

**NAVIGATING A COMMUNICATION PARADOX IN THE  
TIME OF PANDEMIC: HOW AN ITALIAN TOURISM  
ORGANISATION MANAGED COMMUNICATION VIA  
FACEBOOK DURING COVID-19**

**Jyväskylä University School  
of Business and Economics**

**Master's thesis**

**2021**

**Author: Anna Igonina  
Discipline: Digital Marketing and Corporate Communication  
Supervisor: Mark Badham**



## ABSTRACT

Author Anna Igonina	
Title of thesis  Navigating a communication paradox: How an Italian tourism organisation managed communication via Facebook during Covid-19	
Discipline Digital Marketing and Corporate Communication	Type of work Master's thesis
Time (month/year) 05/2021	Number of pages 75 + 9
Abstract  <p>Destination marketing helps places nowadays to attract tourists and to form a positive image of the destination. However, destination marketing becomes a challenging task during the ongoing crisis. Due to the outbreak of the Covid-19 disease and implemented travel restrictions, tourism organisations faced a communication paradox: they could not perform their main task – to attract tourists. Nevertheless, they have to maintain communication on social media with the target audience, promote destinations, and navigate the paradox in communication.</p> <p>The call for papers from destination marketing scholars about the effect of the Covid-19 on tourism and the need for additional research on the usage of social media in crisis communication led to the development of the key objective of this thesis, which is to understand how, during the Covid-19 pandemic, the destination marketing organisation (DMO) in Italy used Facebook to navigate the paradox between (a) inviting foreigners to visit Italy and (b) telling them not to visit Italy yet because of the pandemic. In the study effect of the Covid-19 pandemic on the DMO communication is analysed with the paradox lens. Recent research suggests utilising paradox theory to study the effects of Covid-19.</p> <p>For the research has been selected Italy, as it was the first country to implement travel restrictions and the importance of tourism for its economy. The aim of the research was achieved via studying prior literature related to the topic and conducting both qualitative and quantitative analysis of Facebook posts of Italia.it community, during the first wave of the pandemic, from the 10th of March 2020 till the 3rd of June 2020.</p> <p>As a result of the study was found that to navigate the paradox between invitational and cautionary messages, the DMO of Italy used a key message in posts: 'Italy comes to you' (i.e., the DMO invited followers to explore Italy via virtual tours). Thus, the pandemic restrictions have been communicated, however open invitations and cautions were avoided by the DMO. Besides, the study explored how users responded in terms of engagement to the messages communicated during the first wave of the Covid-19 pandemic.</p>	
Keywords Covid-19 pandemic, crisis communication, destination marketing, Italy, paradox, place marketing, social media engagement, tourism	
Location Jyväskylä University Library	

## CONTENTS

	ABSTRACT .....	3
	FIGURES .....	6
	TABLES .....	6
1	INTRODUCTION.....	7
	1.1 Background of the study .....	7
	1.2 Research aim, questions and design .....	9
	1.3 Structure of the research report .....	10
2	LITERATURE REVIEW .....	12
	2.1 Destination marketing .....	12
	2.1.1 Definitions of 'destination branding', 'destination marketing' and 'destination image' .....	12
	2.1.2 Role of Destination Marketing Organisation (DMO).....	15
	2.2 Social Media Marketing .....	16
	2.2.1 Social media in destination marketing.....	16
	2.2.2 Engagement items on Facebook.....	18
	2.2.3 Message features determining online engagement.....	19
	2.3 Crisis communication .....	23
	2.3.1 Classification of crises.....	23
	2.3.2 Role of social media in crisis communication .....	24
	2.3.3 Destination marketing during crisis.....	26
	2.4 Paradox theory .....	28
	2.4.1 Concept of paradox.....	28
	2.4.2 DMO and paradox of Covid-19 pandemic .....	29
	2.5 Literature review summary .....	30
3	DATA AND RESEARCH METHOD.....	32
	3.1 Research design.....	32
	3.2 Case selection .....	34
	3.3 Data collection.....	35
	3.4 Data analysis.....	36
4	RESEARCH FINDINGS .....	41
	4.1 Italian DMO's Facebook messages.....	41
	4.2 The Italian DMO's communication paradox .....	50
	4.3 User engagement with Italian DMO's Facebook messages...54	
5	DISCUSSION .....	59
	5.1 Italian DMO's Facebook messages.....	59
	5.2 The Italian DMO's communication paradox .....	60
	5.3 Users' engagement with Italian DMO's Facebook messages 62	
6	CONCLUSIONS .....	64
	6.1 Theoretical contributions.....	64
	6.2 Managerial implications .....	65
	6.3 Research evaluation.....	67
	6.4 Research limitations .....	67

6.5 Future research suggestions.....	68
REFERENCES .....	70
Appendix 1: Coding book.....	76

## FIGURES

FIGURE 1 Cognition, affect, evaluation and conation in tourism destination decision-making process (Pike, 2008).....	14
FIGURE 2 Framework for relations between Facebook message characteristics and online engagement (adapted from Pletikosa Cvijikj & Michaelles, 2013)....	19
FIGURE 3 Types of crisis (Coombs, 2015) .....	23
FIGURE 4 Interrelation of dualities within a paradox (Smith & Lewis, 2011) ....	28
FIGURE 5 Conceptual model of the study .....	37
FIGURE 6 Type of messages in relation to the pandemic (total) .....	42
FIGURE 7 Relation to the pandemic of the messages (monthly) .....	43
FIGURE 8 Main theme of the messages (total) .....	45
FIGURE 9 Main theme of the messages (monthly) .....	46
FIGURE 10 Sentence style .....	48
FIGURE 11 Vividness of the messages.....	49
FIGURE 12 Language of the posts .....	49
FIGURE 13 Percentage of pandemic-related and neutral posts .....	51
FIGURE 14 Occurred association between relation to pandemic and the main theme in the posts.....	53

## TABLES

TABLE 1 Framework to analyse tourism-related social media message characteristics triggering online engagement Pino et al. (2018). .....	20
TABLE 2 Message-focused media strategies for marketing places in crisis (Avraham & Ketter, 2008) .....	27
TABLE 3 Framework of the study .....	39
TABLE 4 Examples of the messages in relation to pandemic.....	42
TABLE 5 Examples of the main theme of the messages.....	44
TABLE 6 Examples of messages' interactivity .....	46
TABLE 7 Call to action and traceability of the messages .....	47
TABLE 8 Distribution of the messages based on relation to pandemic .....	51
TABLE 9 Correlations between posts' pandemic relation and the main theme .	52
TABLE 10 Users' engagement with the analysed messages .....	55

# 1 INTRODUCTION

## 1.1 Background of the study

The importance of **place branding and place marketing** (or 'place promotion') has increased with globalisation spreading. With the enlargement of transfers of investments, human resources, goods and knowledge among countries participating in the global economy (Avraham & Ketter, 2008), the competition between territories for attracting tourists, entrepreneurs, and immigrants becomes greater. Nowadays, every country and the major city is competing with others within this global community. Hence, place brand equity, positive image and marketing mix strategy become powerful tools that help to win the competition (Avraham & Ketter, 2008). Place branding can be defined as a combination of unique elements associated with the place that conveys a promise of a certain travel experience (Avraham & Ketter, 2008), while place marketing is a communicational process about place's tourist products, that aims to satisfy tourists and is managed by the destination marketing organisation (DMO) (Pike & Page, 2014).

However, an image of the place (i.e., country or city) can be affected by a **crisis**. Cornelissen (2017), defines an organisational crisis as 'an event or issue that requires decisive and immediate action from the organisation' (p.212). Crises can be classified as internal or external and intentional or unintentional (Coombs, 2015). All types of crises require a response and specific crisis communication from the organisation. **Crisis communication** can be defined as organisational response to the occurred crisis via specific channels (Coombs, 2015). The choice of crisis communication strategy depends on the level of responsibility of the organisation in occurred crisis (Cornelissen, 2017). The appearance and spread of social media led to the evolution of crisis communication, and nowadays, social media play an important role in crisis communication (Coombs, 2015; Coombs, Claves, & Holladay, 2018). Coombs (2015), argues that the main role of social media in crisis communication is listening to the target audience and maintaining communication in times of occurred crisis. This study is focused on a DMO's communication during the Covid-19 pandemic in 2020. A pandemic is an external and unintentional crisis, and organisations have a low level of responsibility (Cornelissen, 2017). However, when the crisis is sudden, unexpected and affects the routines of systems with the possible danger for people's health and lives, as in the case with the pandemic, it is defined as a **disaster**. To cope with disasters cooperation of various organisations is required (Quarantelli, 2005).

On the 11th of March 2020, the World Health Organisation (WHO), announced that Coronavirus (Covid-19) disease received a status of **pandemic** (WHO, 2020). The outbreak of Covid-19 disease became, undoubtedly, one of the most impactful events of the 21<sup>st</sup> century (Zenker & Kock, 2020). By now, we understand that the consequences of the pandemic will stay with us for a long time (Sharma et al., 2021). Due to the outbreak of the disease, people's health

and lives were posed in danger; thus, it can be considered a disaster. As it was stated above, to manage disasters cooperation of various organisations is usually required. To prevent the spread of infection were implemented a number of restrictions that affected routines of systems, e.g. travel restrictions, operational business restrictions, 'lockdown', social distancing (Sharma et al., 2021).

The pandemic became a particularly notable event for the tourism industry, as world tourism has been stopped for a while in order to prevent the spreading of Covid-19 (Zenker & Kock, 2020). Thus the entities of the industry faced an *organising paradox* (Lewis, 2000). As a consequence of the organising paradox, organisations faced a communicational paradox, as, for example, tourism organisations were unable to continue communicating typical messages (i.e., inviting foreigners to travel to the destination country). However, they had to maintain communication with the target audience. A webinar titled 'Communicating crisis: during and post Covid-19' conducted by the United Nations World Tourism Organization (UNWTO) on the 4<sup>th</sup> of May 2020 discussed the problem tourism organisations faced during the pandemic, as due to the travel restrictions, they were unable to invite tourists to visit destinations.

Sharma et al. (2021), suggest that **paradox theory** can serve as a valuable approach to capture such a complex phenomenon as Covid-19. The paradox appears as a consequence of the juxtaposing of two inconsistent elements (Smith & Lewis, 2011). Hence, this study utilised paradox theory for analysis of communication of Italian DMO during the first wave of Covid-19 pandemic (European Observatory on Health Systems and Policies, Merkur, Maresso, Cylus, & Van Ginneken, 2020), as due to the implemented travel restrictions, the DMO faced a paradox they had to navigate in communication.

One of the key tasks of **DMO (Destination Marketing Organisation)** is to promote the touristic destination and to attract visitors (Pike, 2008). Typically, DMOs do this via advertising, direct mailing/marketing, public relations and marketing places on the World Wide Web, including social (Avraham & Ketter, 2008). However, due to the travel restrictions implemented by the Italian government (BBC, 2020a), during the first wave of pandemic (European Observatory on Health Systems and Policies et al., 2020), the DMO of Italy faced a communication paradox, as it was not possible to invite tourists. As a consequence, the DMO had to adjust its communication strategy. Therefore, the study seeks to understand how, during the first wave of Covid-19 pandemic, the DMO (Destination Marketing Organisation) in Italy **used Facebook** to navigate the paradox between (a) inviting foreigners to visit Italy and (b) telling them not to visit Italy yet because of the pandemic.

