
Perceptioning as a tool for Destination Branding: The case of Liguria as Wikidestination

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Abstract: The perceptioning model developed by Bassani et al. (2002, 2007, and 2011) permits to design, launch and develop a strong brand in B2B and B2C markets. In recent years, it has also been used to build wikibrands (Moffit and Dover, 2010) and successful products relying on the high involvement of consumers' communities in value creation processes. The paper explores how the perceptioning model as a tool for destination branding could also find successful application in other fields such as the tourism sector. After a literature review on place branding and perceptioning, the paper applies this model at a territorial scale by analyzing the case of the region of Liguria in Northwest Italy as a prototype of wikidestination. By relying on a qualitative research design based on interviews and discourse analysis, this paper provides evidence that perceptioning is also a suitable approach for territorial marketing, especially in the case of wikidestinations that are constructed collectively.

Keywords: Brand identity, C-to-C online marketing, Perceptioning, Territorial marketing, Wikibrand, Wikidestination

1. Introduction

In a world of disorientation, territorial marketing is reinventing itself by adopting codes of influence in the image of the whole society. The empowerment of customers, employees, suppliers and citizens also disrupts our living places, notably with a holistic approach, to the attractiveness of regions [1].

According to Lewi [2], choosing a travel *destination* or a location for a future implementation depends on four parameters: Risk aversion (considering elements such as infrastructure or security), interest (including considerations on currency, taxation, etc.), hospitality (i.e. climate, empathy, etc.) and the discovery of new potential (commercial, cultural, sociological, etc.). The first three criteria result from the analysis of past and present experience while the fourth comes from a desired future. Finally, consumers and policymakers will ultimately determine where they certainly do not want to go or run their business.

This is why territorial marketing is a subtle blend of several

comparative marketing dimensions: Economic, political, social and cultural. After a literature review on place marketing, branding theory and the concept of wikibrands, this paper discusses the use of social media in destination branding processes in particular by focusing on the case of the Italian region of Liguria. The paper then analyzes the construction of Liguria as wikidestination by using the perceptioning approach [3] and gives evidence that this tool is particularly helpful for identifying brand elements that are crucial for the success of a strong territorial brand.

2. Literature review

2.1. Place Marketing and Branding

Similarly to products, territories must now compete on an increasingly large and diversified market. This led in the last 30 years to the development of place marketing.

Place marketing is a new branch of broader marketing studies [4, 5, 6] which has witnessed the development of a wide literature which, in recent times, has primarily focused

on place branding [7, 8, 9, 10, 11].

As pointed out by Kavaratzis [9], the application of marketing techniques to places comes from two different trends: The development of marketing for non-business and non-profit organizations and the need for many places to find an economic and image repositioning following the industrial decline. Still, Ashworth and Voogd [7] point out that the development of place marketing is initially linked to the development of marketing for non-profit organizations, Social Marketing and Image Marketing.

In this context, place branding has emerged as a tool to create or strengthen the positioning of countries, regions and cities, with the aim of attracting tourists, customers and investments. At the theoretical level, the question of place branding has been approached with very different points of view. It is now widely recognized that place branding is a multi- and cross-disciplinary field [12] and that places increasingly need to consider branding in a wide range of contexts and for a wide range of stakeholders [13].

Among these approaches, five are particularly relevant [9]: Place and origin branding that involves "branding" a product using the image of its territory of origin (and qualities underlying this); Nation branding is used for tourist purposes and for attracting investments to a country; Culture/entertainment branding, linked to the use of cultural events and branding to create economic and social effects especially in urban areas and phenomena such as the spread of buildings-landmark designed by so-called "superstars"; Destination branding, perhaps the area far more investigated, linked to the branding of tourist destinations [14, 15, 16]; and, finally, Place/city branding.

In Italy too place branding is receiving increasing attention, although with some delay compared to other nations [17, 18, 19, 20, 21]. This has been due mainly to the loss of competitiveness experienced by Italy on the international tourism market and to the need to think of new ways for promoting and innovating the Italian tourist products.

In general, even in such a diverse theoretical context, there is an increasing awareness at a local level on at least three points that have been emerging from the empirical results of place branding strategies in the last years.

The first is that if place branding is intended as a strategic scheme to improve a place's image [22], place image should be considered as an integrated part of place identity and not something juxtaposed to it [23]. In other words, integrated place branding should be considering the complex ways in which place identity is produced and negotiated.

The second one regards the fact that, as noted by Anholt, *"communications are no substitute for policies, and that altering the image of a country or city may require something a little more substantial than graphic design, advertising or PR campaigns. A robust and productive coalition between government, business and civil society, as well as the creation of new institutions and structures to achieve and maintain this behaviour, is necessary for achieving this harmonisation of goals, themes, communications and behaviours in the long term."* [24].

The third point, which is confirmed in the first two, is the central role not only of local stakeholders but also of larger communities that today, thanks to the development of technology and Web 2.0 are fully involved in the life and development of the territories.

2.2. Defining Wikibrands

According to Moffitt and Dover [25], wikibrands are defined as "a progressive set of organizations, products, services, ideas and causes that tap into the powers of customer participation, social influence and collaboration to drive business value".

This means a shift in companies' behavior from broadcasting directly to their target audience to engaging their customers in a more collaborative interaction in order to add value to the services provided by their organization.

In general, organizations should recognize the following for creating a wikibrand:

- Customers are at the epicenter of the organization, as they are essential in assisting and supporting innovation, experience, insight, support, brand evangelism and exposure.
- Authenticity and transparency are essential organizational tenders of sustainable enterprises. The reason for existence and authenticity of organizations carry more weight than is often assumed.
- Only by standing out from the crowd, people will notice the organization and talk about it – most efforts, no matter how good they are, tend to be ignored both online and offline simply because they are not deemed to be unique enough, dynamic enough or visionary enough. The aim should be to become the 1% of efforts that do get recognized.
- "Strength is determined by the power of the company's network" and organizations should connect profoundly in order to transform their "business culture and operating models for the future." [25]
- Things that are deemed fresh and exciting today are considered out-of-date tomorrow. Paradigm changes are happening at break neck speeds and in order to keep up and accommodate the customer's needs, it is important to think about and to develop the business processes.

