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A Comparative Study of Communication Management Strategies on Social Media in the Hotel Industry in Spain in Times of COVID-19

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Abstract: The aim of the study is to analyze the communication management strategies of the top 40 hotel companies, in terms of turnover, using their corporate accounts on social networks during the Easter holiday campaign in 2021 and 2022. By using apps such as “Data Analytics” and “Content Analytics” from Welovroi, a comparative, quantitative and qualitative study, using content and discourse analysis, was designed. The comparative study seeks to identify possible changes and offers data on activity, impact and the published content. The results reveal a considerable difference—both quantitative and qualitative—from one period to the other in terms of behavior and networking on social media of the brands studied. Despite the increase in publications from 2021 to 2022, the level of engagement falls, the frequency of publications and content varies and, in addition, the importance of Instagram and Facebook, as networks which generate more interaction with the public, can be noted. The conclusions reached may also serve to improve the management of social media communication for hotel companies.

Keywords: hotel industry; social media; communication management strategies; Easter week; COVID-19



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1. Introduction

The contribution of the tourist sector to the Spanish economy is of the utmost importance and the negative impact of the COVID-19 crisis has been felt here more than in other countries. Before the pandemic, and following a sustained growth trend, the contribution of tourism to the Gross Domestic Product (GDP) of the Spanish economy was 154,737 MEUR, which, in 2020, fell to 61,406 MEUR (INE 2022). According to the most recent stable data available for GDP, in 2019 it accounted for 12.4%, holding the third position at a world level and first in Europe for international visits. However, in 2020, it dropped three places, coming behind France, Germany and Italy (Martinez Moure et al. 2022, p. 117). As regards the contribution of tourism to GDP, Spain fell from the eighth position in 2019 to twelfth in 2020 (World Travel & Tourism Council 2021). Figures show that, overall, tourist demand underwent a strong contraction in Spain caused by COVID-19, particularly international tourists. Hotel stays, in particular, were most affected and experienced a greater fall during the pandemic when compared to stays in other types of accommodation (Benítez-Aurioles 2022).

In this context, it is a good idea to study in depth the content of corporate accounts on social networks, as posted by the main hotel chains in Spain. It would be useful to identify if they have changed their communication strategies on social media after the crisis, highlighting those pitches used to empower its business offer, recognizing which messages generated most audience and engagement in order to establish the degree of effectiveness of the different social media employed and, in general terms, to establish

whether we are facing a possible change in the tourist paradigm. This comparative study aims to contribute information which may lead to an improvement in the management of communication on the social networks of hotel businesses.

Social media marketing is a current and relevant topic due to the constant increase in the use of these platforms to promote business; in this case, tourism and hospitality.

The text addresses the vulnerability of the tourism sector to crises and pandemics, such as COVID-19. This is a crucial discussion given the magnitude with which the pandemic affected the sector globally. The adaptation and reaction of hotel companies to the pandemic, especially in terms of communication on social networks, is vital to understand how companies seek to survive and thrive in difficult times.

In this sense, the text provides a series of data, research and references that validate and enrich the discussion, allowing a deeper understanding of the economic and strategic impact of marketing and communication on social networks in the tourism context, making a comparison of Easter vacations in the years 2021 and 2022.

Among the research questions, we have the following:

- How have social networks influenced tourists' perception and choice of destinations and hotels?
- How has tourism consumer behavior evolved with the rise of social networks?
- How did hotel chains adapt their social media communication strategies during and after COVID-19?
- Which social media platforms have proven to be most effective in the Easter 2021 and 2022 campaigns?

Finally, we pursue the next objectives:

- To deepen and compare the strategies and content that the main Spanish hotel chains employed during Easter in 2021 and 2022.
- To identify if communication strategies on social networks have changed after COVID-19.
- To outline those arguments used to try to promote business offers during this holiday period.
- To recognize which were the messages that generated the most audience and engagement among the audience.
- To glimpse if we are facing a possible change in the tourism paradigm that allows the improvement of communication management on social networks of hotel companies.

