Analysis of the destination image of Sri Lanka on social networks, specifically on Instagram

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Resumen

La imagen de destino es la idea preconcebida que tiene la gente sobre un lugar. Desde la creación de las tecnologías de la información y el aumento del uso de internet, las personas han cambiado la manera de formar esta imagen. Antes, el boca a boca se limitaba a los conocidos. Sin embargo, hoy en día, a través de las redes sociales – especialmente Instagram – y las páginas web, las críticas y opiniones sobre viajes se pueden comunicar fácilmente a un mayor número de personas – a veces involuntariamente -. Además, los dispositivos electrónicos están presentes en todas las etapas del viaje: antes, durante y después, lo que permite una comunicación instantánea. Este estudio tiene como finalidad analizar la imagen transmitida, por 6 cuentas de viajes de Instagram, sobre Sri Lanka. Para ello, sus fotos y videos se clasificaron en diferentes temas y grandes temas que podían reflejar la imagen del país. Además, como los stakeholders pueden modificar esta imagen, también fue importante examinar si alguna de las cuentas de Instagram transmitía una imagen sesgada del país. Los resultados demostraron que Sri Lanka es conocida en Instagram, principalmente, por sus recursos naturales, tanto terrestres como marinos; así como por otros temas. Además, todas las cuentas parecían emitir una imagen de destino similar.

Abstract

The destination image is the preconceived idea people has about a place. Since the creation of information technologies and the increase of use of Internet, the way people set this image up has changed. Years ago, word of mouth was reduced to acquaintances. However, nowadays, through social networks - especially Instagram - and websites, reviews and opinions about trips are easily communicated to a bigger number of people – sometimes unintentionally -. Furthermore, electronic devices are present in all the steps of a trip: before, during and after it, which allows instant communication. The purpose of this study was to analyse the image transmitted through Instagram by 6 travel-related accounts. To do so, all its pictures and videos posted were classified into different topics and big topics that could reflect the image of Sri Lanka. Furthermore, as stakeholders may modify such image, this study examined whether some of the 6 Instagram profiles issued a biased image of the country. The results proved that Sri Lanka is known on Instagram mainly for its natural resources, both terrestrial and marine; as well as by other tropics. Besides, all the profiles seemed to issue a similar destination image.
1. INTRODUCTION

Nowadays there is no doubt that social media has a very important influence on the trends and consumption habits of the population.

In the last years this influence has been especially notorious in the choices of holiday destinations since information technologies are present in every single step of the travelling process.

The virtual sphere, and specially Instagram, is a platform where pictures and experiences that strength the tourism industry are shown. It also helps that places become more and more popular. In fact, it is expected that by 2020 this new type of tourism generates a total revenue of 27.000 million euros in all the World. (Lechuga, 2018). However, negative consequences also arise from the high exposure and continuous promotion of certain places on the network.

Every time a person thinks on a place, he has a preconceived image of the destination. This image is created from the word of mouth and electronic word of mouth. As a consequence, depending on it, the virtual destination image may be positive and negative. Furthermore, the stakeholders are able to manipulate the image projected on social networks by deciding to share a specific information about the spot, in order to favour them. Thus, based on the data the stakeholders want to share, the destination image of the future travellers may change.

Since the grow of importance of the social networks, the aesthetics of the photos and videos is very important, especially on Instagram. That’s why certain places are considered to be more appropriate to take attractive photos than others and, consequently, become more popular – the instgrammability effect -. These places are usually crowded, and people desire to visit them in order to take pictures, post them and show to the fellow Instagram users they have been in that privileged place.

Therefore, the aim of this study is to analyse the virtual destination image of Sri Lanka, in order to know what tourists, prior to travelling, believe they will find at the destination. To do so, a study of all the publications on 6 of the most influent Sri Lanka travel related Instagram accounts is made, classifying such publications into different topics and big topics which make reference to possible characteristics of the destination image. To finally discover which image is given on social networks, the accounts are analysed one by one but also as a whole. This allows to realize if some of the accounts is biased with respect to the others which may mean that it wants to show a different face of the country.

1.1 Customer decision journey

The steps to buy a product or service follow the same pattern for most people, which is known as “customer decision journey”. This can be modified by the influence of different factors, such as the communication between buyers and users of such goods and services.
The consumer decision journey is all the steps followed by a person when buying and consuming a good or a service.

Specially in the tourism sector, all the information shared on the Internet through websites and social networks has an important influence on these steps before, during and after the trip.

Four main stages of the consumer decision journey can be distinguished (Guerreiro et al., 2019):

1) Awareness or search of information, is the consumer's first contact with the product. It consists of the creation of the willingness to visit a place which is bounded to all the information found through online and offline sources. It is the moment to gather all that information in order to pass to the next step.

2) During the evaluation stage the consumer uses tools such as blogs and review platforms or websites, among others. The future traveller considers and analyses all the information gathered in the previous step.

3) In the purchase stage, the consumer decides what to buy, through which method and he pays. In the case of the tourism industry most of the people book their trips through different online websites – flights, lodgement, transportation, excursions, etc.

4) The post-purchase stage occurs during the trip. It is the most critical stage since, depending on the experience of the consumer, he will share positive or negative information about the destination. In this stage social networks, as well as face to face communication play a very important role, because they are the two main ways to transmit their feelings, reviews and recommendations. Based on this, the destination image could be influenced, and it may change the decision of future travellers to visit that place or not (Guerreiro et al., 2019). In this step both online and offline word of mouth have similar influence the future travel decisions (Camprubí et al., 2013).

Therefore, the information shared among websites and social networks is crucial in all the steps taken by buyers during the consumer decision journey. For this reason, firms need to be aware of the importance of this new reality and use them as a tool to improve their image, increase their sales and presence in the market.

2. CONTEXT OF SRI LANKA

The Socialist Democratic Republic of Sri Lanka is an insular nation located at the south east of India, in de Indic Ocean. Its legislative capital is Sri Jayawardenapura Kotte with 103.000 inhabitants and Colombo, with 600.000 inhabitants, is the commercial capital and the Government headquarters. (Oficina de Información Diplomática, 2019)
2.1 Population

With a total population of 22,576,592 inhabitants, by July 2018 (Oficina de Información Diplomática, 2019), Sri Lanka is a very diverse country with several differences among its people.