2.3. From Wikibrand to Wikidestination

According to the Italian consultancy agency Studio Giaccardi & Associati – Consulenti di Direzione: "With the neologism wikidestination, we mean a territory, city or country that, in order to position itself in the imagination of the people as a tourist destination, uses the collective intelligence to build a plural narrative capable of restoring, combining different points of view, the identity of the competitive territory".

As already underlined, competition between territories and tourist destinations is nowadays very tough and the need to stand out and to be appreciated by consumers-tourists does not only depend on massive advertising budgets invested on big

media. Instead it depends more and more on the ability to enhance the message through word-of-mouth approaches, in which the tourist receives stimuli and information on the brand directly from its networks of horizontal relationship.

Technology and social networks then become tools for transforming happy travelers in advocate narrators and spokespersons of the brand, able to influence the choices of other travelers via C-to-C (consumer-to-consumer) online marketing.

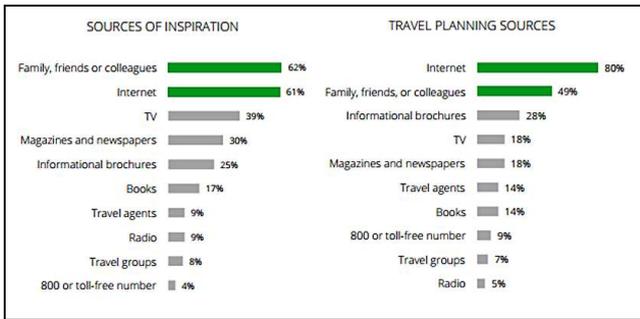


Figure 1. The source of inspiration in the choice of a trip – Google Search Traveler 2013

The wikidestination model allows for setting a strategy for tourism place marketing in which the main influencers are the tourists themselves. Particularly in the field of tourism, there is evidence on the power of C-to-C online marketing influence and Internet in purchase decisions of holiday destinations.

According to Google Search Traveler 2013 [26] (Fig. 1), suggestions from friends, family and colleagues are the first

source of inspiration in the choice of a trip and the second most influential source in planning the vacation.

2.4. Developing a Wikidestination with Perceiving

According to Bassani et al. (2011, p. 108-121) [3], perceiving is a technique for developing a brand. It is based on the assumption that the brand is the result of the perception of consumers. The perceiving approach (Fig. 2) analyzes the basic elements constituting a brand and is therefore a guide to develop the consistency of all its components - functional product qualities, product design, brand identity, communication and genetic code - in order to strengthen and reinforce the brand perception.

The perceiving model is composed of seven different analysis steps:

1. Positioning and definition of the perception of a brand (including context and customer analysis)
2. Decomposition of the perception of a brand according to its (three) basic elements
3. Development of the perception of a brand in terms of functional product qualities
4. Development of the perception of a brand in terms of product design
5. Development of the perception of a brand in terms of communication
6. Development of the perception of a brand in terms of brand identity
7. Definition of the genetic code of a brand.

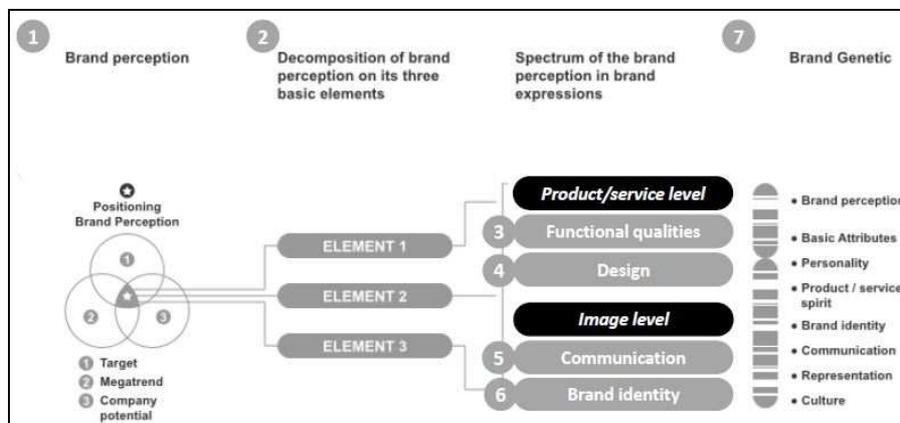


Figure 2. The Perceiving Model (Based on Bassani et al. (2011, p. 108-121) and (www.laurentpollefoort.com/capabilities.html)

3. Analysis of Liguria as Wikidestination

3.1. Methodology and Analysis

The analysis is based on a qualitative research approach and the case study method was chosen as the paper investigates a contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context [27, 28]. Case studies are often more appropriate when the researcher is seeking answers for “how” and “why” questions and has little control over events [27].

This applies to our research question, which is primarily

based on written sources, as well as an interview with Giuseppe Giaccardi, CEO of Studio Giaccardi & Associati – Consulenti di Direzione, which actively contributed to implement Liguria’s wikibrand. After collecting some data through literature, observation and web browsing, we try to analyze both Liguria’s blog and its Facebook page, dedicated to the wikidestination, to observe how the community was involved in the project “Building and maintaining a Liguria wikibrand”.

The place marketing strategy of Liguria has been defined in the tourism marketing plan "A Wikibrand for a

Wikidestination". The project Liguria Tourism Bottom Up, created by Studio Giaccardi & Associati – Consulenti di Direzione on behalf of the Liguria Tourism Board, outlines how to plan the development of tourism in the region. The project had the objective to define a three-year tourism plan for the region with the active involvement of all stakeholders in Liguria. The work realized in Liguria is the first Italian example of designing tourism development and was conducted with a bottom-up methodology in which objectives, actions, resources and indicators for monitoring results were identified through intensive listening and dialogue activities with all the people directly or indirectly involved in the tourism sector of the region: Tourism operators, associations, government agencies, citizens and tourists themselves.