2. Theoretical Framework

Social media marketing (SMM) is a key strategic activity which helps meet business objectives and create value for internal and external stakeholders (Felix et al. 2017). Social media has changed the decision-making process of consumers of tourism and has become a fundamental management tool for communication and commercial information in the hotel industry (Hudson and Thal 2013; Zeng and Gerritsen 2014; Živković et al. 2014). Travelers have been avid users of social media since they first appeared given that the nature of the product leads it to be acquired in advance and at a distance from where it is consumed. Consequently, the trustworthiness of the information received and the possibility of clarifying doubts or sharing comments beforehand are essential (Királ'ová and Pavlíček 2015). Income is key for the business, but trust is the determining factor for engagement given that it allows citizens not only to satisfy their need for information but also to enjoy sending it and sharing their opinion in public (Baraybar-Fernández et al. 2021).

The creation of the image of a tourist destination in the mind of a potential user by means of social networks should consider two factors: on the one hand, the commercial information and message coming from the organizations and businesses in the tourist sector, be they cognitive or emotional, and, on the other, those which are generated on virtual platforms by users (Garay 2019).

Scholars have dealt with this reality, from the point of view of the customer, in order to explore their usefulness as a recently added medium on social networks managed by a third party (Zhang et al. 2014; Lin et al. 2020). It is less common to find studies which

tackle the efficiency of the social networks themselves (Chang et al. 2018). In order to adapt to its general use, companies from the hotel industry seek to interact with their potential customers using corporate accounts on social networks and manage how they follow the efficiency of their online messages. Consequently, the management of each hotel could use the cybernetic space and the content of social media proactively as a tool for communication and follow-up (Kim et al. 2016).

Businesses in the travel sector are one of the most vulnerable economic activities to pandemics or crises, as became apparent during the COVID-19 pandemic. Restrictions on the movement of people, the closing of tourist attractions and the suspension of sales activities and promotional events to prevent the spread of the virus made travel impossible. The activity of the service providers was interrupted and customers' experiences related to the choice of destinations or their means of travel were affected (Chen et al. 2022). In addition to the prohibitions which rendered mobility impossible, the psychological risks and health fears, as perceived by tourists, are key elements for determining travel behavior or plans (Sánchez-Cañizares et al. 2020; Rather 2021).

In the first years of the pandemic, some authors suggested world-wide tourism was facing a change of paradigm (Irwin 2020) brought about by the behavioral changes related to pandemic anxiety (Zenker et al. 2021) or a refusal to travel as a means of self-protection from the virus (Zheng et al. 2021). However, no previous crisis ever led to a permanent transition on a large scale for tourism (Hall et al. 2020). Consequently, in-depth research should be carried out to ascertain whether the changes produced by the pandemic are temporary or if they have served to accelerate the transformations which were already in place. The data show that post-pandemic tourism has reduced its number of foreign guests, and at the same time, the number of nights spent in hotels by Spanish guests has increased (Forbes 2020; UNWTO 2020). Furthermore, the personal preferences of tourists have shifted towards nearer, less crowded areas (Gyimóthy et al. 2022).

The intense vaccination campaign—at least in the West—made it possible to reduce restrictions and reactivate tourist activity at both a national and international level. According to World Tourism Barometer, in the June 2022 issue, tourism continued its recovery at a notable rhythm between January and March 2022. Destinations received three times more international tourists than in 2021, with Europe leading the upturn (UNWTO 2022). There has been a significant increase in expenditure per trip, rising from an average of 1000 \$ in 2019 to 1400 \$ in 2022, but with figures for total income still a long way from those of before the pandemic.

3. Materials and Methods

A comparative, quantitative and qualitative study, using content and discourse analysis, was designed for the Easter holiday period in 2021 and 2022 in Spain. In 2021, with a high rate of COVID-19, restrictions impeded the normal flow of national and international tourists to Spanish hotels, whereas in 2022 the restrictions affecting internal and aerial mobility were lifted, meaning a return to the so-called “new normality”.