**Italy** has been selected for the current study for several reasons. Firstly, Italy was the first country in Europe that **adopted restrictive physical and social measures** and, as a consequence, closed borders and banned travelling (WHO, European Commission Directorate-General Sante, & European Observatory on Health Systems and Policy, 2021). Secondly, **tourism** plays an important role in the national economy; according to statistics, in 2019 share of GDP generated by travel and tourism reached 13% and achieved 233 billion euros (Statista, 2021). Thus, the implementation of travel restrictions is a significant loss for the Italian economy.

The focus of the thesis is on the communication of Italian DMO on Facebook. Italian DMO official name is 'Agenzia Nazionale Turismo', the main goal of the website is 'to promote the brand Italy in the tourism sector and to collect and spread tourist information relating to the country through Internet' (Italia.it, 2021). Nevertheless, the DMO is represented on other social media platforms; for the purposes of the study has been selected Facebook community - Italia.it. The decision is based on the popularity of Facebook as a social media platform; because Facebook enables incorporation of various types of content in posts and because on Facebook users are able to be engaged with content in several ways that can be tracked: liking, commenting and sharing (Shin, Pang, & Kim, 2015).

## 1.2 Research aim, questions and design

Destination or place marketing is a widely researched topic (Pino et al., 2018). Destination marketing organisations (DMO) actively use social media as a tool for image formation and place promotion (Avraham & Ketter, 2008; Pino et al., 2018). Nevertheless, not many recent studies were focused on the role of social media messages in destination marketing (Pino et al., 2018). Besides, there is a lack of studies analysing social media message characteristics effect on online engagement (Pino et al., 2018; Pletikosa Cvijikj & Michahelles, 2013).

Social media communication plays an important role in destination or place marketing (Pino et al., 2018), particularly in times of occurred crisis (Avraham & Ketter, 2008; Fraustino, Liu, & Jin, 2017; Ritchie & Jiang, 2019). However, due to the ever-changing environment and rapid spread of social media, little is still known about the usage of social media in the settings of specific crisis or disaster (Fraustino et al., 2017; Ritchie & Jiang, 2019). The outbreak of the Covid-19 disease resulted in a crisis that has never occurred before (Sharma et al., 2021). There is a **call for papers** analysing the effect of the Covid-19 pandemic on tourism (Zenker & Kock, 2020), due to the novelty of the crisis settings and its scale (Gössling, Scott, & Hall, 2020).

Thus, conducted for the study literature review identified that there is a **gap** in studies about social media communication of the DMO during a crisis with specific settings and a **call** for papers exploring the effect of the Covid-19 pandemic on the tourism industry. To address the existing gap and to correspond to the call for papers has been formulated the aim for the research, that is to understand how, during the Covid-19 pandemic, the DMO in Italy used Facebook to navigate the communication paradox between (a) inviting foreigners to visit Italy and (b) telling them not to visit Italy yet because of the pandemic. To achieve the aim of the research, the following research questions (RQs) have been formulated:

**RQ1:** What messages did the DMO in Italy communicate through Facebook during the first wave of Covid-19 pandemic?



**RQ2:** How did the Italian DMO navigate the **paradox** between openly invitational and discreetly cautionary FB messages during the first wave of Covid-19?

**RQ3:** How did users engage with the DMO's messages on Facebook?

The first question aims to analyse what messages were communicated by the Italian DMO on Facebook during the first wave of the pandemic of Covid-19, while the national borders were closed for tourists. It is important to understand what was the content of the messages that Italian DMO posted during the first wave of a pandemic for further assessment of the navigation of paradox in communication. The purpose of the second question is to understand how the paradox between openly invitational and Covid-19 cautionary messages has been navigated, what was the main theme of invitational and cautionary messages. The final question will address how Facebook users engage with the DMO's messages.

Based on the aim of the study, the **research design** can be classified as descriptive with exploratory research elements (Hair, Wolfinbarger, Money, Samouel, & Page, 2015). As the study seeks to find the best explanation based on pre-existing knowledge, in the study has been used abductive reasoning (Mantere & Ketokivi, 2013).

In the study has been utilised **quali-quantitative analysis** of the data set. Thus, in research has been used mixed-method (Saunders, Lewis, & Thornhill, 2019). The study's **data set** consists of the Facebook posts of Italia.it community from the 10<sup>th</sup> of March 2020 till the 3<sup>rd</sup> of June 2020, thus it analyses the communication of Italian DMO in a period of the first wave of Covid-19 pandemic.

As a research strategy has been used a **single case study**. One of the specifics of the case study strategy is identifiable boundaries (Saunders et al., 2019), in the research the boundaries are identified by the date of the borders' closure and implementation of travel restrictions by the Italian government in March 2020 and easing of the travel restrictions in June 2020.

The pandemic and its consequences will remain in society for many years (Sharma et al., 2021). Thus the findings of this thesis will contribute to research about the Covid-19 pandemic's effects on tourism communications and will provide a valuable resource for practitioners of DMOs. This study will lead to the development of recommendations for navigation of paradox in the communication of DMOs during a pandemic.

### 1.3 Structure of the research report

The introductory chapter discusses the background of the study, the aim of the research and research questions and presents the structure of the whole report.

The introductory chapter is followed by the literature review. In this chapter are discussed the key theoretical concepts related to the study, recently

conducted studies and warranted studies. Based on the key concepts, the chapter is divided into the following subchapters: destination marketing, social media marketing, crisis communication and the paradox theory.

The next section of the report is focused on the explanation of the methodology applied in this research. The chapter is divided into the following subchapters: research design, case selection, data collection and data analysis. For the purposes of the research were selected both qualitative and quantitative methods. Due to the complexity of the research design has been developed a conceptual model of the research. The main methodological considerations and choices for this thesis are discussed in details in this chapter.

The methodology chapter is followed by the findings chapter, which presents the key findings of the conducted research. In the discussion chapter, the findings of this thesis are discussed.

The final chapter of the report is a conclusion. In the conclusion chapter discussed the theoretical contributions, managerial implications, research evaluation and its limitations, as well as future research suggestions.

## 2 LITERATURE REVIEW

This chapter covers a literature review on destination marketing, social media use in destination marketing, some aspects of crisis communication and an overview of the paradox theory. The first section aims to discuss conceptualisation in definitions of destination branding, marketing, image, and to analyse the role of DMO, in destination marketing. The second section is focused on the social media usage in destination marketing, online engagement features of Facebook valuable for measurement of destination marketing efforts and message features that determine engagement. In the third section classification of crises is briefly discussed, the role of social media in crisis communication and specifics of destination marketing in a period of crisis. The fourth section of the chapter aims to define the paradox and apply paradox lens for the current study.

For the conduction of the literature review relevant literature across a variety of disciplines and keywords were explored.

### 2.1 Destination marketing

#### 2.1.1 Definitions of 'destination branding', 'destination marketing' and 'destination image'

The spread of globalisation results in an increased number of global investment, human resources, goods and knowledge transfers, leading to the growth of the number of countries participating in the global economy and tourism. (Avraham & Ketter, 2008). As one of the consequences, places need to compete for the attraction of investments, human resources and touristic flow. Competition among places for various stakeholders brings the importance of 'place branding' and 'place marketing' (Avraham & Ketter, 2008). For the study, it is crucial to explain and distinguish the field's terms for further analysis.

##### *Destination branding*

The literature review conducted for the current research found that researchers use 'destination branding' and 'place branding' as interchangeable definitions (Avraham & Ketter, 2008; Hanna & Rowley, 2008). In the research conducted by Hanna and Rowley (2008), was found that 'destination branding' is widely used in the research related to the tourism industry while 'place branding' is used mainly in the papers from branding and business fields. Saraniemi & Ahonen (2008), classify 'destination branding' as a tourism-related subarea of 'place branding'. Both studies conducted by Hanna and Rowley (2008), Saraniemi & Ahonen (2008), aim to understand and cover the gap in place branding's conceptualisation. According to the previous research findings, the current study suits to destination branding as the work is focused on place branding from a

tourism perspective. Thus, in the following research has been agreed to use a definition of destination branding.

One of the earliest definition of destination brand belongs to Ritchie & Ritchie (1998), they defined destination brand as 'a name, symbol, logo, word mark or other graphic that both identifies and differentiates the destination; furthermore, it conveys the promise of a memorable travel experience that is uniquely associated with the destination; it also serves to consolidate and reinforce the recollection of pleasurable memories of the destination experience' (Avraham & Ketter, 2008, p.17). Saraniemi & Ahonen (2008), in the conducted research, have found that the definition presented above is the most cited. Therefore it has been decided to rely on this definition in the current research.

### *Destination marketing*

Another term necessary to define for the study is 'place marketing'. However, the literature review revealed that 'place marketing' used in research as a broad term (Avraham & Ketter, 2008; Pike & Page, 2014), while in tourism-related research, there is a difference between 'place marketing' and 'destination marketing'. Tourism in place marketing is one of the factors that affect place image together with economic development, diplomacy and other factors (Pike & Page, 2014). 'Destination marketing' is a term used by researchers in the tourism field. The term is related to the place image and place's attractiveness only from the touristic perspective (Pike & Page, 2014). Thus, in the research will be defined and used the term 'destination marketing'.

One of the earliest definitions of destination marketing according to Pike & Page (2014), belongs to Wahab, Crampon & Rothfield (1976): 'The management process through which the National Tourist Organisations and/or tourist enterprises identify their selected tourists, actual and potential, communicate with them to ascertain and influence their wishes, needs, motivations, likes and dislikes, on local, regional, national and international levels, and to formulate and adapt their tourist products accordingly in view of achieving optimal tourist satisfaction thereby fulfilling their objectives' (Pike & Page, 2014, p. 204).

The presented above definition has been criticised in the literature as it does not cover the complexity of the marketing process caused by the interconnection of the participants and their equal impact on destination image. As in the destination marketing, the responsibility for the results of marketing efforts is not controlled by one organisation but by the different institutions (e.g. local businesses, DMOs, government) (Pike & Page, 2014). Thus, the role of the destination marketing organisation in destination marketing has to be explained in more details (see section 2.1.2).

### *Destination image*

According to recent researches, place image plays a significant role in attraction of target audience: investors, tourists, human resources (Avraham & Ketter, 2008). Kottler et al. (1993), define place image as 'the sum of beliefs and impressions people have towards the certain place'.

Place image formation is based on four components (Avraham & Ketter, 2008):

- 1) Cognition - existing knowledge about the place, the knowledge might be both organic and induced,
- 2) Affect - individual's feelings based on the knowledge about place,
- 3) Evaluation - evaluation of the place,
- 4) Behaviour or conation - a likelihood of taking action towards place moving/visiting/investing.

Term 'place image' is related in literature to territorial image for various purposes (Hanna & Rowley, 2008) and audiences including investors/tourists/students (Avraham & Ketter, 2008), while 'destination image' is used in the literature in tourism field (Hanna & Rowley, 2008). Thus, as the conducted study is tourism-related in the study is used term 'destination image'.

Pike (2008), emphasises the importance of destination image in tourism. Destination image is formed with the same components as place image. Travelers in their decision-making process of traveling to the destination take into consideration image of it. Figure 1 presents how cognition, affect, evaluation and conation influence decision-making process.

