
Part 4.

Technology, residents and overtourism

10 How digital strategy increases overtourism – the case of Barcelona

Stephane Bourliataux Lajoinie, Josep Lluís del Olmo Arriaga and Frederic Dosquet

The objectives of this chapter are to:

- Analyse how digital communication can escape the control of DMOs.
- Check how two forms of digital communication (promotion and social networks) generate a self-phenomenon of spreading through internet.
- Check how recommendation platforms promote overtourism in very small local areas.
- Have an open discussion about communication co-creation at the edge of DMO and tourists' point of view.

Keywords: Digital promotion, social networks, overtourism, review platforms.

Introduction

The term 'overtourism' made the headlines in 2017 to denote the antithesis of a fair, well-planned form of tourism. An overtourism destination is a destination perceived as the victim of uncontrolled flows of tourists. Some authors have contributed to analysing the first stages of this perception. Boissevain (1996) published 'Coping with tourists: European reactions to mass tourism', in which he analysed how a massive flow of tourists in Malta generated negative side effects and a total dependence on touristic economy. Tyler et al. (1998) offered one of the first analyses of ways to control tourism flow from a sustainable point of view. Bosselman et al. (1999) published a pioneering analysis on the relationships between hosts and tourists. The paper discusses the risks and benefits of growth in tourism and the need for long-term management to avoid overexploitation of tourist destinations. These research projects laid the foundations for reflection on sustainable tourism and were the starting point for studying the risks of overtourism. Fyall and Garrod (1998) discussed the impacts of overtourism on heritage sites. On the one hand, the phenomenon contributes to a short-term economic boost; on the other hand, it impacts negatively on the way of life of local communities. Research on the topic of are centred on three main areas:

- ◆ Excessive burden on transit stations (airports, ports, stations), the problem of managing the flow of movement (bottlenecks, parking), and the management of other external factors related to the influx of people (drinking water supply, and waste management). This component also includes management of infrastructure costs based on local taxes that are, by definition, paid by tourists only indirectly (tourist taxes on hotel stays) and in their vast majority paid by residents.
- ◆ Covering interactions between tourists and locals. Great tourist pressure requires efforts in cultural acceptance by both sides, as well as showing respect for local customs. Several studies report a very negative perception of the noisy party behaviour shown by some tourists (Martin et al., 2018). The flow of tourists also increases the volume of population movement in daily life, making transportation and waiting times a problem in some places.
- ◆ Economic impact linked to tourism attractiveness. While the tourism economy supports many tourist structures, it also has a direct impact on the cost of housing and the economic value of certain neighbourhoods. First studied in 2011, residents have identified tourism as the

most serious problem in Barcelona (Milano, 2017). In the space of six years, the negative perception of tourists by Barcelonans multiplied by a factor of 23 (source: Barcelona City Council, 2018). Residents now feel that the problem of overtourism is more important than working conditions, economic problems and the state of municipal infrastructure and services.

The reasons for this overtourism are numerous and their impact is usually crossed. However, we find one constant at the root of the feeling of overtourism: a rapid, uncontrolled increase in the flow of tourists to a destination. Recently many authors have studied the perception of overtourism among the local population to try to determinate the acceptable level of tourism pressure (Koens et al 2018; Gonzalez et al. 2018; Kuščer & Mihalič 2019) but only recently have some of them studied the impact of the internet on these processes (Alonso-Almeida et al. 2019, Gretzel 2019, Mariádel-Mar 2019).

Spanish north-east coast: from an economically stricken region to the temple of mass tourism

The cities' own approach and development of a tourism strategy may be problematic too. The tourism economy is a strong lever for cities whose industrial economic environment is in decline. Despite the hard conditions for workers, tourism can bring new jobs that are strongly non-relocatable (Walmsley, 2017). By way of example, the reconstruction in the 1980s of the northern port districts of Barcelona for the creation of the Olympic facilities was an opportunity to convert old abandoned factories into resources for the tourism economy. For their part, many cities have conducted in-depth studies confirming the positive impact of pursuing mass tourism (Kock et al. 2018). The creation of structures such as destination marketing organisations (DMO) reflects the public and private will to monetise tourism (Koens et al. 2018). DMOs are public structures designed to promote the tourist attractiveness of a city or geographical area, and their main mission is to highlight the characteristics of a place and attract tourists (Mak, 2017). At the same time, taking advantage of the economic manna of tourism, cities like Barcelona have undertaken major construction work to rehabilitate neighbourhoods and develop cultural spaces. The number of tourists visiting Barcelona has doubled since the year 2000 to nearly 8.8 million people making just over 18 million overnight stays. This figure does not include the 21 million 'temporary' tourists, for example those visiting on cruises, who make only one-day stop-offs in the city.