During the exploratory phase, a Ranking of Companies was drawn up using the data of INFORMA D&B S.A.U. (S.M.E.) and using public and private sources to define the object sample of the study. The definitive sample was compiled of the top 40 hotel businesses in Spain in terms of turnover; as such, there was significant capacity hosting an important number of potential customers and a high brand image at an international level. They were the following (in alphabetical order): Accor, Allsun, Bahía Príncipe, Barceló, Catalonia, Eurostars, Garden Hotels, Gloria Thalasso, Grupotel, H10, Hilton, Hipotels, Hoteles Globales, Iberostar, Ilunion, Insootel, KN, Lopesan, Marbella Club Hotel, Marina d'Or, Marriott, Meeting Point, Melià, NH, Nordotel, Palladium, Paradores, Petit Palace, Princess Hotels, Protur, Puente Romano, RIU, Robinson, SBH, Senator, Ritz Carlton, Vibra Hotels, Vincci, Zafiro y ZT.

Also, during this phase we identified some of the most advanced and specialized tools on the market in order to carry out the measuring and analysis of traffic generated on social

networks, with the necessary rigor. After experimenting using several of them, we decided to use the applications “Data Analytics” and “Content Analytics” from Welovroi. The first meant that we could compare the different media used, according to the metrics (KPIs) chosen within the programmed time range, and their graphs. To do so, the tool processes all the data analyses segmented by personalized groups associated with the use of Big Data of the social networks linked to the tool itself. The second facilitated the analysis of the more qualitative factors of the research. As a methodological criterion of the application itself, the factor of Content Analytics has been developed by connecting personalized text analysis engines to specific domains in the social media chosen, applying this to the specific digital content practices of Business Intelligence (BI) and Business analytics (BA).

As regards the segmentation of the social networks chosen, it responds to its popularity and use in Spain, according to the Estudio en Redes Sociales 2021 of the International Advertising Bureau Spain (IAB Spain), involving Facebook, Twitter, Instagram and YouTube. Similarly, and with a view of identifying more precisely the publications of the brands related to the holiday period being studied, the searches were filtered using the following terms and labels: #Semana santa, #semana santa, #semanasanta, #easterweek, #easterweek, #easterweek.

The timing of the research was defined by three phases: preliminary period—gathering of information—holiday and post-holiday. The duration was similar for the two years compared, from the 1st of March to the 7th of April 2021 and from the 17th of March to the 24th of April 2022.

4. Results

In general terms, the results obtained revealed significant quantitative differences between the two time frames chosen to be compared. Having said that, in both years there is a low amount of content published which makes no direct reference to this holiday period.

The data obtained (Table 1) show how, overall, most publications from the hotel chains make no direct mention of Easter, according to the selected keywords, for the whole holiday period covered. Therefore, their marketing strategy did not revolve around this particular holiday period. A significant fall in the level of engagement between Easter 2021 (648,213 interactions) and 2022, with 389,427, can be noted.

Table 1. Comparison of publications and interactions, 2021 vs. 2022.

Segmented Publications	Interactions	Publications	Average Interactions
Easter 2021	17,445	94	185.59
Easter 2022	6900	118	58.47
Overall Publications	Interactions	Publications	Average Interactions
Easter 2021	648,213	2234	290.16
Easter 2022	389,427	3279	118.76

Source: authors' own material.

Despite the increase in the number of publications—a sign of the interest of the companies in communicating—the decrease in engagement can also be seen in the segmented publications (−10.545). The indicator of the average number of interactions also reflects that fall. However, it is worth noting the specific case of Twitter, which is the only social network which shows an increase in the level of interaction as compared to 2021 (168.69%) (Table 2).

During Easter 2021, the social networks with the most engagement were Instagram (11,484) and Facebook (5465). However, Twitter and Facebook were the networks with the highest level of publication. One fact which differentiates it from 2022 is the concentration of publications and interactions in the holiday period, i.e., during Easter.

Table 2. Publications, interactions and audiences: Facebook, Twitter, Instagram and YouTube.

	Publications	Variation 2021	Interactions	Variation 2021	Audience	Variation 2021
Facebook	781	+8.62%	109k	−59.33%	11.8m	+86.59%
Twitter	1.950	+89.69%	51.4k	+168.69%	1.72m	+169.32%
Instagram	608	+13.43%	272k	−29.47%	4.67m	+134.77%
YouTube	58	+31.82%	262	−56.26%	121k	+131.35%

Source: authors' own material.