Talking about the ethnicity, 74.9% are Sinhalese, 11.2% Sri Lankan Tamil, 4.1% Indian Tamil, 9.3% Sri Lankan Moor and 0.5% come from other ethnicities.

Religion is a very important part of the daily life of the Sri Lankan being Buddhism the most extended, by far (70.1%), followed by Hinduism (12.6%), Islam (9.7%) and, finally, Christianism as the least practiced (7.6%).

Regarding the distribution of the population in the territory, most of the inhabitants live in rural areas (77.4%) followed by urban areas (18.2%) and finally 4.4% estate areas. That is the reason why there is a big amount of people working on the agricultural sector (Central Bank of Sri Lanka, 2019).

Two official languages coexist, the Singhalese, spoken by 87% of the population and, since 1988, the Tamil, spoken by 28,5% of the population. Apart from these, there are also minoritarian languages and around 25% of the population speaks English. (Oficina de Información Diplomática, 2019)

2.2 Politics

The Democratic Republic of Sri Lanka is based on a semi-presidentialism consisting on a combination of a presidential and parliamentary system. (Copper & Copper, 2019)

An important feature of the Sri Lanka’s history was Civil War which brought face to face people of the same country for 26 years. Once the country became independent from the United Kingdom in 1948, the nationalism started to grow, which the Tamils from the north and east did not like. That’s why, in the 70s, they started a liberal movement which expanded over the years and whose purpose was to become an independent State from Sri Lanka. They were led by the organization Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) which, in 1990, got to control the northeast of the island. Along the 26 years of the war the LTTE made multiple attacks even breaking Sri Lankans human rights. After years trying it, in May 2009, the Government got to eliminate the leader and founder of the LTTE and the Civil War end up. After that, the country started to experience an important economic growth.

As it is an island, Sri Lanka economically depends a lot on the exportations. For this reason, in order to strengthen the economic growth, it increased the bilateral relations – political and commercial - with India - the closest country in the mainland -. Besides, they decided to distance China, although they kept a cordial relation as it was the main investor of the island.
Finally, they signed several free trade agreements with neighbour countries such as Singapore, Thailand, (Oficina de Información Diplomática, 2019), Pakistan, Maldives, Nepal and Bhutan. (Sri Lanka Customs, n.d.)

### 2.3 Economy

The local currency is the Sri Lankan Rupee (1€ = 189,27LKR) (Expansión | datosmacro.com, n.d.)

As Figure 1 shows, tourism has grown dramatically in 9 years since the end of the Civil War, passing from 447,890 tourist arrivals in 2009 to 2,333,796 in 2018.

![Total tourist arrivals to Sri Lanka](image)

**Figure 1 Total tourist arrivals to Sri Lanka.** Reprinted from (Central Bank of Sri Lanka, 2019)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2009</td>
<td>813,911</td>
<td>1,172,618</td>
<td>-358,707</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2010</td>
<td>974,387</td>
<td>1,519,737</td>
<td>-545,350</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2011</td>
<td>1,167,588</td>
<td>2,241,488</td>
<td>-1,073,900</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2012</td>
<td>1,245,531</td>
<td>2,441,879</td>
<td>-1,196,348</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2013</td>
<td>1,344,054</td>
<td>2,323,128</td>
<td>-979,074</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2014</td>
<td>1,453,176</td>
<td>2,535,163</td>
<td>-1,081,987</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2015</td>
<td>1,431,431</td>
<td>2,572,467</td>
<td>-1,141,035</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2016</td>
<td>1,500,766</td>
<td>2,794,393</td>
<td>-1,293,627</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2017</td>
<td>1,732,440</td>
<td>3,198,572</td>
<td>-1,466,133</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2018</td>
<td>1,933,533</td>
<td>3,606,644</td>
<td>-1,673,111</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Table 1 Summary of external trade 2009 – 2018.** Adapted from (Central Bank of Sri Lanka, 2019)

With Table 1 it is appreciable that there has been an improvement of the commercial relations since the end of the Civil War in 2009. Both the exports and
imports have increased a lot. Exports have increased 137.56% in 9 years. Instead, imports have increased 207.57%. Therefore, although the balance of trade keeps being negative, due to the limitations of being an island, it has experienced a big growth (366.43%).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>PRODUCTION</th>
<th>Quantity, MT</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1º</td>
<td>Tea</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>303.800</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2º</td>
<td>Rubber</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>82.600</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3º</td>
<td>Cinnamon</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>23.019</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4º</td>
<td>Pepper</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>20.135</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5º</td>
<td>Cloves</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1.284</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6º</td>
<td>Cocoa</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>654</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7º</td>
<td>Cardamom</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>71</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 2 Agricultural production in 2018. Adapted from (Central Bank of Sri Lanka, 2019)

The most produced agricultural product is tea (303.800 MT), after which comes rubber (82.600 MT), cinnamon (23.019 MT) and finally pepper (20.135 MT).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>EXPORTATIONS</th>
<th>Quantity, MT</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1º</td>
<td>Tea</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>282.400</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2º</td>
<td>Cinnamon</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>17.860</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3º</td>
<td>Rubber</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>14.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4º</td>
<td>Pepper</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>13.601</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5º</td>
<td>Cloves</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>3.290</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6º</td>
<td>Nutmeg and Mace</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2.350</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7º</td>
<td>Unmanufactured Tobacco</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>817</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8º</td>
<td>Cocoa</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>296</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9º</td>
<td>Cardamoms</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>108</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10º</td>
<td>Cashew Nuts</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>72</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11º</td>
<td>Coffee</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 3 Agricultural exportations in 2018. Adapted from (Central Bank of Sri Lanka, 2019)

In Table 3 it can be observed that tea is, by far, the most exported product in Sri Lanka (282.400 MT), followed by Cinnamon (17.860 MT), Rubber (14.000 MT), Pepper (13.601 MT) and Cloves (3.290 MT).

To sum up, agriculture has always been one of the most important economic sources in Sri Lanka. Besides, since the end of the civil war, tourism is another important economic source, which increases in number of visitors and infrastructures year by year.

### 3. DESTINATION IMAGE AND VIRTUAL DESTINATION IMAGE

When talking about or thinking on a destination, everyone has a preconceived image about such place, which is made from the information people have about it and from the way this destination is shown to the rest of the word. Destination image influences the desire of tourists that have already visited a destination to encourage others to visit it. Furthermore, it also enhances the probability of travelling again to that place (Zucco et al., 2019) and it can be
figured out from the pictures on Internet such as those on Instagram. (Camprubí et al., 2013).