This important work of design and listening was based on:

- Listening to tour operators' experiences, needs and expectations of development
- Analysis of online researches of tourists interested on a vacation in Liguria
- Analysis of perceptions and opinions about the brand "Liguria" and stakeholders' place brand.

The analysis has been taken as instructions to define the three-year tourism plan approved by the governing bodies of the region in December 2012. This plan has become crucial for defining the consequent promotion strategies and marketing plan.

3.2. A new Marketing Strategy for Liguria

With 3.8 million tourist arrivals and 13.5 million overnight stays, Liguria represents about 3.9% of tourism in Italy. Despite these relatively low numbers that are due to the reduced territorial extension of the region, tourism is a strategic economic sector for Liguria. It contributes to approximately 10.2% of its GDP, a number that is above the national average, and which generated revenues of 5,158 million € in 2011.

Liguria is a region that is characterized by a strong importance of seaside tourism throughout the region, with subsequent problems for the diversification of the main regional products and with respect to the seasonality of tourism. However, the offer of the region is potentially rich and ranges from wine and food tourism to adventure and nature tourism.

The tourism marketing plan of Liguria, implemented in 2012 and in force until the end of 2015, applies the wikibrand theory on the construction of the Liguria tourist brand. In other words, the marketing plan is designed to promote the tourist destination Liguria relying on the collective intelligence of prosumers, word-of-mouth influence, C-to-C online marketing, viral marketing on social media and the active involvement of tourists and citizens in creating a storytelling of the territory in which the points of view of those who live, visit and know the region are valued.

The strategy assumes that it is difficult to define Liguria with a unique description or with a characteristic that dominates the others. Liguria is known for its seaside but it is also appreciated in the international market for its cultural

aspects, entertainment, gastronomic heritage and the opportunities for sports and outdoor life. The same Liguria tour operators interviewed for the research have shown different connotations and competitive factors of the tourist offer of Liguria depending on the location they were from or their specific work. Many of them, especially among tour operators, identified in the definition "Riviera dei Fiori" (Flowers' Riviera), the strongest brand of Liguria and the name by which, according to them, Liguria is known especially in the foreign market.

Actually, by checking online researches of potential tourists (using the tool Google Trends) we found that the brand "Riviera dei Fiori" is far less known and googled than the place brand "Cinque Terre" and "Liguria" itself. The same is valid for the German translation "Blumen Riviera".

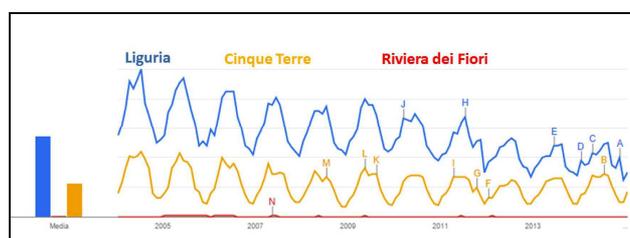


Figure 3. Brand awareness on Google of the terms: Liguria, Riviera dei Fiori and Cinque Terre (Google Trends Analysis)

[Caption: The numbers on the graph reflect how many searches have been done for a particular term, relative to the total number of searches done on Google over time. They don't represent absolute search volume numbers, because the data is normalized and presented on a scale from 0 to 100. Each point on the graph is divided by the highest point and multiplied by 100. When not enough data was available, the graph equals 0]

Even the definition Italian Riviera indicated by operators as "synonymous with Liguria" for foreign tourists is not confirmed by the analysis of online researches made by travelers on Google.

Different audiences who experience different places or attractions develop a set of plural perceptions and opinions that can hardly emerge without giving voice to the very protagonists of the holiday experience. Today's digital technology and social media allow the implementation of marketing campaigns in which people can amplify the story of all those involved in the experience of the destination by transforming comments, photos and articles in content that can influence the decisions of other tourists.

To do so, a space is needed to bring together the stories and where people involved with the brand can interact with the brand on horizontal flows of relationship able to promote and boost the visibility of the brand through the exponential power of social networks.

In the tourist marketing plan of Liguria "A Wikibrand for a Wikidestination", two tools have been identified to support the creation and development of communities involved and interested in having a dialogue with the brand "Liguria": the Facebook page "Liguria", registered in the category "tourist attraction", and the blog "Liguria tells".

The Facebook page and the blog played a central role in the

marketing strategy as:

- Spaces for creation and expansion of a community of people passionate about Liguria
- Place for direct interaction with the brand
- Place for storytelling and narrative of the tourist destination from the traveler’s point of view
- Test and analysis of the topics of greatest interest and appreciation by the readers.

3.3. The Tools of the Marketing Plan for Making Liguria a Wikidestination

The blog "Liguria tells" gives voice to citizens and tourists who want to tell and share "their Liguria", the one they saw, lived and filtered with their eyes, memories and emotions. The result is a collection of short authentic stories, rich in nuances, points of view and possible interpretations that can motivate and influence the choices of new tourists. In about two years more than 200 articles were published on the blog, an average of 100 per year. The blog allowed for involving more than 80 bloggers who have contributed with articles full of photographs and personal views on a variety of topics. The blog generates a large number of interactions in the community:

- Over 287 comments to posts
- Several thousand likes and shares on social networks
- Repins and retweets of posts on Pinterest and Twitter.

The blog is now filled with content written by the editorial board of the Agency Liguria (planned according to an editorial plan consistent with the promotion of tourism and territorial initiatives) and content written by tourists, bloggers and citizens. The topics covered are diverse, always accompanied by a large number of images. Among the most welcomed are those dedicated to traditional culture (festivals, typical products), stories of childhoods spent in Ligurian towns that now become major tourist attractions (tales of memory), and thematic itineraries (outdoor, hiking, villages, etc.). It is important to highlight that the most successful content is the most intimate and personal, as shows the post "Cogoleto and the tale of the ugly duckling", that got more than 1,000 likes and shares on Facebook.