The return to normality has been confirmed by the communication strategies for Easter 2022, both in terms of the distribution of publications and the interaction which they generate. We can observe three pivotal moments for the number of interactions. The first, and most striking, coincides with the preliminary period and comprises the 24th, 25th and 26th of March when there were no restrictions and, consequently, the offer was communicated and the demand was active, as indicated by the search for destinations. The second coincides with the beginning of Easter Week, from the 8th to the 10th of April and, finally, the third takes place in the middle of Easter Week between the 14th and 17th of April, related to last-minute offers and plans. There is a coincidence in the networks which generate a higher level of engagement: Instagram (4781) and Facebook (1941).

The most significant data regard the increase in the audience level for the different profiles on social networks in 2022. This can be linked to the increased demand for information with the new possibilities of movement. Twitter is the social network which grew the most in terms of this ratio, demonstrating its capacity to gain audience (+169.32%), followed by Instagram (+134.77%). Having said that, Twitter, with 1950 publications, as the network with the highest rate of publications, did not manage to increase its rate of engagement (see Table 2). Consequently, no correlation appears between the rate of publications on different social media and the interaction of the public. Below, we show the data for the research as segmented by social network with the top five brands in the indicators of interactions, publications and audience during the Easter week of 2022, as well as a comparison with Easter 2021.

Ritz Carlton is the best-performing brand on Facebook during the Easter Week of 2022 with 25.7k interactions (see Table 3), followed by Riu Hotels (24.7k) and Robinson Club Resorts (9.8k). These results are in contrast to those of 2021, where we find Meliá in first place (70.3k), followed by Marriot (66.4k) and Riu Hotels (51.3k). Only Riu Hotels manages to stay in the top positions for rate of interaction. However, we observe a drastic fall in the overall figures for interactions on Facebook in 2022.

Table 3. Top 5 brand performance on Facebook.

Interactions	Variation 2021	Publications	Variation 2021	Audience	Variation 2021
Ritz Carlton 25.7k	−10.65%	Paradores 61	+17.31%	Riu Hotels 2.83m	+6.79%
Riu Hotels 24.7k	−51.84%	Catalonia Hotels 53	+8.16%	Marriot 2.59m	-
Robinson Club Resorts 9865	+1.21%	Protur Hotels 48	+4.35%	Meliá Hotels 1.05m	+20.22%
Paradores 8666	−19.79%	Marbella Club 42	−2.33%	Iberostar Hotels 1m	+1.76%
Marriot 6903	−89.6%	Marinador Ciudad De Vacaciones 40	+150%	Ritz Carlton 738k	-

Source: authors' own material.

For Twitter (see Table 4), we observe how Marriot (18.8k), Riu Hotels (7.2k) and Hilton Hotels (6.2k) are the profiles with the best rates of engagement, with most of them improving on the figures for 2021. Such is the case of Riu Hotels, which is a hotel chain which managed to stay in the top positions but with an increase of 226.58%. As regards 2021, Paradores obtained the top position (9.8k), followed by Riu Hotels (2.2k) and Accor (2k). On this social network, all profiles increased their figures for publications except Riu Hotels which, with a fall of 18.42%, managed to increase its rate of interaction by 226.58%.

Table 4. Top 5 brand performance on Twitter.

Interactions	Variation 2021	Publications	Variation 2021	Audience	Variation 2021
Marriott 18.8k	+5.78%	Hilton Hotels 699	-	Marriot 331k	-
Riu Hotels 7299	+226.58%	Paradores 186	-18.42%	Hilton Hotels 321k	-
Hilton Hotels 6256	-	Accor 181	+209.78%	Riu Hotels 282k	+13.17%
Paradores 5404	-43.64%	Ritz Carlton 172	+111.94%	Ritz Carlton 224k	-
Ritz Carlton 4404	+534.58%	Riu Hotels 141	+6.02%	Barcelo Hotels 177k	-0.91%
Marriott 18.8k	+5.78%	Hilton Hotels 699	-	Marriot 331k	-

Source: authors' own material.

Instagram was the best-performing social network in terms of interactions with users during Easter 2022 (see Table 5), as it was during the Easter Week of 2021, with Ritz Carlton being the top brand (80.9k), followed by Riu Hotels (27k) and Robinson (24.9k). Both Ritz Carlton (-27.7%) and Riu Hotels (-38.56%) maintain their positions of the previous year, albeit with a considerable fall in numbers. Robinson, despite a 6.72% fall, took advantage of the even more abrupt fall of All Accor Live to jump to third position. The only brand with exponential growth on Instagram in 2022 was Marriot, which went from fifteenth position to fifth.

