

# Co-creating the **branding** of rural destinations: an analysis of **agritourism** Facebook pages in the Northern demarcated **wine regions** of Portugal

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**Abstract** | Online tourism contents is formed by the three R's: reviews, ratings, and recommendations made by travellers. The aim of this article is to explore the use of Facebook by agritourism operators in promoting experiences and to find out how the three R's can help in co-creating the branding of rural destinations. This study adopted an exploratory approach, using qualitative and quantitative methods and questions about how Facebook is used by private agritourism operators, highlighting its potential for the co-creation of destination branding.

**Keywords** | Agritourism, social networking sites, co-creation, destination branding, creative experiences

## 1. Introduction

Mangold & Faulds (2009, p. 359) claimed that the growing importance of social media could be the result of “the emergence of a highly educated, historically affluent, and an increasingly sceptical and demanding consumer population”. Moreover, in the tourism sector, ever more exigent consumers are keen on not only consulting social media but also expressing their opinion through these channels.

Therefore, understanding the way that social media trends impact the tourism industry from a consumers' perspective is essential for the providers in order to satisfy tourists' motivations, expectations, and needs. According to Sabre (2016), an international technology company in the travel industry, one megatrend stands out: the pursuit of social status through goods, services, and experiences collected and shared online by travellers. Amadeus (2015, p. 3), another technological tourism firm, states that “travel behaviour is influ-

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enced most by social media". Regarding the experiences collected and shared online by travellers "the use of social media for tourism destination branding through tourists' online profiles" (Sabre, 2016, p. 38) is an emergent issue.

Thus, the review of sites and blogs is playing an increasing role in travel decisions, particularly in destination and accommodation choices (IPK International, 2016). This displays the importance of the tourism companies' online presence and the management of the user-generated content for demand analysis. It can be said that, currently, online travel and tourism content is additionally constituted by the three R's: reviews, ratings, and recommendations by travellers and considering the disruptive innovations faced in today's global market, analysis on the quality of online contents are imperative in order to reach travellers' segments.

For that reason, the aim of this article is to explore the use of social media platforms, particularly Facebook, by agritourism operators in promoting experiences, and to investigate the extent to which this social networking site can help in co-creating the branding of rural destinations. In order to accomplish the research aim, this investigation reviews the social media literature from a tourism destination branding perspective. The investigation then moves to the practical component and highlights the social media activity developed by the selected agritourism operators in Northern Portugal.

In the next section, the concept of social media is introduced. Section three describes the methodology employed in order to achieve the aim of this research, and section four displays the results and some insights derived from it.

## 2. Theoretical background

The focus of the tourism industry is, now, in delivering unique experiences that personally en-

gage the consumer (UNWTO, 2001). In the experience economy (Pine & Gilmore, 1999), "people readily exchange valued resources (time, money, physical, social and psychological safety) for motivational and emotional experiences" (Ellis & Rosman, 2008, p. 3).

Although the tourism industry is one of the greatest experience generators, in which people construct their own narratives, research on the co-creation of experiences is still scarce (Binkhorst & Den Dekker, 2009). Yet, despite the lack of more meaningful research, some authors have already discussed the topic under different perspectives. Neuhofer, Buhalis and Ladkin (2014) and Buonincontri and Micera (2016) studied the impact of technology on co-creating tourism experiences, while Tussyadiah (2013) had a close look at the potential of mobile platforms in facilitating the tourists' interactions with local attributes of tourism destinations, such as cultural networks and creative communities.

The co-creation of tourism experiences can be interpreted from different perspectives, such as the interaction between humans and animals in boosting the memorability of the experience (Bertella, 2014; Campos, Mendes, do Valle & Scott, 2016). Whether active participation through sport activities constitutes being involved with a place is also under debate (Shipway, King, Lee & Brown, 2016).

Taking a more theoretical approach, Rihova, Buhalis, Moital, & Gouthro (2015) discussed the social construction of co-creation in tourism contexts, focusing on customer-to-customer dynamics, and Sfandla & Björk (2013) set up a framework illustrating the facilitators of experiences in the co-creation processes, where tourists are active elements in the service management network. Furthermore, Melis, McCabe & Del Chiappa (2015) attempted to identify a set of constructs that might influence the way local stakeholders can co-create the tourism offer, since "traditional tourism networks seem inadequate to fully capture the facilitation of experiences" (Sfandla &

Björk, 2013, p. 496). Sontikul and Jachna (2015) established a strong correlation between the perceived value of an experience and the identity of the place where it happened, defending the idea that the physical environment should also be involved in the analysis of the co-creation experience (p. 284).