The Facebook page of Liguria is the place of greater dialogue and aggregation of the community of people passionate about Liguria. Updated on a daily basis, it has reached more than 90,000 clicks on "talking about this", which can be considered as a suitable indicator for measuring the number of people who interact with the content of the page. On a national ranking, the Facebook account of Liguria maintains a high position and is the sixth out of 20 regions in terms of likes and the fourth in terms of "talking about this".

Facebook posts that engage the most are:

- Sunset, sea and cities’ pictures
- Food and wine traditions and recipes
- Events and spectacles.

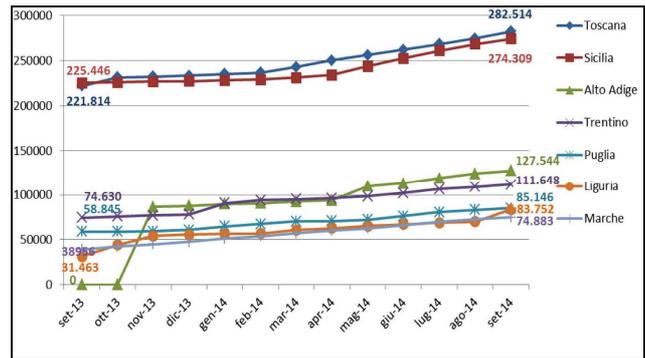


Figure 4. Facebook like Trend 2013- 2014 – Ranking of Italian Region

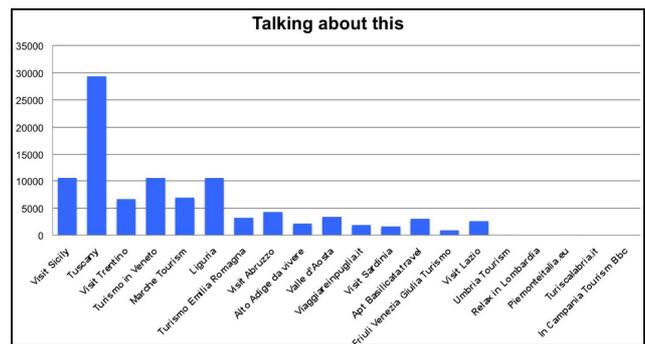


Figure 5. Talking about this – Ranking of Italian Region 2014

The following tools and actions are also part of the tourism marketing plan:

- Social media strategy for Twitter
- Digital Diary Liguria, a format of the company Can't Forget Italy consisting in a race with 5/6 videomakers from around the world who lived and filmed for a few days in Liguria and who tell their experience with a short video
- Social media strategy for visual social networks like Instagram and Pinterest
- Video and photo contest for tourists and citizens
- Myliguria140, a platform that creates tourist guides based on Twitter and made of tweets produced by users
- Specific initiatives for trade
- Vacation and campaign planning on online and offline media.

The whole marketing plan had the goal of making the brand “Liguria” able to communicate, engage, excite, stimulate and produce content and values for increasing its ability to attract tourists especially from foreign markets.

4. The Application of the Perceiving Model

4.1. Positioning and Contextualization of Liguria

Contextualizing Liguria with respect to other destinations and its “prosumers” is crucial for defining a first hypothesis that serves as a guide for design choices for Liguria as a brand.

4.1.1. Target Audience

Based on general online research and observations, it turns out that couples that are between 50 and 60 years old (“Baby boomers”) are part of the typical target audience of tourism destinations such as Liguria. They come to Liguria because they are great amateurs of the seaside and because they are interested in sailing activities. They eventually possess a yacht. At least one person of the couple is (still) actively working and often holds a management position, which means that they come from an upper socio-cultural background. The couple can however also be retired. They own at least one real estate, and are thinking about their personal future. They are willing to spend money because they are attracted by exclusive products that provide a permanent service (anticipated needs). They enjoy delicious food and regional dishes from Liguria. Furthermore, they are concerned about security and want to live serenely their passion for traveling. Recreational activities play an important role, as they are looking for moments of tranquility and calmness.

The second type of typical customers are seaside and landscape amateurs that go to Liguria only for doing outdoor activities. Among such tourists are groups of people and individuals, mainly between 25 and 50 years old. They often know each other and have more restricted financial resources than the first target audience. They are concerned with responsible consumption and eco-friendly behavior because they love nature. Therefore, they also do camping or stay in tents during their hiking trips. The contact with nature is thus very important for them, as they enjoy going outdoors for discovering the diverse landscapes of Liguria.

Last but not least, families that love the seaside and mountains are also a target audience of Liguria. The parents of these families are mainly between 30 and 50 years old and have relatively young children. They are actively working and belong to a middle income group. They want to enjoy nice beaches, landscape and food, as they are willing to spend money especially in the gastronomic sector. Maybe they rent a car for discovering the coastal roads, as contact with nature is essential for their journey in Liguria. They enjoy going outdoors for discovering landscapes, but they are also seeking for recreational activities for relaxing during their vacation.

4.1.2. Liguria in the Context of Italy as Tourism Destination

The consumer perceptions of tourism in Liguria and of other Italian tourism destinations are important for seizing the latent opportunities of the sector. In general, it can be observed that Italy is often considered as top-of-mind for food and gastronomy. Italy is surrounded by the Mediterranean, which represents a travel motivation for many tourists. Many Italian regions benefit thus from a strong international reputation as tourism destinations (Toscana, etc.). With regards to Liguria, the geographic proximity to France, which is a leading destination for the demands of the typical customer profiles mentioned above, could create positive synergies in terms of place image. The increase in exports (French port saturation) could also contribute to a rise of importance of Liguria as region.