Table 5. Top 5 brand performance on Instagram.

Interactions	Variation 2021	Publications	Variation 2021	Audience	Variation 2021
The Ritz Carlton 80.9k	-27.7%	Catalonia Hotels 46	-13.21%	The Ritz Carlton 682k	-
Riu Hotels 27k	-38.56%	Protur Hotels 37	+23.33%	Riu Hotels 655k	+35.07%
Robinson 24.9k	-6.72%	Marbella Club Hotel 28	-15.15%	All Accor Live 535k	-
All Accor Live Limitless 22.4k	-30.6%	Marina D'or 27	+92.86%	Marriot 372k	-
Marriott 19.2k	+281.91%	The Ritz Carlton 25	-13.79%	Iberostar 372k	+35.48%

Source: authors' own material.

Brands have increased the number of videos on YouTube in 2022. This can be seen in the rate of interaction, where Bahía Príncipe (see Table 6), despite a fall of 57.98%, still holds first position as it did in 2021. Eurostars and Senator Hotels are in second and third place, respectively, at the expense of Puente Romano and Iberostar, both of which have suffered a considerable fall in position.

Table 6. Top 5 best-performing brands on YouTube.

Interactions	Variation 2021	Publications	Variation 2021	Audience	Variation 2021
Bahia Principe Hotels 100	−57.98%	Alltours 14	+75%	Riu Hotels 19.1k	+24.03%
Eurostars Hotels 49	+308.33%	Hoteles Globales 12	-	The Ritz Carlton 13.7k	-
Senator Hotels 31	-	Senator Hotels 4	-	Bahia Principe Hotels 13.6k	+16.24%
Princess Hotels 14	+55.56%	Princess Hotels 4	+100%	Marriot 11.8k	-
Meliá 12	-	Paradores 3	+200%	Hilton 8180	-

Source: authors' own material.

As has already been said, overall, Instagram was the social network with the highest rate of interaction in both periods. However, it is worth noting that in 2021 one particular publication from Senator on Facebook was the one which registered the highest rate of interaction, at 3456. In fact, the same brand also reached second place in the ranking, although this was thanks to its publication on Instagram, which recorded 3067 interactions. Paradores was the other brand which achieved a greater engagement with users thanks to a publication on Instagram with 1192 interactions.

During the Easter Week of 2021, the best-performing publications are those which encourage the user with a call to action related to some issue in particular. That is the case of the two publications of the Senator brand with a prize draw and Paradores with a call to make a booking at the restaurants at their facilities. It is important to highlight the statistic that eight out of ten of the publications with the greatest interaction are centered on Instagram.

Unlike Easter 2021, in 2022 Paradores boasted the top two places in terms of publications with the greatest acceptance, thanks to two separate ones on Instagram. Both publications encouraged user participation and interaction. Although it is true that the rate of interaction for both publications—1061 in the first and 844 for the second—show considerably lower figures compared to 2021, it does mean that Paradores is the best brand for connecting with its audience according to its level of engagement during the Easter of 2022. Third place is held by a publication by Marina d'Or, also on Instagram. Along those lines, it is worth pointing out that Instagram accounts for nine out of ten of the publications with the greatest interaction for brands. The fourth publication in terms of interaction is Facebook and also by the brand Paradores.

The two years being compared have introduced significant and interesting differences in terms of the most-used content and labels in the published messages and the conversations produced. During Easter 2021, the issues which generated most conversation revolved around health safety, with hashtags such as #StaySafeWithMelia (37.6k) and #StaySafeWithMeliá (34.7k), as well as #ALLtogether (32.3k) with reference to motivational messages to defeat the economic consequences of the pandemic. One of the main problems detected is the variety of labels used by brands which dilutes the force of a conversation about any particular issues. That is the case, for example, of Meliá, which unites the first three hashtag issues for Easter 2021 in three different labels. It is the same case for Riu Hotels, which is incapable of bringing all its audience together under a single block of issues due to the diversity of its hashtags.