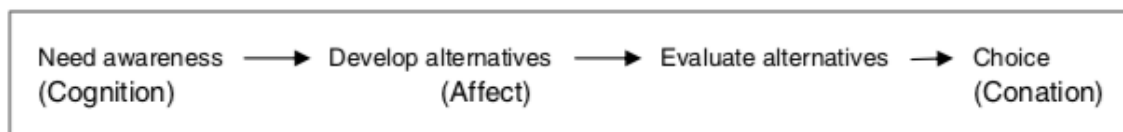


FIGURE 1 Cognition, affect, evaluation and conation in tourism destination decision-making process (Pike, 2008)

Definition of destination image suggested by Pike (2008), can be evaluated as more managerial and brand-oriented definition: 'A destination's image is a repertoire of brand associations held in the mind of the consumer. These associations may be cognitive, affective, conative, or a combination of these.' Based on the definition can be concluded that image formation is a crucial component of destination branding and marketing. Thus, marketers' choice of marketing and advertising strategy should be based on the existing image of the destination.

According to conducted literature review can be concluded that destination branding is an active shaping of a destination image that includes elements of marketing mix for its promotion (Avraham & Ketter, 2008; Foroudi, Gupta, Kitchen, Foroudi, & Nguyen, 2016). However, the studies emphasise that destination marketing has an effective impact on destination image only if the destination brand has positive associations among target audience, otherwise attempts to promote destination can have a negative impact (Avraham, 2015).

The study is focused mainly on a destination marketing and tools used for promotion in social media. The more detailed overview is presented in the section 2.2 of this thesis.

### 2.1.2 Role of Destination Marketing Organisation (DMO)

Destination Marketing Organisations (DMOs) appeared to coordinate efforts in promotion among tourism community (Pike, 2008). As mentioned before, due to the spreading of globalisation, touristic destinations were forced to compete with other destinations. The significant difference is that destinations now are competing on different levels: national, regional and municipal (Avraham & Ketter, 2008). Thus, the number of competitors among destinations significantly raises. As a result, start to appear DMOs of different levels.

Pike (2008), analysed the history of the development of DMOs and revealed the following levels of DMOs:

- National Tourism Office/Organisation (NTO) - the organisation aims to promote the country as a touristic destination. First NTO appeared in New Zealand;
- State Tourism Organisation (STO) - appeared in the USA intending to promote the state as a touristic destination;
- Regional Tourism Organisation - appeared in Europe, the main goal of organisations is to promote regions of the country.

The thesis focuses on the NTO level because as a consequence of travel restrictions implemented to prevent the spread of the Covid-19, have been closed national borders of the country.

However, for the research purpose has been decided to use and to define DMO as a term, because it includes NTO and serves for the goal to describe the main goal and tasks of the organisation. In the academic literature used destination *marketing* organisation (Pike & Page, 2014) and destination *management* organisation. The term destination management organisation has appeared recently and serves as a broader term that encompasses other than promotional functions (UNWTO, 2019). However, it has been decided to use the term destination marketing organisations for research purposes because the research is focused on promotion efforts. Thus, in this thesis, the abbreviation DMO will be used for Destination Marketing Organisation.

After examining terminology and selecting the most appropriate one in the framework of the current study, the next step is defining the selected term. Destination marketing organisation (DMO) appeared due to the recognition of tourism communities of the necessity to utilise approach 'cooperate to compete' (Pike, 2008). Thus, the main goal of DMOs can be formulated as enhancing destination competitiveness on the global arena, via the cooperation of efforts of the stakeholders of tourism community (Pike, 2008; Roque & Raposo, 2016).

Based on the main goal DMO is defined by World Tourism Organisation (WTO) as 'organisational entity which may encompass the various authorities, stakeholders and professionals and facilitates tourism sector partnerships towards a collective vision' (UNWTO, 2019).

In the situation of travel restrictions due to the Covid-19 goal of the DMO is becoming unachievable as destinations cannot attract tourists to visit destinations. On the webinar of UNWTO from the 4th of May 2020, dedicated to

'Communicating crisis: during and post Covid-19', participants discussed the contradiction DMOs and other tourism community stakeholders faced. As the main goal cannot be achieved; however, DMOs have to continue communication. Thus, communicational strategy must be adjusted according to the overall situation. DMOs need to choose the right tone of voice of the messages and shift their focus from attracting tourists at the moment to the future prospective. The more detailed discussion about the contradiction between the primary goal of DMOs and the behaviour dictated by circumstances is presented in section 2.4 of the thesis.

Another challenge that has been highlighted on the webinar is the limitation of communicational channels in the pandemic. Specialists agreed that the most effective and suitable channels in the current circumstances are digital channels. Thus, it is considered effective to use as a communicational platform with target audience social media. Overview of social media's role in destination marketing is discussed in section 2.2 of the chapter.

## **2.2 Social Media Marketing**

### **2.2.1 Social media in destination marketing**

The spread of Web 2.0 applications and social media networks brought a significant shift in the customer's journey (Roque & Raposo, 2016). Potential customers prefer to base their purchase decisions on previous consumers' experience, particularly, in the 'fragmented and information-rich' (p.147) industries as tourism is (Gretzel, Yuan, & Fesenmaier, 2000). Nowadays, tourists and travellers are looking for the information online and on social media to navigate their decision-making process about the travel destination, accommodation, restaurants, tours and attractions (Hays, Page, & Buhalis, 2012; Kim, Lee, Shin, & Yang, 2017).

The change of a customer's journey is followed by the changes in the organisation's way of communication and reaching the customers. Social media marketing has some pros and cons before traditional promotion. Entering the field and connect to the audience became much easier, however, due to the interactivity, collaboration and open communication managing information flow become more challenging for the organisation (Gretzel et al., 2000).

For DMOs utilisation of social media marketing has as benefits as difficulties due to the nature of the organisations. Destination Marketing Organisations (DMOs), as discussed in section 2.1.2 of the chapter, are not-for-profit or governmental organisations that have a mission to unite local tourism enterprises' efforts in tourists' attraction and manage the image of the destination. However, the DMO itself has no opportunities to manage and control all actions of participants of the marketing process, as in the case of business promotion (Pike & Page, 2014). Thus, DMOs are serving as a unified channel for dissemination information or 'information brokers' (p. 152) about the destination,

however, due to the rapid informational changes in external and internal environments, and lack of control over the information flows, managing social media marketing becomes a challenging task for DMOs (Gretzel et al., 2000).

Nevertheless, DMOs are recommended to utilise various social media platforms for marketing of destinations and direct communication with the target audience (Bosio, Haselwanter, & Ceipek, 2018; Hays et al., 2012; Pino et al., 2018; Roque & Raposo, 2016). Among the functional specifics of social media marketing before traditional marketing are: interactivity, collaboration, information representation and transactions (p.147), these functions enable the creation of community, where participants are able to find information, to share, to comment and to communicate directly with the organisation (Bosio et al., 2018; Gretzel et al., 2000). The listed above functions go along with the primary goal of DMOs and allow assessing and adjusting communication according to the request of the target audience (Bosio et al., 2018).

Research conducted by Kim et al. (2017), proves that information posted by DMOs influences the formation of the destination's image. Thus, social media platforms perform as a crucial informational channel and content can also be utilised for customer guidance throughout the whole customer journey (Bosio et al., 2018). The content of the messages posted by the tourism organisations may be broadly classified as informative or entertaining (Pino et al., 2018). Informative is related to the posts about accommodation facilities, attractions, facilities. While entertaining posts serve for creation of online conversation. However, Pino et al. (2018), has found that there is a gap in studies investigating impact of posted social media message content on users.

Xiang & Gretzel (2010), argue that social media marketing in tourism is utilised only to create a positive image of the destination and eWOM to increase awareness about the destination. In contrast, Bosio et al. (2018) suggest that social media can be utilised by DMOs more extensively and can also serve as a useful source for market research and a tool for brand positioning.

Based on a conducted literature review can be concluded that social media platforms are serving as an important channel for communication and an effective tool for marketing in the tourism industry. However, it is essential for DMOs to use social media platforms as a marketing tool for image creation and promotion of the destination, to align the communication strategy with the current targets of DMOs, analyse audience reactions and responses and to use the full spectrum of opportunities social media platforms enable for communication and engagement with followers.

For DMOs, as for not-for-profit organisation, social media promotion can be the most relevant channel to maximise return on investment (ROI), however in order to achieve it DMOs need to engage followers and to use various calls to action (CTA) based on the action they expect users to perform: like, share or comment on their posted content (Pino et al., 2018).

The main focus of the research is on Facebook. Thus, the next section of the chapter presents a more detailed overview of engagement items on Facebook.



### 2.2.2 Engagement items on Facebook

Various businesses and not-for-profit organisations nowadays utilise various social media platforms for marketing, promotion of products and services, brand positioning, market analysis and communication with the target audience (Bosio et al., 2018; Gretzel et al., 2000; Kim et al., 2017; Xiang & Gretzel, 2010). Among DMOs the most popular social media platforms are Facebook and Twitter (Hays et al., 2012; Pino et al., 2018).

However, for a few years, the most popular social media platform in the world remain (Shin et al., 2015; Statista, 2020). Facebook allows users to follow organisational pages they are expressing interest in. If the user starts to follow the page (or 'liking page') in his timeline will be shown content posted by the page (Shin et al., 2015).

The focus of the study is on Facebook. Thus, this section of the thesis discusses its engagement items.

Engagement of the target audience on social media is considered nowadays by researchers essential for the survival among competitors (Akehurst, 2009; Shin et al., 2015). DMOs should pay attention to the content of communicated messages, user-generated content (UGC), to engage and to interact with the audience (Kim et al., 2017; Xiang & Gretzel, 2010), because tourism researches show that engaging activities increase intent to visit proposed location or event (Pino et al., 2018).

Engagement per se 'is a psychological state determined by an interactive, co-creative experience with a focal object, such as a brand or a product' (p.4) (Pino et al., 2018). Online engagement includes cognitive, affective and behavioural reactions of users caused by the interaction with content posted on social media platforms (Dolan, Conduit, Fahy, & Goodman, 2016). Facebook has a limited set of enabled for users behavioural reactions: expressing favour ('like') or disfavour ('dislike') regarding the posted content (e.g. photos of touristic attractions), expressing the more straightforward attitude towards a posted content through comments, and reaching other people by sharing content (Pino et al., 2018).

Besides these metrics, other metrics allow marketers to get the information about users' online engagement (e.g. number of clicks, number of visits, visit duration, etc.) (Harden & Heyman, 2009). However, the most commonly used metrics to assess users' online engagement level are likes, comments, and shares for a post (Pino et al., 2018).

Liking the post is considered the simplest form of engagement, as it requires the minimal efforts from users, sharing can be classified as an intermediate engagement, as requires the same amount of time from users, as liking but associated with the higher level of responsibility for the content, while commenting is considered the most engaging because it takes more time from users and requires more cognitive processing of the information (Mariani, Di Felice, & Mura, 2016). Mariani et al. (2016), has found that users most commonly engage with posts via likes, than via sharing and the least common form of engagement is commenting.

There is a great variety of factors that can trigger online engagement. Pino et al., (2018), classify them as factors with user-related characteristics, brand-related characteristics and message-related characteristics. Current research is focused on message-related characteristics that trigger online engagement.

### 2.2.3 Message features determining online engagement

Numerous researches shown that the significant impact on the decision-making process has User Generated Content (UGC). Consumers tend to believe more to the content created by other users rather than promotional content created by an organisation (Hays et al., 2012). Thus, DMOs for creating credibility are trying to encourage the audience to engage with the published content and co-create new content (Su, Reynolds, & Sun, 2015).