Social media platforms can be seen as a low-cost opportunity for private tourism stakeholders to promote their businesses but also as a way to reinforce the image of the destination where they are located. "Because organisations and consumers can co-create content and meaning about the destination, social media can have an immediate and far reaching effect on reputation" (Owyang & Toll, 2007, cited in De Moya & Jain, 2013, p. 24).

Therefore, destination branding emerges as a method to promote a memorable experience for travellers and, thus, a memorable destination. However, destination branding only emerged as a field in the late 1990s, when Destination Marketing Organisations (DMOs) had to move into branding activities in order to achieve differentiation (Pike & Page, 2014; García, Gómez, & Molina, 2012). Aaker's definition of the concept of branding is still one of the most widely accepted (Aaker's 1991, p. 7, cited in García et al., 2012, p. 647):

A brand is a distinguishing name and/or symbol (logo, trademark, package design) intended to identify the good or services of either one seller or a group of sellers, and to differentiate those goods or services from those of competitors.

As a result, "destinations have emerged as the biggest brands in the travel industry" (Morgan et al., 2002, cited in Pike & Page, 2014, p. 202) "being not limited to countries but also taking place in different regions and cities" (García et al., 2012, p. 646). The famous "I Love NY" (I Love New York) slogan can be seen as the first case of a city brand, dating from 1977 (Cheatham, 2010),

while "España" has been used as a country brand since 2000 (Ulldemolins & Zamorano, 2014).

Bearing in mind the importance of destination branding, the United Nations World Tourism Organization (UNWTO) highlighted that branding should rely on the core essence and enduring features comprising a destination's personality, which make it different from all its competitors (UNWTO, 2009).

Considering the diversity of technological platforms employed in the dissemination of travel information, such as the social networking sites, research analysis should take their role in private tourism stakeholders' branding strategies into consideration and, as a consequence, in destination branding strategies. "The Web 2.0-based websites have revolutionised the Internet in a significant manner by transforming it into a space characterised by the participation and collaboration of users" (Hernández-Méndez, Muñoz-Leiva, & Sánchez-Fernández, 2013, p. 3). Yet, "little research has been conducted to study how tourism entities are evolving with the Internet and using social media to market destinations and engage with potential consumers" (Hays, Page, & Buhalis, 2013, p. 213).

Social networking sites, such as Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, or YouTube, are a consequence of the emergence of the Web 2.0, with a considerable impact on the tourism industry. In fact, social media has influenced consumer behaviour, including "awareness, information acquisition, opinions, attitudes, purchase behaviour and post-purchase communication and evaluation" (Mangold & Faulds, 2009, p. 358). These travel consumption patterns are affected by social media platforms, as Zeng and Gerritsen (2014, p. 33) highlighted, and are the way "travellers search, trust, and collaboratively produce information about tourism suppliers and tourism destinations".

Moreover, Hernández-Méndez et al. (2013) also highlighted the importance of web tools, such

as blogs and social networks, for gaining first-hand knowledge about the needs of customers and, thus, for tailoring products to them. This insight is confirmed by Chung and Buhalis (2008, cited in Jung, Ineson and Green, 2013), as they concluded that consumers' behaviour can be predicted through the observation of their behavioural intentions on social networks.

Nevertheless, research on social media's impacts on the tourism industry is a relatively recent topic. The first publication dates from 2007 and focused on the unexpected influences on tourism businesses, as well as the possible impacts and opportunities for destination stakeholders (Zeng & Gerritsen, 2014). Several definitions of social media can be found in the literature; Kaplan and Haenlein (2010, p. 61) defined the concept of social media in the following simple way:

Social Media is a group of Internet-based applications that build on the ideological and technological foundations of Web 2.0, and that allow the creation and exchange of User Generated Content.

Pike and Page (2014, p. 218) claimed that "academic research has a growing importance to the new destination marketing activity around social media and its impact upon visitor behaviour". Table 1 displays the different social media types.