The rate of engagement has fallen considerably during 2022, positioning hashtags of a more corporate nature over those of health safety or another nature (see Table 7). Riu Hotels soars above all other brands, managing to position the labels #riuhotels (25.3k) and #riuhotelsandresorts (25.2k) among the first. However, we have observed that that brand

has not managed to situate its whole audience in one label in particular, spreading the topics of conversation over other labels, such as: #hotelesriu, #riu, #riuhotels, among others, which unite thousands of interactions.

Table 7. Interactions for most-used hashtags during Easter Week 2021 and 2022.

Easter 2021	Rate of Interaction	Easter 2022	Rate of Interaction
#SoulMatters	53k	#riuhotels	25.3k
#StaySafeWithMelia	37.6k	#riuhotelsandresorts	25.2k
#StaySafeWithMeliá	34.7k	#robinsonclub	25k
#riuhoteles	33.1k	#sharethemoment	25k
#ALLtogether	32.3k	#hotel	23k
#riuhotels	28.5k	#ALLtogether	22.6k
#robinsonclub	25.9k	#hotelesriu	19.8k
#hotel	24k	#riu	15k
#riuhotelsandresorts	16.9k	#ALLtravel	11.3k
#iberostar	12.6k	#vibramoments	10.2k

Source: authors' own material.

An analysis of hotel brands on different social media platforms during Easter 2021 and 2022 offers revealing insights into adaptability and digital marketing strategies in a post-pandemic context.

Comparing both dates, it is observed that while some brands, such as Riu Hotels, maintained solid performance across multiple platforms, others such as Marriott showed impressive adaptability, climbing positions on Instagram and Twitter. However, Easter 2022 evidenced an overall decline in interactions on platforms such as Facebook, suggesting a possible shift in user preferences or the effectiveness of marketing strategies.

In terms of effectiveness, brands that expanded or maintained their reach, such as Ritz Carlton on Instagram, demonstrated the effectiveness of their strategies and content. However, brands such as Marriott, despite their rise on some platforms, showed considerable declines on others, suggesting the need to adapt the strategy according to the platform.

The correlation between posting frequency and engagement was not always direct. While Riu Hotels showed a decrease in Twitter posts but a significant increase in interactions, other brands such as Paradores experienced the opposite.

In conclusion, the analysis reflects the changing dynamics of digital marketing in the hotel sector, highlighting the importance of adapting strategies specifically by platform and responding nimbly to user trends and behaviors.

From the data presented on the performance of hotel brands on social media during Easter 2021 and 2022, several conclusions can be drawn about the effectiveness of their digital marketing strategies.

Ritz Carlton, despite leading in Facebook interactions in 2022, experienced a decline compared to 2021, indicating that while its strategy is still effective, it may not be maintaining the same impact as before. Similarly, Riu Hotels, despite a significant decline in interactions on Facebook, achieved an incredible increase on Twitter, showing adaptability and effectiveness across different platforms.

Effectiveness is not only reflected in interactions, but also in audience and posts. For example, Riu Hotels demonstrated effectiveness by increasing its audience on Instagram by 35.07% with fewer posts, suggesting higher quality content or better segmentation.

On the other hand, Marriott, despite its success on Twitter and Instagram, evidenced a decline on Facebook, which may indicate the need to review and adapt its strategy specifically for that platform.

In conclusion, effectiveness in digital marketing is manifested in a brand's ability to adapt and thrive on different platforms, adjusting strategies according to changing user trends and preferences. Brands that maintain or increase their performance year after year demonstrate not only efficiency but also a deep understanding of their audience and the constantly evolving digital landscape.

5. Discussion and Conclusions

This research provides data which indicate a significant shift in the rate of engagement between Easter 2021 and Easter 2022. This may be due to a change in customer service in the face of the changing social situation because of COVID-19. We can conclude that the brands' call to action, in conjunction with users' willingness to go on holiday after lockdown, led to triple the number of interactions in 2021 compared to 2022. In fact, this fall in interactivity in 2022 is linked to the attitude of demand, i.e., users, since brands actually increased their volume of publications without much success, showing that that variable is neither subject to nor directly linked to the rate of interaction. This once again shows that publishing more does not necessarily guarantee greater acceptance and interaction with social profiles.