Performance of the messages and as a consequence level of online engagement of posts is commonly measured with the number of likes, number of comments (Pino et al., 2018; Pletikosa Cvijikj & Michahelles, 2013).

Content posted by organisations on social media aims to engage users. Nevertheless, online engagement is considered the primary measure of social media marketing effectiveness there is still little known about factors that can trigger it (Pino et al., 2018; Pletikosa Cvijikj & Michahelles, 2013)

The recent researches suggest that such message (in the thesis 'message' is used as interchangeable definition to 'post') characteristics as content type, format or media type (Pino et al., 2018; Pletikosa Cvijikj & Michahelles, 2013), and posting time (Pletikosa Cvijikj & Michahelles, 2013), have the highest impact on the level of online engagement.

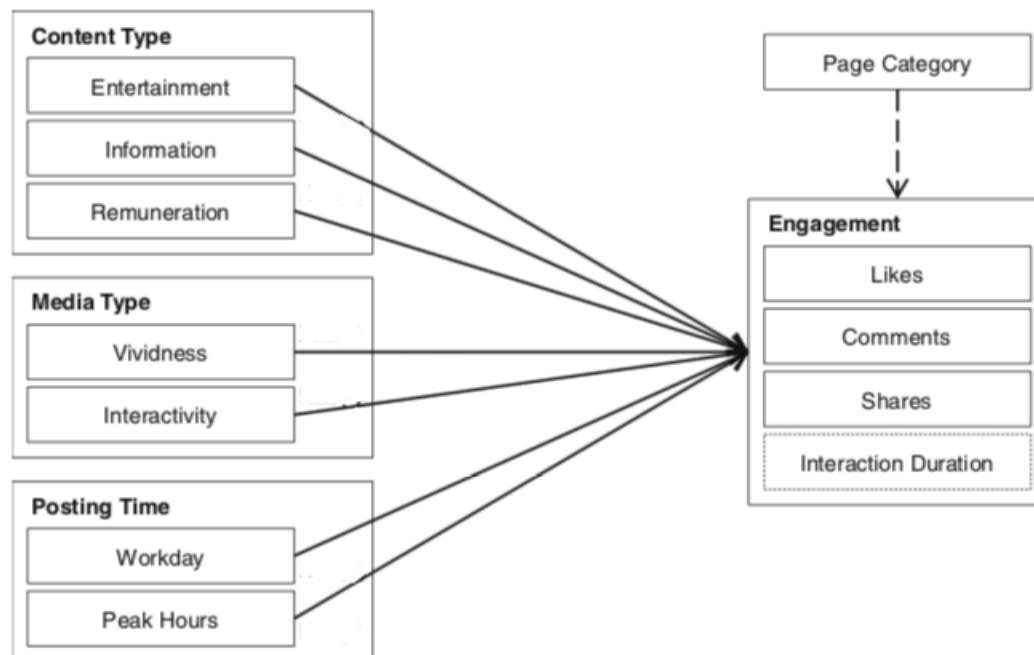


FIGURE 2 Framework for relations between Facebook message characteristics and online engagement (adapted from Pletikosa Cvijikj & Michaelles, 2013)

According to research conducted by Pletikosa Cvijikj & Michaelles (2013), as seen in Figure 2, the level of online engagement is affected by page category (non-message characteristic), content type, media type and posting time. In their study, content was classified as entertaining for the audience – the content that is not related to the company’s products or services; informational content was content that consists of information about products or services, and remunerational content was related to sweepstakes messages. Regarding media type, Pletikosa Cvijikj & Michaelles (2013), suggested that vividness and interactivity of the message influence online engagement. Levels of vividness depend on the richness of media type: video (high level), links (medium level), photos (low level), text (no vividness). Researchers have used two different levels to measure message interactivity: no interactivity for static content as photos and texts, high interactivity to videos and links. And the last proposed characteristic of the message that impacts online engagement is posting time. Pletikosa Cvijikj & Michaelles (2013), suggest that messages posted during the workday and Saturday or Sunday have a different level of online engagement, and peak hours are considered the hours of the day when fans created the highest volume of posts.

As measurements were suggested the number of likes, comments, shares, and has been proposed interaction duration which is counted as a margin between the time of post creation and the time of the last interaction created over the post. However, the variable has been suggested mainly for page moderators and has not proved impact on the online engagement level.

The framework presented in Figure 2 above has been developed by Pletikosa Cvijikj and Michaelles (2013), to assess Facebook brand pages’ online engagement. However, the framework has not been developed specifically for the assessment of online engagement on DMOs pages.

Pino et al. (2018), in the research for online engagement of tourism-related social media pages, utilised a framework adjusted according to the specifics of industry (Table 1). In the paper, authors suggest that online engagement of social media messages in the tourism-related industry can be triggered by such message dimensions as *message content* and *message format*.

### *Message content*

According to the framework developed by Pino et al. (2018), message content has four main features that are likely to trigger online engagement: main theme, presence or absence of elements of uniqueness, emotionality, and temporal orientation.

The main theme of the messages can be classified as informative (aim is to deliver information) or entertaining (aim is to amuse followers) (Lei, Pratt, & Wang, 2016). Lei et al. (2016) found that informative posts regarding services and amenities of destinations receive a higher level of engagement in the tourism-related industry. However, regarding the main theme of the message researchers can also utilise more specific classification of messages main theme by identifying their focus (destination’s attractions, entertainment, traditions, practical information) (Pino et al., 2018).

Elements of uniqueness are related to the unique attributes as attractions and experiences of a destination. However, recent research has not proved the impact of elements of the content's uniqueness on online engagement yet (Pino et al., 2018). Recent studies have found that emotionality of the message (the messages that include such words as 'love', 'scary', 'incredible', etc.) can increase online engagement, as users tend more to 'like' and to 'share' messages that stimulate their positive or negative emotions (Pino et al., 2018). Previous research has found that on Facebook, users are likely to comment more emotionally rich messages (Swani, Milne, Brown, Assaf, & Donthu, 2017).

The temporal orientation of messages is related to the focus of the message on the past, present or future. Regarding Facebook, recent research has found that users are more engaged with the messages oriented in the past (Davalos, Merchant, Rose, Lessley, & Teredesai, 2015). However, research of Facebook posts conducted by Pino et al. (2018), has found that messages posted by DMO with temporal orientation in present receive a higher level of engagement.

TABLE 1 Framework to analyse tourism-related social media message characteristics triggering online engagement Pino et al. (2018).

Message dimension	Variables	Instances
Message content		
	Main theme	Attractions/Entertainment/Traditions/Practical information
	Elements of uniqueness	Absence/Presence of elements of uniqueness
	Emotionality	Unemotional/Emotional message
	Temporal orientation	Past/Present/Future orientation
Message format		
Interactivity	Call to action	Absence/Presence of a call to action
	Sentence style	Affirmative/Exclamatory/Interrogative sentence
	Traceability	Absence/Presence of hashtags
Vividness	Vividness	Absence/Presence of vivid elements (photos, videos, hyperlinks)
	Language	Non-native/Native language
	Message length	

### *Message format*

Pino et al. (2018), highlight two main features of message format that influence the level of online engagement: *interactivity* and *vividness*. However, in comparison to the framework developed by Pletikosa Cvijikj & Michaelles (2013), in the tourism-related industry have been suggested different variables to measure the message format impact on online engagement. Pino et al. (2018), suggest that interactivity of the posts may be affected by presence or absence of call to action, sentence style, and traceability (presence or absence of hashtags). Vividness of the messages can be measured with vividness (presence of video, photo or links), language of the message, and the length of the message. Suggested by Pino et al. (2018), variables of message's interactivity and vividness are described in details below.

#### *Interactivity*

As message format features related to interactivity Pino et al. (2018), address call to action, sentence style and traceability.

Most commonly calls to action on social media pages is an invitation of users to participate in quizzes, contests, polls, or in the case of brand pages sweepstakes of services or products. Previous research has found that Facebook messages containing a call to action receive a higher volume of likes and comments than messages without a call to action (Lei et al., 2016). Nevertheless, call to buy product or service does not usually receive a high online engagement level (Swani et al., 2017).

The sentence styling can also influence the interactivity of the messages. However, no consistent research results exist regarding sentence styling (Pino et al., 2018). Researches argue that exclamations or questions capture readers' attention and can positively affect users' online engagement (Noguti, 2016). However, research results showed that exclamations receive a higher volume of comments and shares, but not questions (Lei et al., 2016; Noguti, 2016). The research conducted by Su et al. (2015), found that question styling decreases online engagement and messages styled as statement receive a higher online engagement. Another study has found that open-ended questions or sentences to stimulate dialogue get a higher online engagement level for brand pages on Facebook (Shin et al., 2015). Thus, the impact of sentence styling on online engagement can be investigated further in various industries.

Traceability of the message is determined by the presence of hashtags. Hashtags can positively affect message dissemination and, consequently, positively affect the level of online engagement (Pino et al., 2018).

#### *Vividness*

Pino et al. (2018), suggest that vividness of the message format depends on its vividness (presence of video, photo or links), language of the message, and the length of the message.

Recent research shows that incorporating vivid elements as videos, photos, and links increase online engagement in the tourism-related industry (Sabate, Berbegal-Mirabent, Canabate, & Lebherz, 2014; Su et al., 2015).

Language of the message can affect the level of online engagement as well. It is suggested that messages written in the native language of users incorporating exotic foreign words can increase the level of online engagement. However, there is still little known about language impact on online engagement (Pino et al., 2018).

Another feature that affects users' online engagement is message length. Recent studies have found that relatively long (about 200 characters) Facebook messages of DMOs receive more reactions from users in opposition to the brand-related messages (Mariani et al., 2016; Sabate et al., 2014).

The frameworks discussed above suit to the current research. Thus, the variables suggested in the frameworks are used for the purposes of the study. The more detailed description of the study's framework is discussed in section 3.1 of the thesis.

## 2.3 Crisis communication

### 2.3.1 Classification of crises

The term 'crisis' is broadly used among researchers and practitioners. The broad definition of the crisis: is a breakdown in a system that creates shared stress (Perry, 2007). From the management perspective, crisis can be categorised into three stages: (1) preparedness and planning, (2) response and recovery, (3) resolution and reflection (Ritchie & Jiang, 2019).

However, for choosing the right response strategy for the organisation is crucial to understand the nature of the crisis (Cornelissen, 2017). There are several crises typologies existing. For this thesis's purposes have been selected typology proposed by Coombs (2015), the typology suggests that crisis can be divided into organisational crises and disasters (Figure 3).