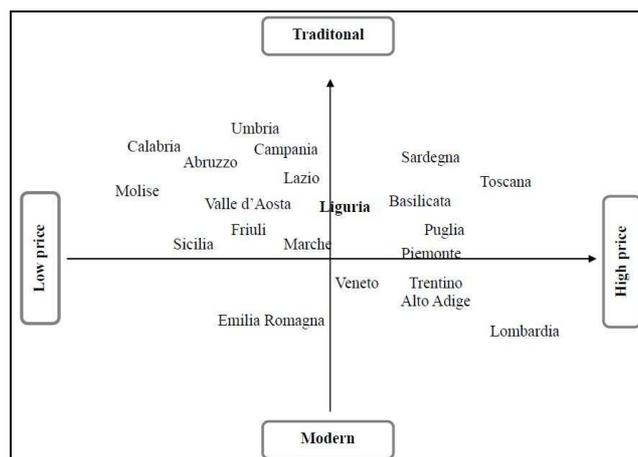


Figure 6. Perceptual map of Italian tourism destinations

4.1.3. Megatrend

Respecting current megatrends is essential for developing the brand perception according to the underlying macro-social tendencies. It can be observed that a demand for permanently accessible services is on the rise worldwide. The reputation of a brand or territory becomes more and more global, as globalization processes involve distinct geographic locations within international networks of immaterial and material exchange. In the contemporary world, it is thus important to stay connected. Recently, increases in the importance of recreational activities can be observed in many industrialized countries. Furthermore, there is evidence on a successive democratization of tourism prices and costs of tourism activities (guided tours, etc.). This led to a growth of the demand of activities such as sailing or hiking. The protection of cultural heritage and environment is globally also on the rise, whereas individual well-being, efficient leisure time utilization and personal pleasure and fun are one of the key values that drive customer decisions.

4.1.4. Liguria's Perception as a Brand

Observations and online research give evidence that Liguria is perceived as a tourist destination for families and couples, especially related to seaside tourism but also to sports tourism for trekking lovers, nature and outdoor sports. Thanks to its mild climate, Liguria is attractive in many months of the year both on the Riviera or the cliffs from which it is almost always possible to enjoy the view across the ocean. Liguria is perceived as a relatively expensive destination, with tourism offerings very varied. It can be distinguished between locations of strong international appeal (e.g. Cinque Terre) and some very exclusive locations such as Portofino.

Also Genoa, the capital of the region, welcomes many tourists thanks to its historical and artistic heritage such as the Strade Nuove and the Palazzi dei Rolli which are inscribed in UNESCO's WHL and attractions such as the Aquarium (1.3 million visitors every year) and the museum Galata Museo del Mare, which are of great interest especially for families.

4.2. Breaking Down the Brand into its Basic Elements

For providing a framework for the construction of the brand

perception, the perceptioning approach seeks to break down the brand perception into three basic elements (Fig. 7) by relying on online research, questionnaires (appendix 1) and other information sources such as literature.

The territorial settings of Liguria (steep, plane, steep, with the seaside and the Alps) also define its character and perception: Liguria is maritime, rocky, and full of colors.

It can be claimed to be Mediterranean, but also diverse, given that there are many suburban and urban roads with narrow streets, where traditions, culture and gastronomy are concentrated.

It is colorful because there are villages such as Vernazza, that offer views across the sea and that create a kaleidoscope of colors with picturesque sceneries, unique to walk in and explore by bicycle.

Furthermore, Liguria has a lot of mountains and littoral coastlines, what creates a harmonious alternation of mountains and ocean for a journey full of discoveries, outdoor activities and cultural experiences. The weather in Liguria is also suitable for people looking for only one activity during their holiday (e.g. relaxing, doing seaside activities, getting to know the Italian culture). The offer of the region also meets the demands of those who prefer more varied holidays.

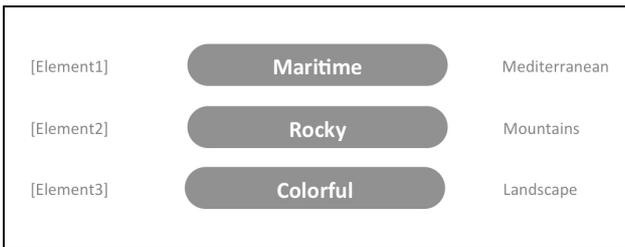


Figure 7. Basic brand elements of the brand "Liguria"

4.3. The Products and Services of the Brand "Liguria"

In this step of the perceptioning approach, the main attributes and design of the products and services of a brand are analyzed (Fig. 8). It turns out that in the case of a territory such as Liguria, many different products and services need to be considered. Liguria is a geographic region, but also a wikibrand, which makes it necessary to consider the ensemble of products and services that constitute the identity of this region. To establish the most adequate perception of the characteristics of the products and services of Liguria, three basic elements of the brand perception need to be considered:

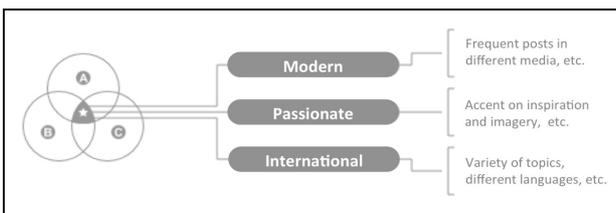


Figure 8. Characteristics of Liguria's products and services

Liguria provides especially cultural products and possesses natural resources (landscape, etc.). The richness of its

environmental diversity, constituted by the seaside and the Mediterranean, littoral cliffs, romantic villages and towns, mountains and rocky landscapes can be assumed to be the main aspect differentiating Liguria from other Italian regions.

4.4 The brand communication

Nowadays, Liguria possesses different online and offline communication channels (Fig. 9), which play an essential role in its territorial marketing strategy (chapter 3). Its Facebook, Twitter, Pinterest, Instagram accounts, as well as several websites and blogs on which experiences with the region are shared, create an ensemble of online media representations that promote Liguria as tourism destination. On these platforms, the landscape of Liguria is often represented. Nonetheless, Liguria communicates also offline and via its cultural festivals.