**Table 1** | Social media types

Social Media Types	Examples
Virtual community sites	LonelyPlanet
Consumer review sites	TripAdvisor
Personal blogs and blog aggregators	Blogspot.com
Social networking sites	Facebook
Media sharing sites	Youtube

Source: own elaboration based on Xiang and Gretzel (2010)

Xiang and Gretzel (2010) stated that social media platforms have leveraged the construction of user-generated content (UGC), which has attracted significant attention in the academic and sectorial fields. The innovative type of UGC produced in social media will challenge the established marketing practices of many tourism businesses and destinations. They uncovered an interesting feature: "consumers tended to produce more online contents on certain activities such as nightlife and dining as compared to others (e.g., attractions) playing an important role within the trip planning when using a search engine" (p. 185). As such, new information seekers will find it easier to find information about restaurants and nightly entertainment.

In the study conducted by Munar (2011), a specific type of UGC was analysed, Tourist Created Content (TCC) and the impact of the tourists' contributions to destination branding. Three main categories of TCC were defined, as shown in Table 2. The study revealed that tourists do not use a brand's formal elements in their storytelling, however, it is active in their destination image formation, through their narrative, visual, and audio contributions (Munar, 2011).

**Table 2** | Brand, destination image and tourist-created content

Tourist Created Content	Destination Branding Formal Elements	Destination Image Formation
Narrative (encyclopaedic, review, travel diary, blog)	Slogans, taglines, and brand name.	Narrative text of the impressions, beliefs, and attitudes about the destination experience.
Visual (photography and video)	Logo, advertising campaigns (photos or video).	Images of the destination experience.
Audio (narrative and/or musical)	Audio advertising campaigns (music or text)	Audio stories about the destination experience.

Source: own elaboration based on Munar (2011).

Additionally, UGC creators “may wish to help other tourists to minimize risk in their decision-making” (Munar & Jacobsen, 2014, p. 48) regarding the acquisition of expensive and complex products, such as certain tourism destinations. Australia is one successful case of using social media platforms, particularly social networking sites, for destination branding, having an online presence on five different platforms (Facebook, Twitter, Pinterest, Instagram, and Google+). Furthermore, in Europe, the campaign undertaken by the Spanish Tourism Entity, entitled “I need Spain” (<http://share.spain.info/>), is 100% user generated. This marketing strategy was also implemented by Turismo de Portugal, which promoted tourists’ participation in sharing their experiences in Portugal, by uploading a 10 second video (<http://www.ponhaportugalnomapa.pt/>). The Australian, Spanish, and Portuguese approach on destination branding reveals the increasing importance of social networking in “humanising a brand and increased engagement” (Hays et al., 2013, p. 234).

Nevertheless, little empirical research has been developed regarding the stakeholders’ role in destination branding (García et al., 2012) and “the main weak points in the destination-branding strategy are found in local people and visitors” (p. 657). In fact, local residents are a key element for a tourism destination and a crucial asset in developing creative activities for travellers, who search for experiential and local knowledge while taking holidays.

A DMO or a tourism company, such as a hotel, can use social media metrics, including “audience size (e.g. number of followers), reach (e.g. viral impact), engagement (e.g. number of comments), sentiment (e.g. consumer response), and outcomes (e.g. resulting traffic, conversions)” (Schetzina, 2010a, cited in Hays et al., 2013, p. 232), to evaluate the impact on searchers or potential travellers. As a result of these new capabilities, the Internet is transforming “mere information seekers into co-creators of information” (Volo, 2010

cit in Duarte, Bressan, O’Shea, & Krajsic, 2014, p. 232). For this reason, the consumer’s reviews are valuable sources about meaningful activities for marketers on destination branding (Lim, Chung, & Weaver, 2012).

Research on the role of social networking sites in promoting private tourism companies is still in its infancy, and particularly when it comes to specific tourism markets’ demand, such as agritourism. “In California for instance, many agritourism entrepreneurs are embracing social media as a marketing tool for their farm-related business operations” (Hardesty, 2011 cited in Duarte et al., 2014, p. 229).

In Portugal, agritourism activity is part of a set of accommodation operators, entitled “Tourism in a Rural Environment” (Turismo em Espaço Rural – TER). Legally constituted in 1986, TER comprised three types of accommodation operators: rural tourism, agritourism, and manor houses. Article 6 of Decree-Law no. 54/2002 of March 11 defines the concept of agritourism as:

Agritourism is a family-owned lodging service provided in private houses integrated in agricultural companies that allow the guests to accompany and learn about the agricultural activity, or to participate in the work developed there, according to the rules established by its responsible.