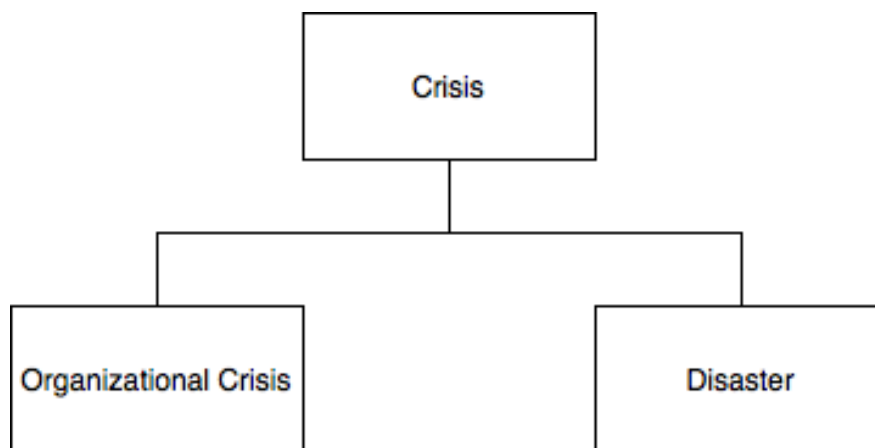


FIGURE 3 Types of crisis (Coombs, 2015)

Organisational crises are unpredictable but not unexpected events that disrupt organisational performance and can have negative outcomes for the organisation's reputation (Coombs, 2015). While disasters are defined as sudden and unexpected events (e.g. epidemics, tornados), seriously affecting routines of systems that pose a possible danger to social values and goals, and require the cooperation of different organisations to cope with the consequences (Quarantelli, 2005).

The work aims to analyse the communication during the pandemic restrictions. Thus, the main focus of the following sections is on the disaster communication. However, recently conducted a literature review on tourism risk, crisis and disaster management, has found that crisis and disaster terms are used in literature as interchangeable (Ritchie & Jiang, 2019). Thus, in the thesis will be used both terms, but *crisis* in the study context needs to be associated with characteristics of disaster.

Disasters can be divided into natural disasters (e.g. earthquakes, epidemics) or socio-political/human-made disasters (terrorist attacks, economic or political crises), the coronavirus pandemic can be classified as natural, however implemented restrictions as a consequence of pandemic are related to socio-political disasters (Zenker & Kock, 2020).

In the case of disasters, an organisation is not responsible for the occurred crisis, due to its unintentional and external nature (Perry, 2018; Zenker & Kock, 2020), and as a consequence, this type of crisis has the least affection on organisation's image and reputation. However, it still requires efforts from the organisation to manage the disaster's impact and adjust communication strategy (Cornelissen, 2017).

Cornelissen (2017), states that there is a number of crisis response strategies exists, the choice of strategies depends on the level of organisation's responsibility for the occurred crisis. For low level responsibility can be used: non-existence strategies (denial, clarification, attack and intimidation), distancing strategies (excuse, downplay), association strategies (bolstering, transcendence) or suffering strategy (victimisation). For high level of responsibility suit acceptance or accommodative strategies. In the case of natural accidents, Cornelissen (2017), suggests to use distancing strategy, where organisation accepts that crisis affected their stakeholders and organisation itself, however states that organisation is not responsible for its occurring. Nowadays, in crisis communication as a channel widely used social media platforms (Coombs, 2015). The next section of the chapter is focused on the role of social media in crisis communication.

### **2.3.2 Role of social media in crisis communication**

The literature review of articles on tourism risk, crisis and disaster management conducted by Ritchie & Jiang (2019), has found that studies about social media usage as a crisis communication tool in the industry are warranted.

However, there are conducted researches about disaster communication. Based on the definition of disaster, social media in disaster communication can

be used for (a) dissemination of the information regarding the occurred situation and further actions and prescriptions and (b) as a communication channel between groups of people or individuals with shared interests (Fraustino et al., 2017).

According to the role of social media in disaster communication suggested by Fraustino et al. (2017), can be concluded that social media are used as (a) traditional media with one-way communication but at the same time (b) with the possibility to establish two-way communication with other individuals or content creators.

Based on the theory of communication there, are always at least two participants of the communication process: sender and receiver (Cornelissen, 2017), in the case of disaster communication they are emergency response organisations and the public (Palen & Hughes, 2018). Thus, for the understanding of the role of social media during the disaster are discussed main reasons for usage of social media by the *public* and *emergency response organisations*.

#### *Emergency response organisations*

In the context of the study, emergency response organisation is an organisation that disseminates information regarding occurred crisis to the public (Palen & Hughes, 2018).

The studies showed that in general organisations prefer to use social media as a one-way communication tool and aiming only to disseminate information about disaster. One of the reasons of this choice is the risk of distorting information and bias creation (Palen & Hughes, 2018).

However, the specifics of social media communication enables two-way communication, despite the initial intents of information senders. Enabled two-way communication is the main reason why the public uses social media in the time of occurred crisis (Fraustino et al., 2017).

#### *Public*

Social media enabled publics to participate in communication regarding disasters, to respond to the posted information, build networks and participate in the content creation (Palen & Hughes, 2018).

The research conducted by Fraustino et al. (2017), identified that there are several reasons why the public uses social media during the disaster:

- Channel convenience;
- Social environment of the individual;
- Trustworthy based on personal recommendations of individuals' surrounding;
- For seeking levity and humour;
- Information seeking;
- For timely information;
- For unique information;



- For unfiltered information;
- To determine disaster magnitude;
- For communication with friends and family;
- To share relief, updates and self-mobilize;
- To maintain a sense of community;
- To seek emotional support and healing.

Based on the list of reasons suggested by Fraustino et al. (2017), public uses social media mainly as a two-way communication tool. Thus, for organisations to keep the target audience is necessary to seek an opportunity to enable two-way communication with the public.

Researchers highlight that nevertheless there are common patterns and regulations regarding response to occurred crisis among organisations, the choice of social media communication strategy depends mainly on the settings of occurred crisis as its nature, an industry of organisational operating (Fraustino et al., 2017; Palen & Hughes, 2018); (Fraustino et al., 2017). Thus, organisations' communication from different industries and in the period of various types of occurred disasters needs to be researched further.

### 2.3.3 Destination marketing during crisis

Destination marketing or promotion is a widely researched topic. However, destination marketing in the period of crisis adds a significant number of challenges to the task to promote the destination, affecting the already existing image (Avraham, 2015).

'Promoting a destination in normal circumstances is a difficult task, but promoting a destination that faces tourism challenges – whether from negative press, or from infrastructure damage caused by natural disasters or man-made disasters – is an altogether more arduous task' (pp. 207-208), (Nielsen, 2001), thus to continue the promotion of the destination DMOs need to adjust their strategy. A recent study suggests that for image recovery and place promotion during and after a crisis can be used five techniques: advertising, public relations, sales promotion, direct marketing and digital marketing (Ketter, 2016).

Based on suggested, five techniques can be concluded that communication at the crisis period plays an important role, as the poorly managed situation can lead to a larger scaled crisis (Oliveira & Huertas, 2019).

The conducted literature review has found number of researches that analysed DMOs communication strategies after various disasters such as terroristic attacks (Oliveira & Huertas, 2019), political crisis (Avraham, 2015), health emergencies (Page, Yeoman, Munro, Connell, & Walker, 2006). However, the research conducted by Page et al. (2006), regarding response of DMO to health emergency has a significant difference from the proposed research, as it encompass various communicative channels and analyses health emergency not as unexpected and unpredicted event, but as a prepared crisis response.

Avraham & Ketter (2008), suggest that to combat the crisis exist source, audience and message strategies. Among message-focused strategies to respond to the crisis Avraham & Ketter (2008), suggested:

TABLE 2 Message-focused media strategies for marketing places in crisis (Avraham & Ketter, 2008)

<p><b>Disregard for/partial acknowledgment of the crisis</b></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. 'Crisis? What crisis?'</li> <li>2. Acknowledging negative image</li> <li>3. Reducing the scale of the crisis</li> </ol>	<p><b>Full acknowledgment of the crisis and moderate coping measures</b></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Tackling the crisis</li> <li>2. Hosing spotlight events</li> <li>3. Hosting opinion leaders</li> <li>4. Using films, TV and books</li> <li>5. Engaging celebrities</li> </ol>
<p><b>Full acknowledgment of the crisis and extreme coping measures</b></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Delivering a counter-message</li> <li>2. Spinning liabilities into assets</li> <li>3. Ridiculing the stereotype</li> </ol>	<p><b>Disengagement from the place's main characteristics</b></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Branding contrary to the stereotype</li> <li>2. Geographical isolation</li> <li>3. Changing the place's name</li> </ol>

The choice of the strategy depends on the level of responsibility for the crisis and its scale. According to the multiple case study analysis conducted by Avraham & Ketter (2008), to battle negative image caused by illness and epidemics, territories use *delivering a counter-message* strategy. For example to combat negative image after SARS epidemic Hong Kong used slogan 'Live it. Love it', Singapore used slogan 'Singapore OK'. However, the suggested strategies are not specifically focused on social media communication of the place in crisis and are more suitable for improving image on the crisis-recovery stage.

Ritchie & Jiang (2019), have found that current literature does not cover the implementation of various management strategies based on crisis nature, typology and scale. Thus, the analyses of response strategies of various organisations with a clear description of the context of occurred crisis are in demand. Moreover, Zenker & Kock (2020), and Sharma et al. (2021), argue that Covid-19 pandemic crisis is more complex than previous crises and has to be investigated using rather exploratory than purely descriptive studies.

Gössling et al. (2020), made an attempt to analyse current pandemic of Covid-19. The paper describes previous pandemics and epidemics, their impact on tourism and economy, and attempts to describe the current effect of Covid-19 for tourism. However, the conducted literature review has not found studies that analyse the social media communication of DMOs in the period of implemented travel restrictions due to the health emergency. Gössling et al. (2020), states that the outbreak of Covid-19 disease is unique and paradigm-shifting phenomena that provides many paths for future researches, requiring new approaches and lenses for analysis.

## 2.4 Paradox theory

To explore the situation in which a DMO quite suddenly had to respond to a global pandemic by reconsidering its message to foreigner, this thesis turns to paradox theory.

### 2.4.1 Concept of paradox

The concept of paradox takes its roots from ancient times (Lewis, 2000). However, nowadays, with the complexity and contradictions that brings globalisation paradox lens becomes a useful tool for researchers to explore newly appeared controversial phenomena (Smith & Lewis, 2011).

Smith and Lewis (2011) define *paradox* as 'contradictory yet interrelated elements (dualities) that exist simultaneously and persist over time; such elements seem logical when considered in isolation, but irrational, inconsistent, and absurd when juxtaposed' (p.387).

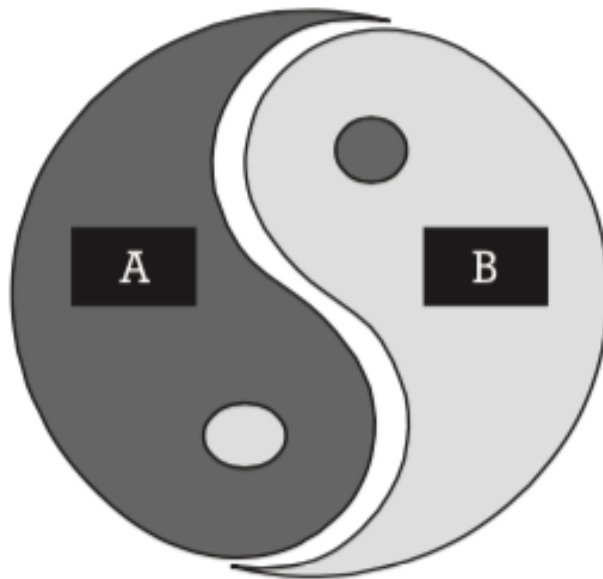


FIGURE 4 Interrelation of dualities within a paradox (Smith & Lewis, 2011)

Paradox appears when two elements (dualities) are placed simultaneously, as illustrated in Figure 4. The dualities are united by external boundary into a unified whole. However, internal boundary distinguishes dualities and creates an opposition between them.