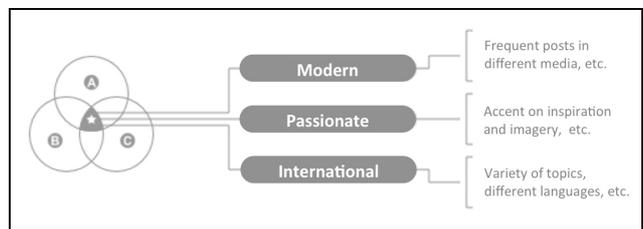


Figure 9. Liguria's communication

4.5. The Identity of the Brand

The logo of the region (Fig. 10) is used by the regional tourism promotion agency for making Liguria a brand (appendix 2).

The blue color reflects the color of the sea, whereas orange is the color of the sun shining for most of the year with temperatures above the average of other regions in northern Italy. The wave recalls the arched shape of the region that is from east to west characterized by the sea.

The logo was designed in 2006 and since then accompanies the entire institutional tourism communication of Liguria.



Figure 10. Liguria's brand identity

4.6. The Genetic Code of Liguria

The genetic code of a brand aims to summarize the identified characteristics of the brand and is composed of eight different aspects described by attributes.

The representation of Liguria can thus be claimed to be natural, whereas the personality of the region is Mediterranean. The perception of the brand Liguria is beautiful and the brand identity is outdoor-oriented. Its culture is Italian, and its communication is technologically connected. The spirit of its products is eco-friendly, and the basic attributes of Liguria are maritime, rocky, and colorful.

4.7. Using Perceptioning for Wikidestination Branding

In the case of wikidestinations that are constructed collectively by the aims of online networks, further evidence on the pertinence of the results of the perceptioning approach [3] is given by a discourse analysis of these networks. A discourse analysis serves as methodology for studying the language used for talking or writing about the region of Liguria. This enables to identify how Liguria is perceived and connoted.

For this reason, blog articles on Liguria's community blog "Liguria tells", as well as publications on the Facebook page of Liguria have been analyzed. These two online platforms and their importance for the creation of the wikidestination "Liguria" have been presented in chapter 3.

It is thus referred to five blog entries (appendix 3) written in Italian that were used as sample:

- "Viaggio di una toscana nei caruggi di Genova" (by Valentina Vettori on December 29th 2014)
- "Genova: la città, le sue strade e il Natale" (by Eleonora Caldari on December 12th 2014)
- "I paesi rosa del Levante, Fiascherino e Tellaro" (by Chiara Repetto on November 21st 2014)
- "Omaggi a Chiavari" (by Daniele Pipitone on November 11th 2014)
- "I colori di Liguria-Riviera di Ponente" (by Manuela Della Corte on November 7th 2014)

Furthermore, the contents of the posts on Liguria's Facebook page have been analyzed over several weeks with respect to thematic content, visualizations and used language. The objective of this communication analysis was to identify which basic elements of the region are used to promote Liguria online in terms of C-to-C marketing in online forums.

5. Findings

In the last two years, the wikidestination strategy for Liguria has generated important results:

- Growth of the community of people involved by the brand "Liguria"
- Facebook page: More than 62,000 likes in 24 months
- Twitter: More than 6,000 followers in 24 months
- Blog: 127,000 page views and 45,000 unique visitors in 24 months
- Myliguria140: More than 400 downloaded guides, 1,330 people involved and over 8,000 tweets collected from the platform
- Involvement of tour operators in the tourism marketing strategy
- Concentration on the name of Liguria of all the tourist offer of the region making it a representative brand
- Increase in two positions (from the tenth to the eighth position) in the ranking of most sold by foreign tour operators in Italian regions
- Extension of the wikidestination strategy on the new regional tourism portal which will be online in January 2015

- Increase in international tourist arrivals and journeys
- 2009-2013: +35.6% arrivals, + 24.7% journeys.

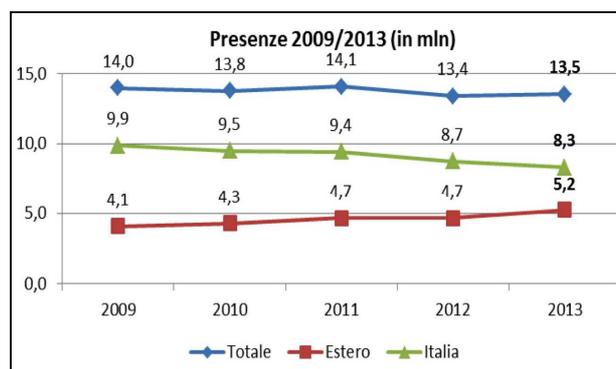


Figure 11. Tourist arrivals –Trend 2009-2013 Source Istat, Tourism Observatory of Liguria's Region and Studio Giaccardi & Associati

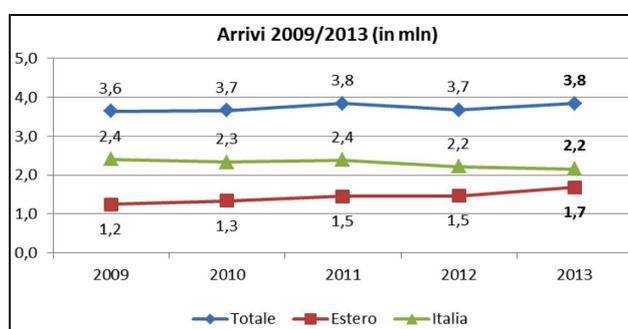


Figure 12. Tourist day presences – Trend 2009-2013- Source Istat, Tourism Observatory of Liguria's Region and Studio Giaccardi & Associati

The region of Liguria has thus witnessed a significant increase in meaning as tourism destination in Italy. There is evidence that its marketing strategy, which relies on online networks, shared experiences and C-to-C online marketing, found resonance in the mind of consumers. It was found that the online communication channels of the marketing concept of Liguria represent probably one of the most important ways for promoting and developing the region's identity and reputation. The striking advantage of the wikibrand concept is thereby that consumers develop the brand collectively.