Agritourism can be considered as an integrative and sustainable type of tourism activity, particularly considering its dual functionality: the preservation of ancient houses and the use of existing agricultural structures for its exploitation and interaction with tourists. Many agritourism operators are located in areas demarcated for wine growing. Currently, Portugal has fourteen unique and distinct wine regions (Wines of Portugal, 2016), as shown in Figure 1. The different wine landscapes are perceived as a potential resource for the development of tourism. As such, in 2006, Turismo

de Portugal set out "Gastronomy and Wines" as one of the ten strategic tourism products for the

development of tourism in Portugal.



Source: Wines of Portugal (2016)

Figure 1 | Portuguese wine regions

Currently, the Plan of Action for the Development of Tourism in Portugal, Tourism 2020 (Turismo de Portugal, 2014), defines the product "Gastronomy and Wines" as a strategic differentiating factor for Portugal.

'Vinhos Verdes' is the largest Portuguese demarcated wine region, as well as one of the largest in Europe, extending throughout the north-west of Portugal (CVRVV, 2016). With respect to the Douro region, it is suggested by several authors that it was the first demarcated wine region in the world (IVDP, 2016). In 2001, part of it, the Alto Douro Vinhateiro, was classified by the United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) as a World Heritage Site because of "its cultural, evolutionary and living landscape" (IVV, 2015, p. 118). The demarcated wine region of Trás-os-Montes has a "secular

origin, being intrinsically marked by the wineries dug in the rock of Roman and Pre-Roman origin" (ENOTUR, 2016). The next section displays the research methodology employed in the present study.

### 3. Methodology

This paper examines the use of one social networking site, namely Facebook, by agritourism operators located in the three demarcated wine regions of northern Portugal, namely 'Vinhos Verdes', 'Douro', and 'Trás-os-Montes', in promoting experiences, with the aim of revealing the extent to which this social medium can help in co-creating the branding of rural agritourism units. This study

has two research objectives:

- (i) To explore the use of Facebook pages by agritourism operators to market to their customers;
- (ii) To display the varying degree of Facebook use among agritourism operators, based on the Marine-Roig (2014) model.

The study is essentially exploratory in its aim, and accordingly adopts a mixed-method approach that employs both qualitative and quantitative data.

After the literature review, a list of the agritourism operators in North Portugal was drawn up using the data available on the official website of the National Tourism Registry, belonging to Turismo de Portugal, the entity that officially and nationally regulates tourism.

In order to achieve the final sample of agritourism operators, the following geographical filters were used: NUTS (Nomenclature of Territorial Units for Statistical Purposes) II North; NUTS III Alto Trás-os-Montes, Ave, Cávado, Douro, Grande Porto, Minho-Lima, and Tâmega. Finally, the type of accommodation was selected, only including agritourism accommodation from within the rural tourism units. As a result, 75 units in the three demarcated wine regions of northern Portugal were selected, and 56 agritourism operators with a Facebook page (registered under the name of their company) were analysed.

First, a qualitative content analysis was pursued, since it is a technique increasingly used in tourism research (Veal, 2006), particularly to develop valid contextual inferences from texts or other objects (Krippendorff, 2004).

Facebook was the social networking site chosen to perform the content analysis, since it has millions of users, including companies and organisations. "Facebook is the most popular social medium of all time, it is positioned at the forefront of the online tourism industry and is used by tourists at all stages of the travel experience" (Mich &

Baggio, 2015 cited in Da Cunha, Moura, & Analide, 2013, p. 482). "Information, posts, tweets, blog entries, and other forms of content exist freely on the web, but due to the relative infancy of the technology, there is comparatively little research to assess, explain, or even examine these forms of marketing, advertising, and business-to-consumer interactions" (Hays et al., 2013, p. 214).

The researchers identified the "hashtags", which are keywords preceded by the # symbol from each Facebook page and these frequently used keywords were coded into categories for more qualitative measures. "Hashtags" referring to agritourism company brands were excluded from the content analysis and, considering the small sample size (56), the keywords with two or more observations were analysed.

Additionally, a quantitative analysis was implemented, since "certain quantitative aspects of web sites hosting travel blogs or reviews must be examined to get an idea of the degree to which they project the image of a tourist destination as perceived and expressed by bloggers and the potential impact that this may have on tourist behaviour and decision making" (Marine-Roig, 2014, p. 384).