Lewis (2000), states that paradox framework for organisations consists of three successive elements: appeared tensions, reinforcing cycles and management. Tension appears as a consequence of juxtaposed cognitively or/and socially constructed polarities. Reinforcing cycles can also be called 'a trigger for change' (p. 763), as at this stage, organisations understand that work cycles have to be adopted according to paradox reality. Managing paradox is related

to disclosure of its hidden potential, to reinforce past practices and perceptions to remain successful.

The most common paradoxes that appear across studies are paradoxes of *learning*, *organising* and *belonging*, nevertheless they are distinguished between each other they can perform as interrelated paradoxes (Lewis, 2000). The paradox of learning is related to tension appeared between *old and new* and can be caused by innovations in organisational processes. The paradox of organising appears as a consequence of tension between *control and flexibility*, can appear when an organisation tries to reorganise working processes for different reasons and needs to maintain its efficiency and creativity at the same time. The paradox of belonging is a tension between *self and other*, related to the complexity of relationships between individuality and group-belonging. One of the most common trigger for belonging paradoxes nowadays is globalisation (Lewis, 2000).

Nowadays, in a fast-paced globalised world, organisations' ability to address competing demands and manage paradoxes determines their value and life cycle (Lewis, 2000); (Smith & Tracey, 2016).

#### 2.4.2 DMO and paradox of Covid-19 pandemic

The outbreak of Covid-19 disease has affected many spheres of live and economic industries. One of the most affected industries is tourism. World Travel & Tourism Council (WTTC), assessed Travel & Tourism GDP loss up to \$2.1 trillion in 2020 (WTTC, 2020). The loss is caused by the travel restrictions to the national territory implemented by 166 countries (Lapointe, 2020).

Restrictions lead to stagnation in international tourism. In today's globalised and interconnected world, such shift in international tourism is *paradoxical* for touristic organisations and tourism businesses (Lapointe, 2020), as they were unable to perform in the conditions of closed borders and additional quarantine measures.

Applying the paradox lens (Smith & Lewis, 2011) to research the contradictions brought by the Covid-19 pandemic, may help to research challenges that appear as a consequence of measures implemented to limit the spread of pandemic (Lapointe, 2020; Sharma et al., 2021) Sharma et al. (2021), suggested that the pandemic of Covid-19 may be also seen as 'wicked problem' or 'grand challenge', due to its high uncertainty and evolvement over the time. While Zenker and Kock (2020), suggested that it can be explored with chaos theory or system theory. However, paradox theory is commonly used to analyse phenomenon from the organisation's perspective, thus to approach the research is used paradox theory (Sharma et al., 2021).

Current study analyses *organising paradox* (Lewis, 2000), that faced destination marketing organisation (DMO) of Italy during the first wave of the pandemic of Covid-19, from the communicational perspective.

The main goal of DMOs is to promote the touristic destination and to attract tourists (Pike, 2008). However, due to the implemented travel restrictions and quarantine measures, the goal became unachievable. Thus, DMOs faced

tension between control and flexibility. Due to the changes caused by the pandemic in the industry, they had to maintain their efficiency and communicate about the touristic destination. However, they had to adjust their communication strategy and use creativity to continue promoting the destination. Thus, the study attempts to analyse communication regarding organising paradox.

UNWTO webinar from the 4th of May 2020, dedicated to 'Communicating crisis: during and post Covid-19', discussed the paradox that faced DMOs and stakeholders of the tourism community. The communication with the travel community's followers on social media could not be stopped due to the interruptions, as it could significantly affect the existing image. However, habitual call to action "come to visit [name of the destination] now" had to be transformed into "come to visit [name of the destination] but later" (UNWTO webinar, 4<sup>th</sup> of May, 2020).

## 2.5 Literature review summary

The literature review for the current research includes analysis of literature in such fields as destination marketing, social media marketing, crisis communication and paradox theory. Conducted analysis has identified some valuable findings for the study.

First, have been defined terms 'destination marketing', 'destination branding' and 'destination image'. The conducted literature review has spotted that there is a lack of consistency in the definitions used in the recent researches. Destination marketing (place marketing) are studied from the tourism and marketing perspective. Such terms as 'place marketing', 'place branding' and 'place image' are more used in the marketing field. However, as the study is focused on tourism has been agreed to use terms with 'destination', which are more used in the field of tourism. The next section covers the definition of the DMO. The analysis of the literature has found that DMO is used in studies as an abbreviation for 'destination marketing organisation' and 'destination management organisation'. Nevertheless, the terms are used as interchangeable terms, in the study was used 'destination marketing organisation'.

After that, the literature review discusses the role of social media in destination marketing. The chapter emphasises Facebook, as the study is focused on Facebook communication. Thus, in the chapter was also analysed the literature on engagement items on Facebook and message features determining online engagement.

The previous researches highlighted that social media play an important role in destination marketing, however, there is a gap in studies that investigate the role of social media messages in destination marketing (Pino et al., 2018). The conducted literature review has also found that there is literature that focused on Facebook communication of DMOs, to promote destination or event (Pino et al., 2018), however not to analyse its response to a sudden crisis through Facebook messages (Ritchie & Jiang, 2019).

The literature review has found that there is a lack of consistency in the previous researches regarding several message-format and message-content characteristics effect on engagement (Pino et al., 2018; Pletikosa Cvijikj & Michahelles, 2013). Thus, studies investigating the impact of message characteristics may prove or disapprove some results of the recent studies.

Further, in the chapter is discussed crisis communication. In the chapter presented a brief typology of crisis, followed by the review of the literature on the role of social media in crisis and concluded with the review of the literature on destination marketing. The typology helps to distinguish between crises and disasters. The actual study is focused on disaster communication, as pandemic belongs to disaster.

Recent studies assessed the response of DMOs to the occurred crisis, but the crisis has been approached not as unexpected (Page et al., 2006). Moreover, due to the novelty and complexity of the occurred crisis of the Covid-19 pandemic, exploratory studies with descriptive elements are in demand (Zenker & Kock, 2020).

The role of social media communication in crisis communication is researched. However, there is a gap in studies on social media communication of various organisations in different types of crisis (Fraustino et al., 2017; Ritchie & Jiang, 2019). For example, in the circumstances of paused travelling and responses of tourism organisations to the crisis. The importance of the studies has been discussed in the most recent articles (Gössling, Scott, & Hall, 2020; Zenker & Kock, 2020) and on the webinar conducted by UNWTO.

The chapter is concluded with an overview of the paradox theory. In the chapter analysed literature that covers the main aspects of paradox theory and suggests implementation of the paradox lens for various researches. In the next section has been taken an attempt to apply a paradox lens for the current study. The most recent research suggests that the paradox lens may help researchers to reveal the complexity of the Covid-19 phenomenon and help to analyse various events caused by the pandemic and to address the gap in paradox theory application (Lapointe, 2020; Sharma et al., 2021). However, there are other possible theories to approach the pandemic phenomenon suggested by other researchers as a wicked problem, grand challenge, theory of chaos and system (Lapointe, 2020; Sharma et al., 2021).

Thus, based on the results of the conducted literature review, the proposed study can have a valuable theoretical contribution as a review has found that there is a gap that exists in studies on social media communication of DMOs in disasters (Fraustino et al., 2017; Ritchie & Jiang, 2019). Study results will also supplement existing studies on message characteristics effect on users' engagement (Pino et al., 2018; Pletikosa Cvijikj & Michahelles, 2013) and findings of the paradox theory application on the pandemic (Lapointe, 2020; Sharma et al., 2021). Moreover, during the analysis was found that there is a call for researches on the Covid-19 pandemic effect on tourism (Gössling et al., 2020; Zenker & Kock, 2020).

## 3 DATA AND RESEARCH METHOD

### 3.1 Research design

Research design can be defined as a general plan for the whole research journey (Saunders et al., 2019). Designing and planning research is an important step that can be time-consuming (Saunders et al., 2019) and not strictly followed in the end (Eriksson & Kovalainen, 2008). However, research design helps to navigate methodological decisions and possible dilemmas faced by the researcher. Thus, in the research planning process is crucial not to miss and not to mix different stages. Saunders, et al. (2019), suggested the research onion framework that helps in research design to avoid confusion between various stages and navigate the planning process.

According to the research onion framework, there are six layers or stages of the research design process: philosophy, approach, choices of research methods, strategy, time horizons, data collection and data analysis (Saunders et al., 2019). The chapter structure covers the stages suggested in the framework and has been partially guided by it.

As it was mentioned before, the research aims to understand how, during the Covid-19 pandemic, the DMO in Italy used Facebook to navigate the paradox between (a) inviting foreigners to visit Italy and (b) telling them not to visit Italy yet because of the pandemic. To achieve the aim of the research, the following research questions (RQs) have been formulated:

**RQ1:** What messages did the DMO in Italy communicate through Facebook during the first wave of Covid-19 pandemic?

**RQ2:** How did the Italian DMO navigate the **paradox** between openly invitational and discreetly cautionary FB messages during the first wave of Covid-19?

**RQ3:** How did users engage with the DMO's messages on Facebook?

Following the research aim, a descriptive research design with exploratory research elements has been used in this study. Descriptive research is used 'to describe the characteristics of the topic of interest in the research' (Hair et al., 2015) (p. 157). In comparison, an exploratory research design is widely used for research topics with the lack of literature regarding the topic of research (Hair et al., 2015). Conducted for the study literature review has found that studies about communication during various types of disasters are warranted. There were not found studies exploring the response of destination marketing organisations (DMOs) to the unpredicted health emergency. However, some research analyses the social media engagement of DMOs. Thus, the research can be classified as descriptive research that has exploratory elements.

Followed by the proposed research design in the study was used abductive reasoning (Mantere & Ketokivi, 2013), as the study aims to explore how the communicational paradox has been navigated by the DMO of Italy but follows

suggested in recent researches characteristics of engagement (Pino et al., 2018; Pletikosa Cvijikj & Michahelles, 2013). Deductive reasoning is used for hypotheses testing, and inductive reasoning is used for developing new theories, while abductive reasoning does not seek to develop new theories nor to test a pre-existing hypothesis for the specific case (Hair et al., 2015; Mantere & Ketokivi, 2013). Abductive reasoning can be utilised for finding 'the best explanation' (p. 81) to interpret the specific context based on pre-existing knowledge (Mantere & Ketokivi, 2013). Thus, the nature of abductive reasoning meets the objectives of this study.

In addition, based on the aim of the research and research questions, for data analysis, has been chosen mixed method of data analysis. Mixed methods include a combination of qualitative and quantitative techniques and analysis procedures (Molina-Azorin, Bergh, Corley, & Ketchen, 2017). As the study has followed methodology suggested by Pino et al. (2018), and Pletikosa Cvijikj & Michahelles (2013), in the research used quali-quantitative assessment of the data set.

More specifically, to answer (RQ1) was used qualitative data analysis, to answer (RQ2) was used quali-quantitative data analysis, and to answer (RQ3) has been utilised quantitative analysis in order to 'quantitise' the qualitative data (Saunders et al., 2019). It is argued that mixed methods can be used for various reasons in the research. One of the reasons to elaborate mixed methods is interpretation (Saunders et al., 2019), that performed as a reason for the study.