Even though it depends a lot on the information and recommendations people share on Internet, by using marketing techniques the perceived image of a certain destination could be modified. (Nixon, 2019; Zucco et al., 2019).

The term virtual destination image has emerged from the use of information technologies in order to examine and transform the destination image (Zucco et al., 2019). The interactions that occur in social networks and the behaviour people have online are very important for the image. It is such that several social networks and web pages exclusively for tourism and restaurant business purposes have been created. That is the case of TripAdvisor, Expedia, Skyscanner or Yelp.

The image a person has about a destination is not created by seeing just one picture or video but build up from several interactions with images and videos of such destination. Furthermore, it can change throughout a person’s life whether the feedback he receives is positive or negative. Also from one photo, different people could focus on different aspects, interpret it differently and, therefore, create his own destination image. (Nixon, 2019)

Through webpages and social networks, it is easier for the stakeholders of a destination to manipulate or change the destination image perceived by the users, as they have access to the statistics of each publication. With these, they can know the reach and interactions - number of likes, comments, profile visits, new followers – of his publications, and, according to them decide the next posts.

In conclusion, it is important for all the stakeholders and tourism agencies to have a good destination image, since it will encourage future travellers to visit that place.

3.1. The role of word of mouth in developing destination image

It is common that when people return from a trip or is willing to travel, communicate with others to tell their experience or to obtain recommendations and opinions about a destination. This information exchange can occur both between known and unknown people and by different means.

Word-of-mouth (WoM) is the information and content shared and created by people, based on their own experience. “Such content must be informal, interpersonal, and spontaneous, occurring outside the business environment” (Guerreiro et al., 2019, p. 241). Furthermore, this communication occurs without the aim of receiving something in return and reflects the experience of a traveller, thus, it can be both positive or negative. (Guerreiro et al., 2019)

Traditionally, person to person communication was the way people shared, recommended, suggested and gave opinions about products, services and experiences lived on their trips. Nevertheless, nowadays the increasing and extended use of the Internet, technologies and electronic devices has changed
the way people interact with each other. That’s why, the expression “word of
mouth” has been replaced by “word of mouse”, making reference to the change of information via electronic devices and the Internet (i.e. electronic word of
mouth). There are both differences and similarities between them (see Table 4).
(Camprubí et al., 2013)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Word of mouth</strong></th>
<th><strong>Word of mouse</strong></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Comes from known people</td>
<td>Can come both from known (Facebook, Instagram) and unknown people (Tripadvisor, Instagram)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Communication occurs face to face</td>
<td>Communication occurs through a screen</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>People know each other</td>
<td>Usually who makes the review doesn’t know the person who will be reading it</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>It is easier to personalize the recommendations people give</td>
<td>It is more difficult to personalize the messages</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The information is limited to the social circle of the reviewer</td>
<td>The information has no limits and can be spread worldwide</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Both positive and negative comments arise</td>
<td>As there is no personal contact it is easier to make negative comments</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Contribute to create a destination image</strong></td>
<td><strong>Table 4 Differences and similarities between word of mouth and word of mouse. Adapted from (Camprubí et al., 2013)</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The introduction of these technological changes has led to the origin of a new concept, “prosumer”. It derives from the fact that nowadays the consumers of publications on social networks are also its creators or producers. Everyone shares and obtains information from Internet. (Guerreiro et al., 2019).

Specially among millennials, it is quite impossible to find a person who uses social networks just to look up for information, reviews and recommendations, most of them also make reviews of goods or services used. Furthermore, even if someone posts a picture from a trip on Instagram without the aim of giving an advice to his followers, he will probably be influencing them. Some may discover that destination thanks to the picture and decide to visit it.

In the tourism industry the work of prosumers is crucial, since the purchase of such products is quite risky (Guerreiro et al., 2019). In this sector, word of mouse is mostly related to topics such as the quality of the services, the tourist satisfaction, the reputation of the destination and its image. (Guerreiro et al., 2019)

Overall, through word of mouth, destinations, products and services become known among people sharing the same interests. Furthermore, the use of internet has increased the reach of the recommendations and, therefore, people have more information to make their own perception of a destination as well as to decide whether to travel or not to a certain place.
3.2. The use of social networks in the travel industry

Different social networks are used in the tourism industry both by buyers – getting information about the destination - and by the firms – learning about their future consumers -.

Tourist services have always been intangible; they are bought in advance and far away from the place where they will be consumed; and people cannot try them before buying them. For this reason, they are called “experience goods”. Years ago, the choice of a destination depended exclusively on the information given by travel agencies, travel guides and recommendations of close people. However, nowadays, with technologies, there are much more sources of information.

The importance of social networks is that future travellers trust more advices made by other travellers than those from the traditional sources of information. Therefore, these play an important role in the promotion of hotels, airlines, restaurants, destinations and services. (Organizacón Mundial del Turismo, 2014).

Instagram has participated in changing the travel industry (Siegel et al., 2020). In fact, even the way of travelling has changed, some people decide to travel having bought just the flight and, in their destination, they decide the route and book their means of transportation or lodgements. As shown in Figure 4, nowadays people use electronic devices in every single stage of their trips and for different purposes. This demonstrates that tourism firms need to be present on Internet in order to be able to compete with others. (Organizacón Mundial del Turismo, 2014).

![Figure 2 Incidence of mobile devices along the trip. Adapted from (Organizacón Mundial del Turismo, 2014)](image)

In conclusion, the characteristics of the tourism industry make it necessary for many people to use social networks to obtain information about the destination before, during and after the trip. As a consequence, every day more stakeholders influence the decisions of future travellers and can modify the image of a destination.
3.2.1. Reasons for following accounts based on trips

Social networks work as a travel guide where everyone shares his own experiences. In its beginning, these were exhibited just to the closest relatives and acquaintances. Nowadays, people expound their lives with the whole social network community. (Zucco et al., 2019)

It is proved that, the main reason why people share pictures on social networks is to feel as part of a circle. For this reason, travellers upload photographs and videos about trips to places where they want others to associate them with (Zucco et al., 2019).