In this paper, it turned out that the perceptioning model proposed by Bassani et al. (2002, 2007, and 2011) [3] provides in this context an efficient tool for crystallizing the basic components of the collective wikibrand "Liguria". It was shown that a discourse analysis of the tools used for creating the wikibrand (blog "Liguria tells" and Facebook posts) can be used for enhancing the overall findings of the perceptioning model based on observations and online research with shared experiences and C-to-C marketing in social networks.

By referring to the blog "Liguria tells", it was verified that especially the landscape and nature, the contrasts of places and towns, as well as the cultural diversity of Liguria are crucial elements for its wikibrand. "Unique", "rare", "beautiful", "colorful", "panoramic", "emotional", "natural", and "tasty" are examples for adjectives that are frequently associated with the region on the blog "Liguria tells".

The perception of the region was relatively coherent also

with other blog entries, whereas only articles by Italian people that currently live in Liguria or that already lived there have been analyzed. It can be assumed that mainly people that have positive associations with Liguria write articles on the blog. It is therefore appropriate to apply the perceptioning model, as this model has the intrinsic idea to focus on positive brand connotations, as only positive attributes are useful for developing a brand. Furthermore, different regions (not only the seaside, but also cities) of Liguria were described in the articles, so geographically representative results can be assumed.

The content of the posts on Facebook that were published over the last weeks give evidence on the same associations:

- Geographical associations (touristic sites and destinations, presentation of places, etc.)
- Natural associations (landscape, cliffs, mountains, seaside, beaches, sunset, plants, etc.)
- Cultural associations (local dishes, gastronomic highlights, cultural festivals, architecture, art, etc.)

The publications on Facebook have in common that they tend to evoke strong colorful contrasts, with an emphasis on tradition and inspiration. The posts are published in different languages (mostly in Italian, but also in English and German), what alludes to the international character as tourism destination. The frequency of the publications of sometimes more than three times per day gives a dynamic impression. The posts are published by private organizations, but comments from tourists and habitants give evidence that these elements are of principal interest for the interaction with the brand.

In general, it turns out that in the case of wikibrands such as Liguria, the shared perceptions of the region on social networks (blog, Facebook, etc.) can either be used as input for the perceptioning approach or for enhancing an already proposed perceptioning model that is based on general observations and other information sources outside from C-to-C marketing in social media. In terms of input for the perceptioning model, the perceptioning approach can serve for crystallizing the most essential features for the wikibrand “Liguria” that are mentioned in social networks. Especially in the case of wikidestinations that are created by the aims of shared experiences, C-to-C online marketing and viral marketing, perceptioning provides a helpful tool for focusing on the main elements through which a brand can be developed further. On the other side, evidence was found that an already proposed perceptioning model based on observations and online research can be further enhanced by referring to a discourse analysis of the main networks that constitute the wikibrand “Liguria”: Its blog and its Facebook page. Especially the analysis of the used language in these networks serves to back-up and reinforce the proposed perceptioning model [3] in chapter 4.

All in all, there is thus evidence that in the case of wikibrands, virtually shared experiences, viral marketing and C-to-C marketing in social networks can be used for making the perceptioning approach even more empirically representative. Nevertheless, it also turned out that when

applying the perceptioning model on a territory, the steps 3 and 4 of the analysis (functional product characteristics and design) need to synthesize and regroup the attributes of a variety of different products and services with different designs and characteristics, as they all belong to the wikibrand “Liguria”.

6. Conclusions

The perceptioning model [3] can be used for analyzing and developing the perception of a territory as a brand. The example of Liguria shows that the perception of the region plays a key role in terms of word-of-mouth influence, shared experiences, C-to-C online marketing and viral marketing that incite consumer-tourists to spend a journey there. In this context, this paper has shown that the perceptioning model aims to develop the identity of a territory especially when considering these marketing concepts. There is evidence that especially communication and marketing strategies for creating wikibeands via social media can provide suitable input for the perceptioning model and serve to back-up its different analyses. On the other side, a perceptioning approach for wikibrands initially based on observations and online research can be enhanced with discourse analysis of social media.

Nowadays, it is important to evoke that a territory can be considered as a brand that needs to be promoted for remaining competitive in an increasingly challenging tourism market. The number of tourism destinations is globally on the rise, as many countries are more and more developed in terms of infrastructure. The global market for tourism becomes therefore increasingly competitive and can be compared with other conventional product markets that also underlie the need for remaining competitive in a globalized economy.

In the end, the contribution of the destination image is strategic for the tourism sector, and can bear significant potential for job creation, particularly in times of economic crisis. A strong territorial brand can therefore contribute to the beneficial development of a geographic region.

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Appendix

Appendix 1: The Liguria from your Point of View

The questionnaire is part of a tourism development project of Liguria. This project aims to give voice first of all to young citizens. In order to participate you must be aged between 18

and 65 years old and live or have lived in Liguria, enough to handle it say what are your favorite places.

If I say "Liguria" what is the first thing you think of?

What are the three adjectives that you think best describe the region of Liguria?

Tell us three things that only a real inhabitant of Liguria knows (habits, places, and ways of saying ...)

Three colors to describe Liguria?

Where are the most characteristic views of Liguria?

Appendix 2: How to Create a Logo?

What is the history of this logo?

What were the previous logos?

Why today there are two logos? (Liguria region and tourism in Liguria)

What is the purpose of this logo compared with the other?

Regarding the visual of the logo:

- Why these colors (blue, orange, black (shadow of the wave))?
- Why the wave?
- Why the shadow?