In the study manual content analysis was used to analyse qualitatively the data set that consists of the Facebook posts of Italia.it. While the quantitative analysis was used to assess how qualitative characteristics of the messages affected users' engagement, as was suggested by Hair et al. (2015, p. 153), 'quantitative data refers to measurements in which numbers are used directly to represent the characteristics of something'. The data collection and data analysis are discussed in more details, correspondingly in sections 3.3 and 3.4 of the chapter.

A single case study has been selected as a research strategy. Case study can be defined as an in-depth analysis of the topic or phenomenon in a real-life settings (Saunders et al., 2019). One of the main characteristics of the case study is identifiable boundaries (Eriksson & Kovalainen, 2008). Boundaries of the research were identified by borders closure and travel restrictions implemented by the Italian government from March 2020 till June 2020. Due to its nature in the case study research are commonly used mixed methods of data analysis (Saunders et al., 2019). Eriksson & Kovalainen (2008), suggest that case study has mainly qualitative spirit. However, quantitative data can be used to construct the case and to explain better qualitative data, similarly to the current research.

In conclusion, the study is classified as cross-sectional. According to Hair et al. (2015), cross-sectional studies provide a snapshot or description of organisational processes in a specific period of time. The study's data set consists of the Facebook posts of Italia.it community from the 10<sup>th</sup> of March 2020 till the 3<sup>rd</sup> of June 2020, thus it analyses the communication of Italian DMO in a period of the first wave of Covid-19 pandemic.



### 3.2 Case selection

One of the key steps in conducting a case study research is selection and description of the case and determination of its boundaries (Saunders et al., 2019). As it helps strategically to distinguish case-study conducted within real-life settings from others (Saunders et al., 2019) and to make a more detailed and intensive analysis of a certain case (Bryman, 2012).

For the current study has been chosen a single case study. Saunders et al. (2019), suggest that a single case study enables critical analysis of the specific case even if the case is not unique. As it was mentioned in the previous section, the current study aims to understand how, during the Covid-19 pandemic, the DMO in Italy used Facebook to navigate the paradox between (a) inviting foreigners to visit Italy and (b) telling them not to visit Italy yet because of the pandemic. Thus, the case has certain boundaries. First of all, the study analyses a specific organisation – the DMO of Italy, more specifically only Facebook communication of the organisation. The official Facebook page of the DMO of Italy called 'Italia.it', the page has 551 229 followers (12<sup>th</sup> of May 2021). Besides, the study analysed the Italia.it communication via Facebook in a certain period of time from the 10th of March 2020 till the 3rd of June 2020.

On the 11th of March World Health Organisation (WHO), announced that Coronavirus (Covid-19) disease received a status of pandemic (WHO, 2020). The outbreak of the Covid-19 pandemic is one of the most impactful events of the 21st century, especially for tourism (Zenker & Kock, 2020). Zenker and Kock (2020), highlight that particularly impactful the pandemic can be for countries that are dependent on tourism and were suffering from a high infection rate. For Italy, tourism plays an important economic role. According to statistics, in 2019 share of GDP generated by travel and tourism reached 13% and achieved 233 billion euros (Statista, 2021). However, due to the high infection rate and in order to prevent the spreading of coronavirus disease, the Italian government had decided to extend quarantine measures for the whole country and to close borders for tourists (BBC, 2020). Italy was one of the first countries in the European Union (EU) that entered lockdown and implemented travel restrictions (The Economist, 2020).

Tourism has been paused from March 2020 till June 2020. On the 3rd of June 2020, travel restrictions implemented by the Italian government had been eased and travelling re-started for European (BBC, 2020b).

As tourism is an important economic source for Italy due to its suspension, the amount of GDP has consequently gone down. Thus, for Italy, the outbreak of the Covid-19 disease became a big strike for the economy (The Economist, 2020). Therefore, for the study has been selected the Italian Destination Marketing Organisation (DMO).

Italian DMO official name is 'Agenzia Nazionale Turismo', the main goal of the website is 'to promote the brand Italy in the tourism sector and to collect and spread tourist information relating to the country through Internet' (Italia.it, 2021). The organisation is represented with accounts on Twitter, Facebook, YouTube and Instagram. The study is focused on Facebook communication of

Italia.it. Facebook has been selected due to its popularity as social media; because Facebook enables the incorporation of various content types: texts, videos, photos and links, and because users can respond to the posted content with liking, commenting and sharing (Shin et al., 2015). Thus, the level of online engagement with the posted content can be measured with the number of likes, shares and comments.

### 3.3 Data collection

To describe and analyse phenomena that appeared in the business world, the right data have to be collected. Selection of the data set and method of the data collection is crucial, as the data must be representative and correspond to the aim of the research (Hair et al., 2015).

The study analysed Facebook posts of Italia.it in the period from the 10<sup>th</sup> of March till the 3<sup>rd</sup> of June 2020. For the analysis have been collected 147 posts in total. As it was stated above, the study utilises quali-quantitative data analysis. Thus, for the purposes of the study has been firstly collected secondary data in a format of (a) screenshots of published posts and (b) text scripts of the posts for further qualitative analysis. For qualitative assessment of the data set a coding scheme has been developed, and manual content analysis has been utilised. The data analysis process is described in details in the next section of the chapter. In order to perform a quantitative assessment of the data set, have been utilised results of conducted content analysis.

#### *Data collection for the qualitative analysis*

As the unit of qualitative analysis has been selected, Facebook post (Hair et al., 2015). The screenshots and text scripts have been collected in a separate Excel sheet. Therefore, the coding sheet consists of six columns: 'Coded name of the post', 'Script of the message', 'Screenshot 1', 'Screenshot 2', 'Screenshot 3', 'Screenshot 4'.

*Coded name of the post.* Posts' names were coded based on the date of its release in the format 3/6/20. In the case of two or more posts from the same date has been used coding 3/6/20-2, where '2' responds to the number of the post per day.

*The script of the message.* In this column have been collected scripts of the posts. The scripts were collected by copy-pasting.

*Screenshot 1, Screenshot 2, Screenshot 3, Screenshot 4.* The columns correspond to the number of screenshots necessary for the full post collecting, excluding comments. The screenshots of the posts served mainly to collect numerical data (N of likes, shares and comments) and for assessment of vividness construct in qualitative analysis.

### *Data collection for the quantitative analysis*

Quantitative analysis in the study is used in order to 'quantitise' qualitative data. As the study aims to assess the messages that the DMO of Italy posted during the lockdown of the Covid-19 pandemic, a coding book with measured variables has been developed. The coding book is presented in Appendix 1. The coding sheet has been created in the format of an Excel file. In the coding sheet, creation has been followed a conceptual model developed for the study (Figure 5). Excel file consists of 12 columns. The first column is the coded name of the post, were used the same name as for qualitative analysis. The second column is the body text of the post, while each of the following columns represents one of the variables.

Three columns consist of the primary numerical information about the post: the number of likes, comments and shares. In the analysis, these variables are considered dependent variables (Hair et al., 2015). The following columns consist of variables that measure message content: elements of relation to the pandemic, main theme. The last five columns are related to the message format construct and assess message interactivity and vividness. To assess interactivity are used a call to action, sentence style and traceability variable. Finally, to assess vividness used vividness and language variables. Other than a column with name and columns with numerical variables are performing as independent variables in the study (Hair et al., 2015).

The next section of the chapter discusses data analysis used in the study.

## **3.4 Data analysis**

Data analysis methodology has been adapted from Pino et al. (2018), and Pletikosa Cvijikj & Michahelles (2013). As was mentioned above, the study utilises mixed methods for data analysis. The qualitative method is followed by quantitative in order to 'quantitise' (p. 183) qualitatively assessed data (Saunders et al., 2019). Based on Saunders et al. (2019), the research design where qualitative data analysis is followed by quantitative belongs to sequential exploratory.

As it was suggested by Hair et al. (2015), a conceptual model is an important outcome of the literature review that helps a researcher to conceptualise the relationships that will be studied. Thus, for the study has been developed a conceptual model in order (1) to help researcher conceptualise the results of conducted literature review and (2) to present visually the relationships that the study aims to assess (Figure 5). For the development of conceptual model have been followed studies conducted by Pino et al. (2018), and Pletikosa Cvijikj & Michahelles (2013). The model consists of ten variables that are assigned to four constructs (Hair et al., 2015).

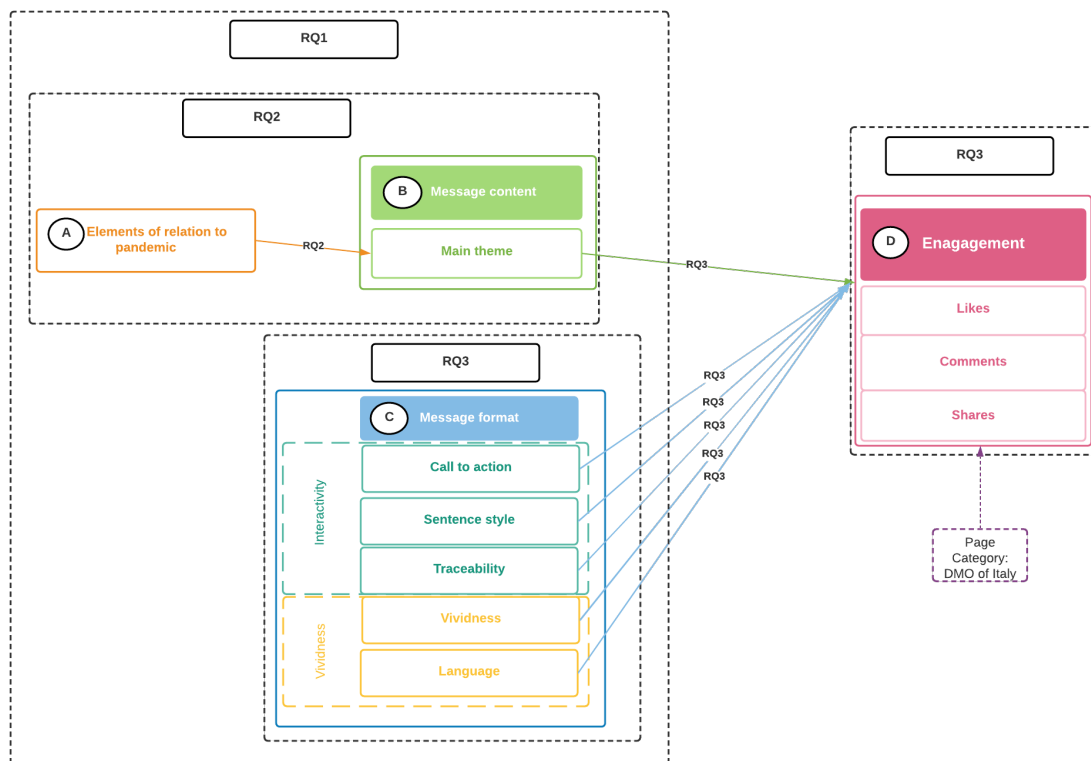


FIGURE 5 Conceptual model of the study

The model consists of four constructs: A, B, C and D. Construct **(A)** – ‘Elements of relation to pandemic’ has been developed specifically for the purposes of the study, to assess whether the post content is invitational, cautionary, other pandemic-affected or neutral. Invitational messages contain an invitation to travel to Italy (Example: *Spring bursts in the alleys of Spello. An invitation to let yourself be carried away by the scent of the blooms and be lulled by the harmony that reigns in this beautiful and welcoming village*). Cautionary messages attempt to communicate that travelling to Italy has to be postponed (Example: *Let’s stay away today to hug each other more warmly tomorrow*). Other pandemic-affected are messages with content shaped by the pandemic; however, they are nor invitational nor cautionary (Example: *Let us take you on a virtual tour of Tuscany through the best movies shot across the region. Check out our selection and tell us: which is your favourite?*). Neutral messages are not containing information related to the pandemic (Example: *The Amalfi Coast, where reality overcomes imagination. Enjoy this stunning view of the garden of Villa Rufolo, also known as the "Garden of the Soul"*). Construct **(B)** aims to assess ‘Message content’. Variables of the construct **(C)** assess ‘Message format’. Finally, construct **(D)** – ‘Engagement’, measures the performance of Facebook posts in terms of users’ engagement. The level of posts’ engagement is measured by the number of likes, comments and shares.