In social networks there are more influencers every day, but what is an influencer? According to the Cambridge dictionary it is “a person paid by a Company to show and describe its products and services on social media, encouraging other people to buy them” (Cambridge Dictionary, n.d.). Influencers on Instagram have also become popular for tourism marketing. Destination Marketing Organizations have comprehended their power and importance and, as a consequence, they are progressively counting on and hiring them to make promotions (Barbe et al., 2019). As they reach a huge amount of people, they can increase awareness of less known destinations, create interest and the desire to visit these places (Barbe et al., 2019).

Apart from modifying how people view products and services, photos can also be more easily remembered than words (Barbe et al., 2019). This allows to conclude that, among the existing social networks, Instagram is the most suitable to share anything related with travelling, because it focusses in photos and videos in different formats and also allows to include a little text with them.

What motivates people to follow travel-related Instagram accounts? Some studies reveal that Instagram users follow them for factors such as usefulness, enjoyment and entertainment. (Barbe et al., 2019). Others conclude that users are satisfied when they perceive that an account is enjoyable and useful. (Barbe et al., 2019).

Thus, Instagram is the most useful social network to share content about trips since it is focussed on pictures, which both influencers and individuals upload in order to feel part of a circle. Furthermore, people follow travel-related Instagram accounts in order to have a good time and because they transmit good feelings.

3.3. Instagram

Instagram is a social network where people upload pictures and videos and share them with their followers with whom they interact by commenting and liking the publications (Instagram, n.d.).

It was launched on 6th October 2010 by Kevin Systrom and Mike Krieger only for IPhone and IPad but, due to its rapid popularity they soon created a version for Android and later for Windows Phone.
As the years passed and the numbers of users increased, the app has been improved and many versions with new functions have been created, in fact, currently they are in the version 133.0. Some of the improvements have been:

- **2011**: The possibility to put filters and edit the images from the app.
- **2015**: Introduction of publicity of firms which users can see as they scroll down their account.
- **2016**: Instagram Stories: pictures and videos of 15 seconds that are shown only for 24 hours. Initially they could be decorated with filters and stickers. More recently users can also put music, surveys, questionnaires, donations, countdowns and GIFs.
- **2018**: Instagram TV: it can be used in the Instagram app or in another one just for this purpose. People can create a channel which works similarly to the cansels of YouTube and post videos with a duration up to 10 minutes.
- **2018**: Tagging products of a picture and from the tag redirect to the brand’s website.
- **2019**: Buying products tagged in a picture directly form Instagram. Brands such as Nike, Zara, Dior and MAC Cosmetics offer this option. ([Instagram](2012); [Pons](2019))

In April 2012 Facebook made a its biggest investment and bought Instagram for 1000 million USD, which reflects importance of photo sharing and the reputation of Instagram ([Geron](2012)).

According to the database Statista, by 2018 the number of Instagram users was 1000 million. As shows Figure 2, the number of users has increased dramatically since the launch of the app, especially since 2014, when the version for Windows Phone was launched and everyone, no matter the phone they had, could make use of this social network.

![Number of Instagram users in millions](image-url)

*Figure 3 Number of Instagram users. Adapted from ([Clement](2019b))*
As it can be observed in Figure 3, according to Statista, by March 2019, three of the most followed accounts are from worldwide known television channels - @natgeo, @natgeotravel and @discovery - which have always had a good reputation and an important paper in the travel world. Otherwise, the rest are from particulars – one of them an influencer, @caiocastro – who by posting pictures of travellers became a phenomenon of the social networks.

Therefore, Instagram is one of the most used social networks. Over the years, it has increased in importance and number of users, especially since 2015 when it started to be used also for business purposes. For this reason, it is the most suitable social network for making posts related to travels.

### 3.3.1. Instagrammability and its effects

People, and specially influencers are aware of the importance of posting good pictures in order to have the maximum likes and repercussion.

The term “Instagrammability” designates those locations or things that, have the characteristic of being worth to post on Instagram, usually because they are attractive, exclusive or photogenic (Siegel et al., 2020)

The desire to have an Instagram feed with wonderful photographs is such that sometimes people travel merely to take “perfect pictures” with which to obtain many likes and increase the number of followers, and they don’t even pay attention to the local culture, local people and the environment surrounding them. (Siegel et al., 2020; Smith, 2018).

There are people who put their lives in danger, taking photographs in cliffs, running trains or even in the top of a building. Figure 5 is an example of a very typical and widespread picture among the travellers in Sri Lanka.
In summary, Instagram users care about the image they present on their accounts and therefore instgrammability traduces into image perfectionism at any cost.

### 3.3.2. Negative consequences

It is clear that, when someone decides to join a social network, his choice depends on the amount of people already using such social network. For a destination, being present in a busy network definitely has very positive aspects but it also arises negative consequences.

The reach of influences in a small period of time can be huge and impact the choices of tourists. This happens due to the concept of “positive feedback” which means that the more people talk positively about a destination, the more tourists visit it; while other destinations which are not so popular on social media are not visited as much. Those places that become popular are usually the more “instagrammable” and may be just a city or even street of a whole country. This may be good for those destinations receiving positive feedback. However, taking a big part of the tourism market may also lead to a collapse of its infrastructures, “an over-expansion of carrying capacity, and the closing down of certain destinations” (Barbe et al., 2019, p. 598) and, therefore, cause a situation of overtourism. (Barbe et al., 2019; Saphiro & Varian, 1999)

Overtourism is “the impact of tourism on a destination, or parts thereof, that excessively influence perceived quality of life of citizens and/or quality of visitors experiences in a negative way” (World Tourism Organization (UNWTO) et al., 2018, p. 4).
Related to this, there are other problems such as the increase of litter; complaints and disconformity of part of the local population; and lack of connection of tourists with the reality of the destination due to its continuous search of wonderful pictures (Siegel et al., 2020).

In conclusion, in order to face the effects of this new reality, which is not only positive, destinations need to assess the capacity of their infrastructures related to the amount of visitors they receive.

3.4. Research question

Taking into account that the electronic word of mouth has an important influence on the decision-making process of the travellers, and that it can lead to a situation of overtourism, with the potential harm of the destination, this study endeavours to answer the question: What are the most promoted places from the main Sri Lankan Instagram accounts?

The destination image is created from the communication and exchange of information between known and unknown people and also between firms and buyers; both face to face and online. For this reason, the aim is to respond to: What is the destination image that the main Sri Lankan Instagram accounts want to give about the country?