Appendix 3: Results of the Discourse Analysis on the Blog "Liguria Tells"

Viaggio di una toscana nei caruggi di Genova (by Valentina Vettori on December 29th 2014)

Online via:

<http://www.laliguriaracconta.it/2014/12/29/viaggio-di-una-toscana-nei-caruggi-di-genova/> on January 17th 2015

Main connotations: Reserved and decadent soul ("animo riservato e decadente"), magnificence of its ancient splendor ("magnificenza del suo antico splendore"), rare beauty ("rara bellezza"), mysterious and full of contrasts ("mistero e contrasti"), world heritage of the UNESCO ("patrimonio dell'umanità Unesco"), Kaleidoscope of shops ("caleidoscopio di negozi"), otherwise unobtainable ("altrimenti introvabili"), Genova is a city to be savored from below upwards ("Genova e una città da assaporare dal basso verso l'alto"), atmosphere of rare individuality ("un'atmosfera di rara unicità"), distant elements that come together in a unique reality ("Elementi distanti che si fondono in un'unica realtà"), gracious ("graziosa"), unattended ("inaspettata"), easy-going atmosphere ("l'atmosfera si fa chiassosa e allegra"), taste the diverse types of Focaccia that the culinarian tradition of Liguria offers ("assaporare i diversi tipi di focaccia che la tradizione culinaria ligure offre"), marvelous opposite ("meravigliatevi di fronte"), shopping for all tastes ("negozi per tutti il gusti"), distinct smell ("odore inebriante"), large and luminous ("larga e luminosa"), and again another surprise ("a noi di nuovo sorpresa"), proving that art and beauty are all at your fingertips, just look up ("A riprova che l'arte e la bellezza sono a portata di tutti, basta alzare lo sguardo"), hidden beauty ("bellezze più nascoste")

Genova: la città, le sue strade e il Natale (by Eleonora Caldari on December 12th 2014)

Online via:

<http://www.laliguriaracconta.it/2014/12/12/genova-la-cittale-sue-strade-e-il-natale/> on January 17th 2015

Main connotations: I adore my city ("adoro la mia città"), contradictions ("contraddizioni"), Genova has many faces, many places and many different angles ("Genova ha tante facce, tanti luoghi e tanti angoli"), particularly lively ("particolarmente vivace"), makes me feel part of a big whole ("mi fanno sentire parte di un tutto più grande"), enthusiastic people ("ragazzi entusiasti")

I paesi rosa del Levante, Fiascherino e Tellaro (by Chiara Repetto on November 21th 2014)

Online via:

<http://www.laliguriaracconta.it/2014/11/21/i-paesi-rosa-del-levante-fiascherino-e-tellaro/> on January 17th 2015

Main connotations: Beautiful things remain often hidden in Liguria ("Le cose belle si tengono, si tengono strette, si tengono care, e in Liguria, troppo spesso, si tengono nascoste"), the gift of poetry, where the ancient remains of early paradise have been found ("golfo dei poeti, dove sono state rinvenute antichissime tracce del paradiso terrestre"), absolute beauty ("bellezza assoluta"), most beautiful coast of the whole Mediterranean ("costa più bella di tutto il Mediterraneo"), seems like a wild paradise island ("Sembra un'isola selvaggia, il paradiso"), brilliant green of the Mediterranean pines ("verde brillante dei pini marittimi"), the blue sea, the smell of salt air, and the language of white sand ("il turchese del mare e gli scogli, il profumo della salsedine, la lingua di sabbia bianchissima"), chic establishments ("stabilimenti più chic"), panoramic road ("strada panoramica"), grace and simplicity, sophistication and mystery, seduction ("Grazia e semplicità, raffinatezza e mistero, seduzione"), elegance ("eleganza"), silence of noon ("silenzia del mezzogiorno"), unique emotion ("emozione unica"), you wouldn't want to go away ("Non vorresti andare mai via"),

Ommaggio a Chiavari (by Daniele Pipitone on November 11th 2014)

Online via:

<http://www.laliguriaracconta.it/2014/11/11/omaggio-a-chiavari/> on January 17th 2015

Main connotations: Liguria is a little bit my land of adoption, a part of my family ("La Liguria è un po' una mia terra di adozione: parte della mia famiglia"), it is really unique ("è veramente unica"), painted with the green of the nature, the red and orange color of the houses, and the intensive blue color of the ocean ("dipinta con il verde della natura, i colori rossi e aranciati delle case, il blu intenso del mare"), Genova, a somewhat chaotic city ("Genova, città un po' caotica"), unmistakable views ("inconfondibile affaccio"), Chiavari allows to breath fresh air and refresh your mind from a week full of work ("Chiavari permette di respirare un'aria più pulita e rinfrescare la mente dai pensieri della settimana lavorativa"), can offer so much more than swimming ("può offrire tanto oltre alla balneazione"), an example for Ligurian baroque architecture rich of golden decoration ("esempio di architettura barocca ligure ricca di decorazioni dorate"), nice balcony over the ocean ("bella terrazza sul mare"), rich of

different plants, ponds and monumental greenhouses (“ricco di piante diverse e laghetti, serre monumentali”), a little angle of paradise (“un piccolo angolo di paradiso”), beautiful sunsets (“bellissime tramonti”)

I colori di Liguria-Riviera di Ponente (by Manuela Della Corte on November 7th 2014)

Online via:

<http://www.laliguriaracconta.it/2014/11/07/i-colori-di-liguria-riviera-di-ponente/> on January 17th 2015

Main connotations: The Kaleidoscope of houses, the pastel shades of the churches, and the green of the hills (“caleidoscopio delle case, le tinte acquerellate delle chiese, il verde delle coline”), breathe the art and history of this landstripe (“respire l’arte e la storia di questa striscia di terra”), people that have the ocean in front of them, but never loose contact to the hinterland (“gente che ha tutto il mare davanti, ma che da sempre si aggrappa con amore e con forza al suo entroterra”), rigor of medieval villages (“il rigore medievale dei borghi”), each village is a natural art gallery (“Ogni borgo à una pinacoteca naturale”), the villages are always classical and have a sweet made of little things (“riportano indietro nel tempo con una dolcezza fatta di piccolo cose”), Liguria is a land with no plains, in which mountains plunge into the ocean (“La Liguria è una terra senza pianure, in cui i monti si gettano nel mare”).

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