The analysis of the Facebook pages from agritourism operators was performed during the month of November 2016. Personal Facebook pages, as well as non-official pages, were excluded in this study. In order to achieve the aim of the study, part of the model proposed by Marine-Roig (2014), namely, the post frequency (amount of information displayed daily, weekly or monthly in the page) and interaction variables (number of comments and shares) already adopted by Hays et al. (2013), were employed. Finally, a good practice example, in terms of daily management of a Facebook page, was added.

## 4. Results

### 4.1. Post frequency and number of “likes”

As illustrated in Table 3, in total, 56 agritourism operators located in the three demarcated wine regions of Northern Portugal have a Facebook page. However, the dynamics of the Facebook pages are diverse. ‘Dynamics’ is defined as a category used for content analysis purposes and, in this case, is a sum of all the ‘posts’ made by agritourism operators and their ‘Facebook fans’ during the month of November 2016.

The research results obtained showed that the agritourism stakeholders located in the Douro region received more ‘likes’ (n=75938) on their pages compared to those from the Trás-os-Montes region (n=14962). Despite the number of agritourism companies being higher in the Vinhos Verdes wine region, the statistical analysis disclosed that some Facebook pages have the lowest scores regarding the ‘likes’ metric. As suggested by Hays et al. (2011), the number of ‘likes’ is the metric generally used to assess the effectiveness of social networking sites, such as Facebook.

**Table 3** | Descriptive statistics regarding Facebook pages in agritourism operators, November 2016

Demarcated wine regions	No. of Facebook pages		No. of likes		Post Frequency	
	(n)	%	(n)	%	(n)	%
Douro	15	29,1	75938	57,4	188	60,5
Vinhos Verdes	30	52,7	41290	31,2	74	23,8
Trás-os-Montes	10	18,2	14962	11,3	49	3,6
Total	56	100	132190	100	311	100

Source: own elaboration

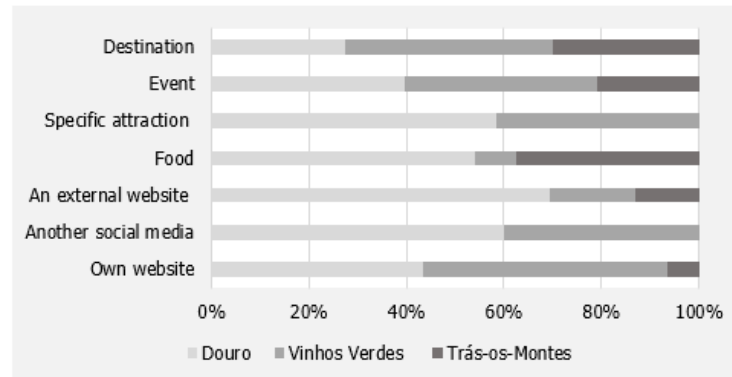
Furthermore, when analysing the “post frequency” during the month of November 2016, the Trás-os-Montes region had the lowest scores (n=49), in contrast with the Douro region (n=188), which had the highest. In this way, the agritourism operators in the Douro region can be seen as more successful than other regions in terms of social media dynamics, with respect to the number of ‘posts’.

Kaplan and Haenlein (2010, p. 66) defend the idea that “social media are all about sharing and interaction” and advise to “ensure that your content is always fresh and that you engage in discussions with your customers”. Considering this key priority to “be active”, the content analysis showed that some agritourism stakeholders from the three wine areas had inactive Facebook pages. “Inactive

pages” are pages that had no activity – no “posts” – in the month of November 2016: 33% of the Facebook pages of the Douro and Vinhos Verdes wine regions and 60% of the Trás-os-Montes wine region.

This can be explained by distinct causes, yet, in this research the lack of ‘visible’ return on investment (ROI) seems to explain a lot. Unlike DMOs, which measure their ROI based on the number of Facebook ‘likes’ (Hays et al., 2011), the agritourism operators’ main aim is to sell tourism products/services and not only to promote them, as DMOs do, which makes it difficult for them to notice the possible marketing and economic outcomes that originated from their activities on Facebook.





Source: own elaboration.