Furthermore, given the possibility of the stakeholders of a destination to easily modify or manipulate the destination image through social media, this study tries to detect if this happens in Sri Lanka by answering the question: Is some of the Sri Lankan accounts trying to manipulate the destination image shown on Instagram?

4. METHODOLOGY

First of all, 6 different Instagram accounts whose only thematic is Sri Lanka were chosen. Following, all their publications were classified into different topics and general topics. Finally, the information was analysed to obtain the destination image of Sri Lanka shown on Instagram.

Although Instagram has different screens, only one, where the profile of the user appears, has been used in this study. First of all, appears the name of the profile and a profile picture. Also, the number of: followers, accounts it follows and posts made. After that, there is a space called “Bio”, where a little description of the profile can be written and also webpage links can be added. Just below there are the Story Highlights, which are the collection of Stories that the owner of the account wants to keep visible forever and are gathered in different groups with a label. Finally, there are three different tabs: 1) all the posts made by the account; 2) the IGTV videos; and 3) the posts in which the account is tagged. From these, only the first tab was considered when making the study.
Therefore, although from Instagram a lot of information can be obtained, this analysis focusses on the pictures and videos uploaded by 6 of the most representative Instagram accounts focussed on Sri Lanka.

4.1. Choice of Instagram accounts

Many different Sri Lanka-related accounts exist on Instagram, that’s why their choice was important in order to make a realistic and accurate analysis of the virtual destination image of the country.

As the purpose of the study was to analyse how the country is shown on Instagram, 6 accounts, focussed pictures and videos of trips to that destination, were analysed. What was taken into account when choosing the accounts was that in the name of the account appeared the words “Sri Lanka”, since when looking for information on social networks to plan a trip, people type the name of the destination they want to visit. Furthermore, in order to make sure they were not accounts with fake followers and that they had a real influence among a group of users, the relation between number of followers, posts, likes and comments in their publications were also observed. Although Instagram is struggling to punish all the accounts that do these infractions, it is still common that people buy fake followers or likes through different platforms.

The first account was @srilanka, whose first publication was on 8th March 2013. It has 805 publications and 180k followers (by 18/02/2020). This account was very active making posts and Instagram Stories. They keep the Stories in the Story Highlights classified into nationalities – Switzerland, France, Turkey, India - and each Highlight gathers all the Stories sent by users from one same nationality. This shows that apart from having many followers, they are from very different nationalities, which is one of the pros of social networks – the ability to easily reach a large amount of people around the world -.

The second account was @destination_srilanka, its first publication was on 7th January 2016, they had 1221 publications and 35.2k followers (by 18/2/2020). It is the official account of Sri Lanka Tourism office and, that’s why, they have many promotional posts and in their Bio they give access to their website. They are very active posting pictures, videos and also Instagram Stories. In their beginnings they used pictures posted by other travellers in their accounts, but since 5th November 2018 they are posting professional pictures, most of them with their logo.

The third account is @wonderlust.srilanka, which has 797 publications and 83k followers (by 18/02/2020). Its first publication was on 15th March 2016 and they are focussed on posting just pictures. In the Bio there is a link to their webpage where different tours around the island are offered.

The fourth account is @explorerssrilanka. It is a quite recent account, their first publication was on 2nd October 2018. They have 271 publications and 6961 followers (by 18/02/2020). They are very active both making posts – pictures and videos - and Insta Stories. All the videos and pictures published are collected from different accounts – always mentioned in the text of the picture -. 
The fifth account is @feelsrilanka, whose first publication was on 10th April 2017. They have 2158 publications and have 49.8k followers (by 18/02/2020). This account is related to other two, called @hotels.srilanka – based on hotel reviews – and @travelvtvsrilanka – focussed on videos -. In this account there are photos, videos and also Instagram Stories.

The last one is @srilankatravelgram, with 550 publications and 20.2k followers (by 18/02/2020). The first post was made on 20th August 2018. Only pictures are posted in this profile but also Instagram Stories which are classified by cities. In the Bio there is the link of their webpage which informs about the main destinations in Sri Lanka and the most important things to do.

Therefore, accounts with different level of reach and characteristics have been analysed in order to make the most reliable analysis possible.

4.2. Classification method

In the analysis of each post, only the topics that were reflected in the posts and whether they were pictures or videos was taken into account.

After deciding the accounts that would be analysed, using an excel file and the Instagram accounts the classification was made.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Big topics</th>
<th>Topics</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Country boosting</td>
<td>Terrorism attacks</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Tourism promotion</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Culture</td>
<td>Church</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Traditions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Food</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Local People</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Spiritualism</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Temple</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Infrastructure</td>
<td>Architecture for tourism</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Local architecture</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Means of transportation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Natural resources</td>
<td>Animals</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>National Parks</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Plant landscape</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Rock formations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Seascapes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Sports</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Tea</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Waterfall/Lake</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>Another</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Table 5 Classification into big topics and topics. Source: own creation*
First, each post was classified into picture or video. Secondly, they were classified into the different topics from Table 5. Up to three topics for each publication were allowed. Finally, all the topics were classified into big topics.

Therefore, this classification makes reference to different aspects that could reflect how Sri Lanka is projected through social networks, and, therefore the image that Instagram users may have about this destination.

5. ANALYSIS OF THE PICTURES OF INSTAGRAM ACCOUNTS ABOUT SRI LANKA

Using the classification of the publications, an analysis of each Instagram account was made checking which topics were more used in each of them.

Finally, a global analysis of all the accounts together was conducted, in order to see whether there was a tendency in the use of some of the topics, which would suggest the image that is being given about Sri Lanka on social networks.

5.1. Account @srilanka

The first account is @srilanka, which has a total of 805 posts (by 18/02/2020) with 94,04% being pictures and a 5,96% of videos (see Figure 6).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Big Topic</th>
<th>Nº posts</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Country boosting</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Culture</td>
<td>241</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Infrastructure</td>
<td>153</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Natural resources</td>
<td>738</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Others</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 6 Profile of the Instagram account @srilanka. From (Petrus Mudoy, 2020d)
As it can be seen in the Table 6, more than the 90% of the pictures comprise the big topic “natural resources”, followed by “culture” with an amount of publications of this big topic close to the ones of “infrastructure”. Finally, with much less publications there are “others” and “country boosting”.