Users chose Instagram as their favorite social network for relating to hotel brands. The academic literature has demonstrated the efficiency of visual messages, as opposed to written ones, for increasing the commitment and interaction of the consumer. Among other reasons, it is because they can transmit vividness, facilitating the understanding of the message and its rhetorical capacity (Hsieh and Tseng 2017; Sabate et al. 2014; Ge and Gretzel 2018). Regarding the content of the messages, it can be observed that users interact more when they are encouraged to do so with the use of competitions and prize draws on Instagram and Facebook, which are the two social networks which have recorded the best results during the time frame of the study.

As regards the pattern of discourse being used, we observed a clear shift in trend from 2021 to 2022. During the Easter period of 2021, hotel chains focused their efforts on transmitting the safety and health measures of their establishments as the main tourist pitch, whereas for Easter 2022 there is no mention of issues related to health measures and COVID-19. This envisages the intention of hotel chains to return to normality and, at least in Europe, the perspective of recovering the levels of hotel occupation from before the pandemic.

As far as the management of communication of the large hotel chains is concerned, no brand positioning can be perceived from the labels being used. This leads to a reduction in the efficiency of bringing audiences together under the same hashtag, thus diverting the focus of the conversation and enabling the ability to interact over different topics of conversation. The communication policy of not including a specific reference to the holiday period being studied—Easter—in the published labels was also noted. This situation may indicate that social networks are used as a promotional channel for offers on specific products in an attempt to adapt estimated results to the demand received; in other words, social networks are used as a commercial communication channel rather than a tool for creating a community.

The social profiles of Paradores de Turismo—a public entity which belongs to the Spanish Government—is one of the best-performing brands on social networks for the periods being studied, with an accurate communication policy on social networks and publications with a clear call to action to its users. In fact, they boost their activity on publications on Instagram with appealing, high quality, attractive images of their facilities, gaining one of the best rates of interaction. Another reason which may help explain these results is the shift in the global trend, which was mentioned at the beginning of the article, in the choice of closer-to-home, safer destinations as opposed to further away, more exotic ones.

The study was limited to Spain and a study should be carried to establish whether results can be applied to other countries where travelers may have a different motivation. However, the relevance of the industry for the Spanish economy means the results are important and the conclusions may be of interest to other countries in the same region which share Spain's dependence on tourism.

In the sample studied, the impact obtained using social networks shows no direct link to the potential associated with brand value and business strength. Large, national and international brands, such as Meliá, Iberostar or NH, do not stand out above other hotel

businesses which are not household names and have fewer resources. That shows room for improvement in the management of social networks. Among the potential improvements are the need to highlight identity or take full advantage of storytelling in the process of strengthening or reformulating the cognitive and affective attributes which boost the image of tourist destinations. All of this is necessary for generating tourist loyalty in the user.

Social networks have modified the decision-making process of the tourist consumer. They have become an essential tool for managing communication and commercial information in the hotel sector. Travelers trust the information they receive through social networks, seek to resolve doubts and share comments, and this is a determining factor in their choice process. In addition, the creation of the image of a tourist destination or hotel on social networks must take into account both the information provided by the organizations and the opinions shared by other users.

Travelers have become very active in the use of social networks since their emergence. The nature of tourism, where products are often purchased in advance and far from the place of consumption, makes consumers seek confidence in the information they receive. Users not only seek to satisfy their need for information but also enjoy sharing their own experiences and opinions, exercising public judgment.

During the first year of the pandemic, there was speculation about a paradigm shift in world tourism. However, not everyone agreed that this shift would be permanent. During 2021, there was reduced posting of Easter-specific content on social media by hotel chains, possibly due to pandemic restrictions. However, in 2022, although the number of Easter-related posts increased, there was a decrease in overall interaction. Hotel chains adapted their strategies according to the circumstances, but also based on public response. During Easter in 2021, the social networks which achieved the highest interaction were Instagram and Facebook. By 2022, Instagram and Facebook again led in terms of interaction. However, although Twitter had a higher number of posts, it also showed a notable increase in its interaction rate in 2022 compared to 2021. On the other hand, Instagram has been the best performing network in interactions during both years.

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