Figure 2 | Type of “posts” on Facebook by agritourism operators and by demarcated wine regions

Additionally, as Da Cunha et al. state, the managers of the online social networking sites, such as Facebook, “need to regularly update the online channel, and include visual elements such as photographs and videos offering contents that are both appealing and interesting to users” (2013, p. 482). Regarding the type of “posts” on Facebook by agritourism operators illustrated in Figure 2, the descriptive statistics revealed that the Douro and Vinhos Verdes wine regions’ “posts” were mostly about their “own website”, the “destination” and “events”. On the other hand, the posts in the Trás-os-Montes wine region were more focused on

“food”, followed by the “destination”.

Table 4 displays the most frequently used “hashtags” and allows to assess their dispersion. Therefore, in terms of the destination image of the Douro and Vinhos Verdes wine regions that is projected through “hashtags”, there is a slight tendency to highlight directly wine related topics: #wine, #bestwine, #grape, #viticulture, #winetasting, #winecellar, #winelover, #packaging, and #winetourism (n=15); followed by tourism designations, i.e. #tourism, #agritourism, and #ruraltourism (n=9).

Table 4 | Top “hashtags” units (keywords) on agritourism Facebook pages

Units of analysis extracted from Facebook pages	Demarcated wine regions			Total
	Douro	Vinhos Verdes	Trás-os-Montes	
#serenity; #peace; #tranquility	3	2		5
#tourism; #agritourism; #ruraltourism	6	2	1	9
#escapes	1	1		2
#douro; #dourovalley; #ilovedouro	7			7
#wine; #bestwine; #grape; #viticulture; #winetasting; #winecellar; #winelover; #winetourism	8	7		15
#lateharvest2016	2			2
#autumn;	1	2		3
#portugal	1	3		4
#réveillon	2			2
#gastronomy; #dinner; #gastronomictourism		5		5
#nature; #animals; #mountain		3	1	4
#ecoviadovez; #arcosdevaldevez		2		2
#visitpontedelima		2		2
#refinement; #charminghotel		2		2
#celebrate; #sucess		2		2
#comfort; #fireplace		2		2
#weekend		1	1	2
#mirandadodouro			3	3
#transmontano; #trásosmontes			2	2
#montesinho			2	2
#bragança; #bragançacastle; #wonderfulkingdom			3	3

Source: own elaboration

#### 4.2. Interaction with e-customers

In this paragraph, four critical findings about the interaction between agritourism Facebook managers and their customers are presented.

Regarding the degree of interactivity of agritourism operators with their customers and as shown in Figure 3, the results demonstrated that the Douro region is, again, the geographical area where Facebook activity is higher. This is confir-

med by the number of comments ( $n= 133$ ) and the number of shares ( $n= 242$ ) when comparing to the other wine regions. As such, agritourism operators located in the Douro region demonstrated more openness to integrate social networking sites into their marketing strategies (Öz, 2013). In the Trás-os-Montes region, however, a lot more photos than in the other regions are posted to capture the attention of visitors.

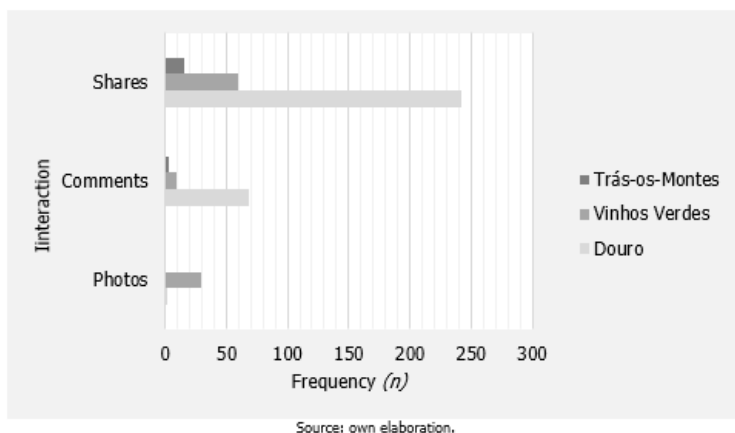


Figure 3 | Type of 'posts' made by Facebook fans

When evaluating the number of comments made by Facebook fans, researchers should take into account who has made them. In this case study, it was found that comments are regularly made by the same fan, which can bias the engagement level assessment.