Regarding the topics (see Figure 7), the mostly used are “plant landscape” and “seascape”, with 210 and 202 publications respectively, followed by “animals” with a total 148 publications and “rock formations” with 76. This keeps relation with the tendency of the big topics since all of these are sorted in that classification as “natural resources”. The next topics according to the frequency of use are “local architecture” and “local people” with 68 and 60 pictures and videos respectively. After those, several topics are similarly used: “food” with 54 publications; “means of transportation” with 52, “temple” and “waterfall/lake” both with 50 publications; and finally, “traditions” with a total of 49 pictures and videos.

Up to this point most of the topics are classified in the top 3 of the big topics as “culture” and “infrastructure”. Following with the classification there are “architecture for tourism” with 33 publications; “spiritualism” and “sports” both with 27; and “national parks” with 19. Finally, the least used topics are “another” with 15 publications; “tea” accounting for 6 posts; “tourism promotion” with 2 pictures and videos; and “church” and “tourism promotion” with a total of 1 and 0 publications respectively.

It is not strange that this account has only 2 publications related to tourism promotion. Most of their pictures are taken from tourist that post pictures of their trips to Sri Lanka, therefore, instead of promoting tourist firms, they are showing the most visited and popular places of the country, as well as the most important of the culture – food, festivals, local people -.

5.2. Account @destination_srilanka

The next account is @destination_srilanka. It has 1221 publications (by 18/02/2020) of which 1118 are pictures (91.56%) and 103 videos (8.44%).

![Used topics in the Instagram account @srilanka](chart.png)
Table 7 Classification of @destination_srilanka into big topics. Own creation from @destination_srilanka (Sri Lanka), n.d.)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Big Topic</th>
<th>Nº posts</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Country boosting</td>
<td>159</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Culture</td>
<td>359</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Infrastructure</td>
<td>142</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Natural resources</td>
<td>759</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Others</td>
<td>61</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 7 shows that most of the pictures follow the big topic “natural resources” with a total of 759 posts and “culture” with 359. Following them there are “country boosting” with 159 posts and very close to it “infrastructure” with 142 publications. Finally, the least used big topic is “others”.

Figure 8 Profile of the Instagram account @destination_srilanka. From (Petrus Mudoy, 2020a)
From the graph on Figure 9 it can be observed that the most used topics are “plant landscape” with 192 publications and “animals” with 182. Following them and very close in the number of uses there are “tourism promotion” with 152 pictures and videos; “seascape” with 126; “sports” with 120; and “traditions” with 103 publications. In this case, as the official account of the tourism office is being analysed, there is an important increase in the number of posts about tourism promotion; indeed, the topic is in the third position. Many pictures and videos of this account are promotional, accounting for a 23,62% of the total pictures and 79,61% of the total videos respectively. The type of posts with this theme are from tourism fairs, such as the ITB; new cruises and airlines that arrive to the country; things that make Sri Lanka famous – see Figure 10 –, brochures or competitions.

Following with the use of the topics, “spiritualism” has 79 publications and “local people” 72. After these, topics with a similar number of uses are “local...
architecture” with 68 posts; “temple” with a total of 63 publications and “another” and “waterfall/lake” both with 61. The next topics are “means of transportation” and “food”, both with 41 posts; followed by “rock formations” with 33; “architecture for tourism” with 31 and “national parks” with 28 pictures and videos. Finally, “tea”, “terrorism attacks” and “church” are the least used, with a total of 16, 7 and 2 posts respectively.

Therefore, from the analysis of the publications of this account, it can be said the image that a tourism authority wants to show about Sri Lanka. They boost mainly the big amount and variety of nature it has as well as the different tourism options - collected in the topic “tourism promotions” -.

5.3. Account @wonderlust.srilanka

Regarding the account @wonderlust.srilanka, it has 797 publications (see Figure 11) and all of them are pictures, there are no videos in this account (by 18/02/2020).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Big Topic</th>
<th>Nº posts</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Country boosting</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Culture</td>
<td>215</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Infrastructure</td>
<td>170</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Natural resources</td>
<td>665</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Others</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 8 Classification of @wonderlust.srilanka into big topics Own creation from (@wonderlust.srilanka (The best of Sri Lanka daily), n.d.)
In this account most of the pictures – more than half of them - reflect the big topic “natural resources” with 665 posts; followed by “culture” and “infrastructure” with 215 and 170 pictures respectively. Nevertheless, the least used topics are “others” with 10 publications and “country boosting” with just 1 picture (see Table 8).

![Used topics in the Instagram account @wonderlust.srilanka](image)

Figure 12 Classification of @wonderlust.srilanka into topics. Own creation from (@wonderlust.srilanka (The best of Sri Lanka daily), n.d.)

From the graph in Figure 12 it can be seen that in this account there are two topics that are used a lot and the rest of the topics are spread more or less homogeneously among all the pictures; these topics are “plant landscape” with 241 publications and “seascape” with 207. They are both part of the big topic “natural resources” which is the most used big topic, that’s why this big topic is the most used. The following topic has been published less than half of times than the previous topics; it is “food” which accumulates 82 publications; followed by “means of transportation” with 72 pictures. The next topics are very close in number of uses “local architecture” with 66 publications; “animals” with 62; “rock formations” with 54 posts; followed by “temple” with 44 pictures and “local people” that has been used 41 times. Half of the topics have been used less than 40 times, which are “waterfall/lake” with 38 publications; “architecture for tourism” and “spiritualism” both with 32 pictures; “sports” with 22; “national parks” with 21 and “tea” with 20 uses. Finally, the least used topics are “traditions” with 16 publications; “another” with 10 pictures; and “terrorism attacks” with 1 picture. The topics “church” and “tourism promotion” have not been used in any publication.

Therefore, it is clear that what this account is reflecting the most from Sri Lanka is the natural environment both marine and from land.

