUSIONS

The relationship between tourism and transportation is widely discussed area of debate since the last decades; however, very few studies constructed the travel and tourism competitiveness under the domain of airport that widely represents the most frequently used means of transport. The results show that air transportation significantly associated with the entry and exit of tourists, whereas the private vehicle has been the second means of transport. Clearly, airports are the ambassadors of tourist destinations, hence their unitary spatial vision must be aligned with the tourist destination, in order to improve tourist's perception of the airport-destination branding in all parts of the world.

This demonstrates the airports can play a more active role in the promotion and delivery of tourism products and services in their host cities. Why? First, an airport is an ambassador of a destination. Second, an airport exhibits the positive characteristics of a destination. Third, passengers evaluate the experience within the airport with the promotion of the destination they received in their country of origin and fourth, airports are the Gates of Paradise where tourists enjoy and satisfy their dreams in the desired tourist destination. Emphasizes the importance of how passengers can view airports and the tourism destinations as a single entity, thereby indicating that airports are an internal part of the tourism service system.

We cannot forget that the supremacy of the airport as infrastructure and airlines as a means of transport, show other weaknesses in the tourist destination, that is, if we take the data from table 1 and 2 of Spain and the rest of the world, ports and railways occupied residual positions as a means of access to the tourist destination. This demonstrates the great dependence that many tourist destinations have on airports and airlines, for this reason, it would be convenient to invest in other means transport more efficient and sustainable such as trains and electric buses to access tourist destinations. In the case of the access to the islands, cruise ships should improve their strategies with car rental companies, rail and bus companies, in order to compete with airlines.

Utilizing the findings of this study, DMOs, airport managers and internal and external airport stakeholders can gain precious insight of multiple dimensions of the business, interconnectivity and promotion of brand image through digital marketing. The major reason airports and tourism companies are so successful at adapting digital marketing strategies is because they carefully analyse how people interact with surrounding environments while travelling, through the Application Programming Interface (APIs), Key Performance

Indicator (KPI) and users Internet Protocol (IP) address. These insights help DMOs recognize existing customer needs and give travellers what they want to create the "wow" effect and ensure repeat sales. Airports can play a more active role in the promotion and delivery of tourism products and services in their host cities. Digital marketing enables organizations to offer products and services. The airline and tourism industries are service-oriented and the digital marketing tool favors the ubiquity and internationalization of DMOs-Airports information and brand image.

We live in the digital age and the master key to a destination is the physical accessibility offered primarily by airports and the digital accessibility offered by DMOs through its master marketing plans and digital tools. The greatest competitive advantages that tourist destinations can have are: natural and artificial resources as the best justification and an airport that offers tourists the possibility to visit them in a space-time as short as possible. A good experience inside the airport as part of the tourist trip is essential in the perception of global traveller satisfaction.

These examples of the services provided by airports and a DMO demonstrate how these organisations have successfully released a smart tourism experience to tourists by employing adequately smart technologies and solutions to offer an experience which is data-driven, built in real time, context-aware and co-created. But most of all, these organisations have utilised technologies with the superior end of providing a better experience. This way, other businesses in any of tourism sectors and all DMOs ought to think about how they could improve the experiences they offer and then exploit the potential of using ICTs to facilitate these superior experiences while considering tourists' current needs and expectations.

LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE RESEARCH

This study has some limitations that should be considered when interpreting the produced results and conclusions. The data collection was limited to the websites of Spanish airports as well as in state public agencies. Future research could test through surveys of passengers and airport managers, how airports are perceived and evaluated in the tourist's experience on their trip. Researchers may examine the management of the total quality of airports and its impact on passenger services and products. The major role of the airport authority and the supporting roles of other stakeholders in the total management and branding of an airport is a potential topic in this direction.

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