As mentioned before, some agritourism stakeholders use a denomination in their Facebook page that does not coincide with the name of their commercial brand (and were excluded from this study). The use of a different name might be confusing for customers and might function as a barrier in the involvement and promotion processes with potential consumers. Moreover, only 60% of the agritourism websites had a direct link to their Facebook pages.

It was also possible to infer that some of the agritourism companies were more focused on or-

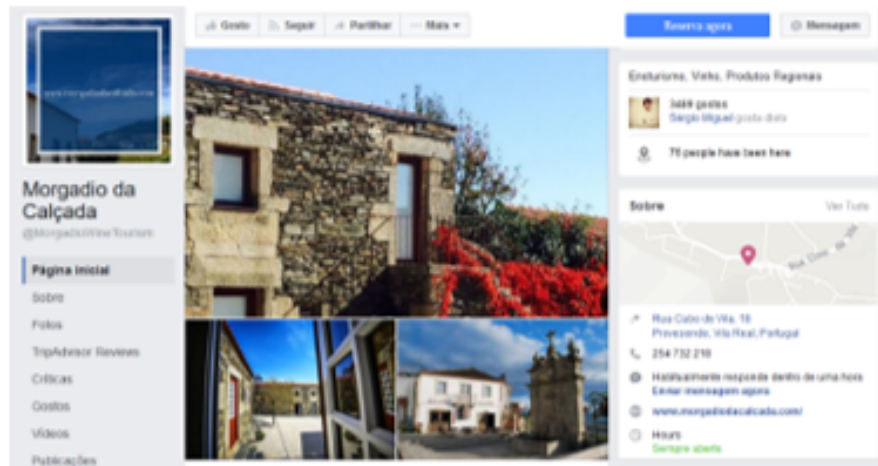
ganising wedding parties, rather than providing accommodation and/ or activities related to the rural environment. In other words, some agritourism companies' main business relies on the organisation of wedding parties, while the accommodation is seen as a complementary service.

#### 4.3. A good practice example of destination image projection through Facebook

When searching and exploring Facebook pages, the variety of images 'posted' by agritourism managers should embrace a coherent symbolic framework that mirrors the regional identity. The majority of agritourism operators use social media to promote their businesses, as well as to provide information about local and regional events. An

interesting finding is that the agritourism operators located in the Trás-os-Montes wine region use Facebook to provide information about local

events (16.1%) more than to promote their own businesses.



Source: <https://www.facebook.com/MorgadioWineTourism/?fref=ts>

Figure 4 | Best practice example of Facebook activity

Figure 4 illustrates a best practice example with concern to the overall information that a Facebook page should include, particularly related to contacts (localisation map, telephone number, website, etc.). There should also be a clearly visible direct or indirect reservation button, which allows the user to be redirected to the website of the accommodation unit or directly to its external reservations' platform. When analysing the visual content of the Facebook page of the Morgadio da Calçada farm, a variety of updated photos and videos appear, as well as a link to the Trip Advisor application (app), where even more traveller' photos and reviews of this unit can be found.

#### 4.4. Final remarks

With regard to the first research objective formulated above, this exploratory research showed that agritourism operators in North Portugal are developing and enrolled with social networking si-

tes, such as Facebook, and they are using them as a tool for the promotion of wine tourism (i.e. tastings, wine trails) and gastronomy (recommending endogenous resources). Nevertheless, the development of a place's brand can be affected by the mixture of different images produced and, in this particular study, agritourism operators' demonstrated poor skills and experience in tourism marketing.

As far as the second research objective is concerned, using some of the variables proposed by Marine-Roig (2014) regarding the level of interaction between agritourism operators and e-costumers on Facebook pages, this research showed that the agritourism actors of the Douro Region use their Facebook pages in a more intensive way than the "Vinhos Verdes" and "Trás-os-Montes" region; they are even in line with international trends. Agritourism operators in the Douro Region showed more openness to boosting visitor's interaction and integration with the destination through social media strategies, turning themselves, with the help of their Facebook pages, from ser-

vice providers into capacity enablers (stimulating and allowing participation).

Comparing what is being done by the selected agritourism units with what is advised to be done, as was described in the theoretical introduction of this study, the outcomes are rather reduced. Therefore, the Innovine & Wine project members are preparing a workshop to which all the companies that were analysed will be invited. A future research follow up might verify whether such a practical contribution provokes real changes so that the level of involvement of all stakeholders in the co-creation of the brand of rural destinations actually improves.

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