5.4. Account @explorerssrilanka

The Instagram account @explorerssrilanka has 271 publications (by 18/02/2020) of which 266 are pictures corresponding to the 98,15% and 5 are videos – accounting for 1,85%.
As in the Instagram accounts previously analysed, the most used big topic is “natural resources” with a total of 297 the publications, indeed in this account there is a big difference between the use of this theme and the rest. Next, it can be found “infrastructure” with 83 publications; followed by “culture”. Finally, “others” has just 3 publications and “country boosting” doesn’t have any publication (see Table 9).
Regarding the classification of the topics (see Figure 14), the most used are “plant landscape” and “seascape” which both appear in 93 publications of the account. The rest of the topics are used in a significant smaller number of publications. “Architecture for tourism” is used in 32 posts, followed by “means of transportation” found 30 times; “waterfall/lake” with 29 pictures and videos; “rock formations” with 21; and “animals” and “local architecture” both with 20 posts. All the topics mentioned up to now are comprised in the two most used big topics “natural resources” and “infrastructure”. Following there is “national parks” with 18 publications; “tea” with 13; “sports” with 10; and “local people” with 5. Finally, “spiritualism” appears in 4 pictures and videos of the accounts; followed by “another” and “temple” that both appear in 3 posts; and “church” and “food” being present in just 1 publication. In addition, the topics “traditions”; “terrorism attacks” and “tourism promotion” are not shown in any of the publications of the account.

In summary, as in the case of the previous account, the aim of this one is to highlight the marine and land natural environment of the island.

5.5. Account @feelsrilanka

The account @feelsrilanka has 2158 post, of which 99.68% are pictures – accounting for 2151 pictures - and 0.32% videos - accounting for 7 videos -. The few number of videos in this account can be explained by the existence of a sub account – from the same owner – specific for sharing videos, as specified in the “bio” of the account.
Figure 15 Profile of the Instagram account @feelsrilanka. From (Petrus Mudoy, 2020c)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Big Topic</th>
<th>Nº posts</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Country boosting</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Culture</td>
<td>135</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Infrastructure</td>
<td>597</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Natural resources</td>
<td>2370</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Others</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 10 Classification of @feelsrilanka into big topics. Own creation from (@feelsrilanka (Sri Lanka), n.d.)

With relation to the big topics collected in this Instagram account (see Table 10), “natural resources” is, by far, the most used topic, with a total of 2370 publication. Following, there are the topics “infrastructure” with 597 photos and videos; and “culture” with 135. Finally, “others” and “country boosting” are the least used themes and account for 17 and 11 publications respectively.
From the graph in Figure 16, the most used topic is, by far, “plant landscape” appearing in almost half of the pictures and videos of the profile. Following there is “seascape” with 427 publications; “waterfall/lake” with 391 posts; “rock formations” with 388; “means of transportation” with 340 and “local architecture” with 205. This keeps relation with the two most recurrent big topics “natural resources” and “infrastructure” respectively. Although the small number of topics analysed so far concentrate a large number of publications, the themes that remain to be analysed are more numerous and are present in a much smaller number of photos and videos. The next topics more used are “tea” with 78 posts; followed by “animals” with 69; “temple” with 62 publications; “architecture for tourism” with 52; and “national parks” with 46 pictures and videos. The reason why there are few publications about “architecture for tourism” is that the same owner has an account specific for making hotel reviews. Following with the classification there is “local people” with 33 posts; followed by “spiritualism with 24; “another” with 17; “sports” with 14 and “terrorism attacks” appearing in 11 publications. Finally, the least used topics are “food” with only 10 posts; “church” with 4 and “traditions” with 2 publications. Furthermore, the topic “tourism promotion” doesn’t appear in any picture.

Therefore, this account exhibits above all the natural environment of the country.

5.6. Account @srilankatravelgram

The account @srilankatravelgram has a total of 550 publications and all of them are pictures.

![Srilanka TravelGram Profile](image)

Figure 17 Profile of the Instagram account @srilankatravelgram. From (Petrus Mudoy, 2020e)
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Big Topic</th>
<th>Nº posts</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Country boosting</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Culture</td>
<td>60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Infrastructure</td>
<td>170</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Natural resources</td>
<td>556</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Others</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 11 Classification of @srilankatravelgram into big topics. Own creation from (@srilankatravelgram (Sri Lanka TravelGram), n.d.)

The most used big topic in this account is “natural resources” which appears in most of the pictures; followed by “infrastructure” with 170 publications; “culture” in 60; and “others” with 4. Finally, “country boosting” doesn’t appear in any of the pictures and videos (see Table 11).

Looking in the graph from Figure 18, there is a topic which is clearly the most used, it is “plant landscape” which appears in 209 publications. Following, there are five topics also very used – in more than 50 publications –; they are “rock formations” with 110 posts; “means of transportation” with 86; “seascape” with 84; “waterfall/lake” with 71; and “local architecture with 52 times used. They are all part of the two most recurrent big topics “natural resources” and “infrastructure” respectively. The next topics are “temple” with 38 publications; “animals” and “architecture for tourism” both with 32 pictures; followed by “national parks” with 19 and “sports” with 17. Finally, “tea”; “food”; “spiritualism”; “local people” and “another” are the least used with a total of 13, 9, 7, 6 and 4 publications. Besides, the topics “church”; “traditions”; “terrorism attacks” and “tourism promotion” don’t appear in this account.

To sum up, what is shown is this account is the flora and fauna as well as the culture of the country.
5.7. Ensemble of all the accounts analysed

Taking into account all 6 accounts aggregated, there is a total of 5802 publications and there is a clear winner in the big topics (see Figure 19) which is “natural resources”, with 5385 publications. From this big topic, the largest part comes from “plant landscape” and “seascape”, accounting for a total of 1903 and 1139 publications (see Figure 20). This is something predictable before making the analysis since the island has a total land area of 6.628.110 hectares of which 3.446.232 are tree cover (by 2018) (Mongabay, n.d.). Furthermore, its climate makes it possible to enjoy the sea during all the year. Regarding “seascape” there are pictures from beaches and the seabed. Following with “natural resources”, the next most used topic is “rock formations” with 682 publications, most of which are from the sister rocks Lion Rock and Pidurangala Rock – in Sigirya-, Little Adam’s Peak, Ella Rock or the rock at Dallawela beach.
After that, comes the topic “waterfall/lake” with 640 publications. Most of the times it is related to “rock formations” since many waterfalls are accompanied by rocks rather than vegetation. Some of the most visited falls are Diyaluma Falls, Ramboda Falls or Ellawala Falls. The next topic is “animals”, with 513 publications. Most of them are elephants, turtles, leopards and monkeys; and the pictures are taken both in natural parks, their natural habitat; and orphanages and traditional festivities in the case of elephants. The next is “sports” with 209 publications. Most of the pictures show water sports as, for example, surf – by far, the most practiced according to the pictures, both by locals and tourists -, kayak or paddle surf. “National parks” appears in 151 pictures and videos, where there is both flora and fauna, such as leopards and herds of elephants, deer, buffaloes and many other. Most are from Yala National Park – famous for having leopards -, Horton Plains National Park and Minneriya National Park. To finish with the big topic “natural resources” there is the topic “tea” with 146 publications. The publications reflecting this theme show both tea plantations – with and without women working in them -, tea factories and also tea plants being part of the vegetation of the country. The most famous is Lipton’s Seat and Nuwara Eliya plantation.
The next big topic according to the amount of publications is “infrastructure” with a total of 1315 publications. From this big topic the most used topic is “means of transportation”, which is not surprising since the most repeated picture in this country is the one in the train going from Ella to Kandy and vice versa. This is the most famous picture of Sri Lanka and which most travellers have taken. Another recurrent picture, of this topic is the Nine Arch Bridge, over which the train mentioned above passes. Finally, one more significant element appearing a lot in the pictures are tuk-tuks, the most used means of transportation in the island.
The next topic is “local architecture” with 479 posts, which has more publications than “architecture for tourism”, with 213. “Local architecture” is seen in pictures such as Figure 24, where an arch built hundreds of years ago can be seen, also the Galle lighthouse, houses of locals and big buildings from the capital. In the case of “architecture for tourism” there are mainly reviews and recommendations of hotels, which are infrastructures build specially for tourist which locals don’t use.

Following the classification of big topics, there is “culture” with 1023 publications. The topic “temple” is the most used. It is the religious building of the Buddhists and, as it is the most extended religion in the country, there are many of them. One of the most famous is the Temple of the Relic Tooth in Kandy or the Golden Temple of Dambulla. Next, “local people” has 217 publications. Most of them are in the trains, driving tuk-tuks or praying. “Food” is the following topic with 197 publications, it comprises from local fruits to typical dishes or markets. The next is “Spiritualism” with 173 pictures and videos showing temples and churches, offerings, Buddhists and people meditating or doing yoga. “Traditions” is the following theme with 170 posts, comprising traditional festivities, traditional dances, people with traditional suits, traditional devil masks, etc. Finally, there is the topic “church”, which is the least used topic. Only 7.6% of the population follow the Christianism, therefore, it is normal that there are few churches in the country.
The next big topic in the classification is “country boosting” with 173 publications. From this big topic, the most used is “tourism promotion” with 154 posts, most of them from the account @destinationsrilanka, the official account of the tourism office of Sri Lanka. Many of these publications show the arrival of new cruise companies and airlines to the island; important things to visit; the presence of Sri Lanka at important tourism fairs – such as the ITB in Berlin -, etc (see Figure 26). And, the least used topic among this big topic is “terrorism attacks” with just 19 publications, which is normal since it reflects the terrorism attack of the Easter day of 2019.

Finally, the least used big topic is “others” with 110 publications. This just comprises one topic called “another”, and, therefore they have the same number
of posts. These are pictures and videos that show things that are not classifiable into one of the rest of the categories.

Therefore, the analysis of all the accounts together shows that most of them follow the same tendency and want to transmit the same destination image. What is transmitted on social networks about Sri Lanka is, by far, its natural resources, both from land and from the sea which, occupy an important part of the territory. Whereas the least used topics of the overall publications are from the terrorist attacks and promotions.

6. CONCLUSIONS

The changes that technological innovations have produced in all the fields of the society are irrefutable and numberless. Either electronic devices, informatic programmes, websites or social media have drastically and rapidly changed the lifes of the people.

Specially in the travel industry, technological developments have modified and influenced the decision-making process of consumers. Most of them get inspiration and know destinations by surfing on Internet, buy their trips online, share their experiences, and finally make reviews and recommendations. Therefore, nowadays, social networks and review webpages are present at any moment of the consumption process: before, during and after the trip. For this reason, they have a very important influence in the consumption behaviour of the society stimulating the word of mouth and the destination image of the tourist places.

Regarding the analysis of the Instagram accounts, most of their posts are pictures, which makes it easier to classify the topics. However, videos allow to expose different scenarios with very different topics and show the variety of activities it or landscapes one can find in such destination.

About the big topics of the accounts analysed individually, the most used is always “natural resources”, followed by “culture” and “infrastructure”, which, depending on the account, are in second or third position. The most used topic is always “plant landscape” and after this, the most repeated depending on the account are “seascape” and “animals”.

Looking at the analysis of the accounts together, the most used big topic is by far “natural resources”, which appears in more than half of the pictures. Regarding the topics the most used are “plant landscape”, “seascape”, “rock formations”, “waterfall/lake”, “means of transportation” and finally “animals”.

Therefore, the image shown of Sri Lanka on Instagram is basically flora and fauna which is not surprising since it is an island with a big extension of vegetation, a large variety of animal species and many aquatic attractions. Regarding the topic “means of transportation” in most of the pictures tuk-tuks appear, which are one of the most used means of transportations both for Sri Lankans and for tourists.
These typical automobiles have become a tourist attraction for the occidental visitors due to their peculiar structure.

Pictures from tourism promotion are the least published which could mean that the pictures individuals take and post are already a good means of promotion by themselves. Furthermore, Instagram is used by travellers to know the real experience of other tourists and not to see publicity made by firms; therefore, they trust more on fellow users than on brands. From the other hand, all these pictures and videos make the destination appealing and increase the desire of people to visit it.

All the stakeholders can use Instagram as a tool to subtly modify the destination image, and, thus, the perception of the destination. As a result, people following that account may have a very different image of Sri Lanka than someone following others. In the case of this study, the different accounts analysed follow the same direction. Therefore, it can be deduced that the tendency of the topics followed by all of them are what can be really found when travelling to Sri Lanka.

In conclusion, the destination image is very important since it determines the amount of tourist a destination will receive as well as the characteristics of its visitors. Nowadays, Internet and especially social networks, have become the most important vehicle to transmit such image, which can be easily modified by any of the stakeholders according to their desires and needs, and impact on the tourism. However, it is also important to control the degree of exposure of a place in social media since, a big exposure may translate into a situation of overtourism and the discomfort of the local population. For this reason, although the use of the information technologies by tourist firms and authorities is important to boost the industry, they should also be used in a responsible way.

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