Construct **(A)** has been developed specifically for the purposes of the study, as there were not found recent researches that evaluated social media communication of DMOs in a period of the pandemic. Constructs **(B)**, **(C)** and **(D)** have been adopted from the studies conducted by Pino et al. (2018), and Pletikosa Cvijikj & Michahelles (2013).

There has not been found any research evidence that relation to the pandemic can have an impact on the DMO's engagement rates with Facebook users. However, the research aims to understand how the users responded in terms of engagement to the various pandemic-related messages. Thus, the study attempts to examine the relation between **(A)** relation to pandemic and the **(D)** engagement constructs.

Besides, the study examines the correlation between **(A)** relation to pandemic variables with **(B)** message content variables as the evidence of message content effect on engagement level on Facebook exists (Pino et al., 2018; Pletikosa Cvijikj & Michahelles, 2013), and to present the deeper analysis of communicated messages.

According to recent studies, there are two basic message components that trigger **(D)** online engagement: **(B)** message content and **(C)** message format. Message content **(B)** for the study is suggested to be measured for the purpose of the study with (1) main theme variable. In comparison, message format **(C)** can be measured with two constructs (a) interactivity and (b) vividness. Constructs, in contrast to variables, can be measured only indirectly. Thus they are more abstract and can be represented with variables that allow measuring their impact directly (Hair et al., 2015). Therefore, interactivity of the messages is measured with the following variables (2) call to action, (3) sentence style, (4) traceability. And to measure vividness construct are used as variables (5) vividness and (6) language. The listed above variables are independent variables 'the characteristic that influences or explains the dependent variable' (p. 142), consequently the dependent variables are variables that the researcher is trying to explain, understand or predict (Hair et al., 2015). The study aims to explore what message characteristics trigger online engagement **(D)**. Thus, as dependent variables are used (7) likes, (8) comments and (9) shares.

Pletikosa Cvijikj & Michahelles (2013), suggested that page category also affects users' engagement. Thus, in the conceptual framework is specified that the page category is the page of DMO of Italy. As the study utilises abductive reasoning, no other hypothesis than that suggested variables can affect online engagement has been suggested.

Similarly to Pino et al. (2018), and Pletikosa Cvijikj & Michahelles (2013), for the qualitative assessment of the data set has been applied manual content analysis. Researchers suggest that manual content analysis can be utilised to discover the primary theme of the data set and when deeper understanding than enabled software analysis is needed (Hair et al., 2015), for example, to analyse latent content (Saunders et al., 2019). Pino et al. (2018), also highlighted that in an analysis that aims to assess social media posts' characteristics as sentence style or communication goal, software content analysis is not effective. Such characteristics require personal judgement for making coding decisions. The variables that have been assessed in the study and their instances are presented in Table 3. For quantitative analysis have been used correlation analysis, and one-way ANOVA (Hair et al., 2015).

Based on the conceptual model of the study has been developed a coding book (Appendix 1). In order to ensure the reliability and validity of the coding scheme inter-coder reliability test has been conducted prior to the analysis of

the whole data set. As suggested by Saunders et al. (2019), in the intercoder reliability test, can participate two researchers to ensure the reliability and validity of the data scheme. Thus, the test has been selected a set of the data and coded following the scheme independently by the author and another student. A recent study suggests that to ensure the data's reliability, about 10% of the whole data set has to be assessed by different coders (Lombard, Snyder-Duch, & Bracken, 2002). As the whole data set consists of 147 Facebook posts, for the intercoder reliability test have been randomly selected 15 posts. To assess the results of the intercoder reliability test has been utilised the formula suggested by Saunders et al. (2019):  $PA = \frac{A}{n} \times 100$ , where,  $PA$  = percentage agreement,  $A$  = number of agreements between the two coders,  $n$  = number of segments coded. A sufficient percentage of agreement is considered over 80%.

During the conduction of the intercoder reliability test has been agreed that among instances for 'Elements of relation to pandemic' has to be added 'Other-pandemic affected', as there were found messages that suit neither to the 'Invitational' nor to 'Cautionary' instances, however, they are related to pandemic. Conducted intercoder reliability test has shown 97% of agreement ( $97 = \frac{109}{112} \times 100$ ). Thus, the whole data set has been coded with the suggested coding scheme.

Importantly, at the later stage of the analysis has been discovered that in the 'Other pandemic-affected' group, a number of messages could be unified under the 'Outbound' instance. As their key message was: 'Italy comes to you' that was delivered with the hashtag #Italycomestoyou with some variations (Example: *Italy at your fingertips. Take a virtual tour of iconic Italian sites. More than 150 cultural institutions to discover Italy's unique masterpieces, landscapes, and cultural heritage. #Italycomestoyou*). In the outbound messages Italy 'came to travellers' with the virtual tours, stories about various destinations, historical facts.

TABLE 3 Framework of the study

Construct	Variables	Instances	References
(A) Elements of relation to pandemic	Elements of relation to pandemic	Invitational / Cautionary / Outbound / Other pandemic-affected / Neutral	Developed for the study
(B) Message content	Main theme	Culture, art and history / Traditions and food / Collateral themes (practical information for travellers) / Tourist destinations / Events	Pino et al. (2018); Pletikosa Cvijikj & Michahelles (2013)
(C) Message format	Call to action	Absence / Presence of a call to action	Pino et al. (2018)
	Sentence style	Affirmative / Exclamatory / Question	Pino et al. (2018)

	Traceability	Absence / Presence of hashtags	Pino et al. (2018)
	Vividness	Video / Link / Photo / Photo + Link / Video + Link / Absence of vivid elements (photos, videos, hyperlinks)	Pino et al. (2018); Pletikosa Cvijikj & Michahelles (2013)
	Language	English / Italian / Both (Italian/English)	Pino et al. (2018)
(D) Engagement	Likes	Number	Pino et al. (2018); Pletikosa Cvijikj & Michahelles (2013)
	Comments	Number	Pino et al. (2018); Pletikosa Cvijikj & Michahelles (2013)
	Shares	Number	Pino et al. (2018); Pletikosa Cvijikj & Michahelles (2013)

To answer (RQ1: *What messages did the DMO (in Italy) communicate through Facebook during the first wave of Covid-19 pandemic?*), was used qualitative assessment. The manual content analysis assessed variables of constructs A, B, and C.

To answer (RQ2: *How did the Italian DMO navigate the **paradox** between openly invitational and discreetly cautionary FB messages during the first wave of Covid-19?*), has been examined the share of various types of (A) pandemic-affected messages using the results of content analysis and has been analysed the correlation between the variable of A and B constructs. The connection has been examined with correlation analysis in SPSS.

In order to answer (RQ3: *How did users engage with the DMO's messages on Facebook?*) quantitative analysis is used. With one-way ANOVA test has been examined relationships between (A), (B), (C) and (D) constructs. Constructs (A), (B), and (C) were counted as independent variables, while (D) construct has been considered a dependent variable.

Similarly to Pino et al. (2018), users' engagement with each message has been operationalised to assess engagement level based on the number of likes, comments and shares. To count the overall indicator of engagement of each message has been summed the number of likes, comments and shares. And a series of one-way ANOVAs tests had been run to assess whether message content and format characteristics affected users' engagement with the messages of the Facebook page of Italia.it. The findings of the quali-quantitative data analysis are discussed in the next chapter of the thesis.

## 4 RESEARCH FINDINGS

The research aimed to understand how, during the Covid-19 pandemic, the DMO (Destination Marketing Organisation) in Italy used Facebook to navigate the paradox between (a) inviting foreigners to visit Italy and (b) telling them not to visit Italy yet because of the pandemic.

In the chapter are presented the main findings of the research. The chapter is structured according to the suggested RQs. Thus, the next section is focused on the results of the qualitative analysis of Facebook posts during the first wave of the pandemic. In the following section, are presented the findings regarding the navigation of paradox between openly invitational and discreetly cautionary messages. The final section of the chapter presents findings regarding users' engagement with analysed Facebook messages of the DMO.

### 4.1 Italian DMO's Facebook messages

The findings of the research question (*RQ1: What messages did the DMO in Italy communicate through Facebook during the first wave of Covid-19 pandemic?*), were summarised and analysed using the Pivot tables and charts, that allowed us to compare the results of analysis and to make conclusions about communicated messages.

To answer the RQ1 has been utilised qualitative content analysis. The whole data set that consists of 147 posts was analysed using the manual content analysis. The analysis has been performed in Excel, using the coding sheet that is presented in Appendix 1.

For the analysis, were developed four constructs to assess the data set. Construct **(A)** - 'Elements of relation to pandemic' has been developed specifically for the purposes of the study to assess whether the post content is invitational, cautionary, pandemic-affected or neutral. Construct **(B)** aims to assess 'Message content'. Variables of the construct **(C)** assess 'Message format'. Finally, construct **(D)** - 'Engagement', assess the level of online engagement of online posts with such post's metrics as likes, comments and shares. However, for qualitative assessment of the posted messages were analysed only the results of the coding of **(A)**, **(B)** and **(C)** constructs.

#### *(A) - 'Elements of relation to pandemic'*

The results of the analysis has shown that the majority of the posts has relation to the pandemic (Figure 6). Among the related to pandemic messages, 35% of the messages were 'Outbound', which means that the content of the messages has a relation to the pandemic, however, it does not attempt to invite tourists nor to caution but the key message is that while travels are restricted Italy comes to tourists (e.g., with VR tours, stories about destinations, historical facts) instead of them coming to visit (see Table 4).



TABLE 4 Examples of the messages in relation to pandemic

Messages	Example
Invitational PA	Spring bursts in the alleys of Spello. An invitation to let yourself be carried away by the scent of the blooms and be lulled by the harmony that reigns in this beautiful and welcoming village.
Cautionary PA	Let's stay away today to hug each other more warmly tomorrow
Outbound PA	Italy at your fingertips. Take a virtual tour of iconic Italian sites. More than 150 cultural institutions to discover Italy's unique masterpieces, landscapes, and cultural heritage. <a href="#">#Italycomestoyou</a>
Other PA	Let us take you on a virtual tour of Tuscany through the best movies shot across the region. Check out our selection and tell us: which is your favourite?
Neutral	The Amalfi Coast, where reality overcomes imagination. Enjoy this stunning view of the garden of Villa Rufolo, also known as the "Garden of the Soul"

The percentage of invitational messages - 17% exceeds other pandemic-affected - 12% and cautionary messages - 10%. And the percentage of neutral messages is 26%.

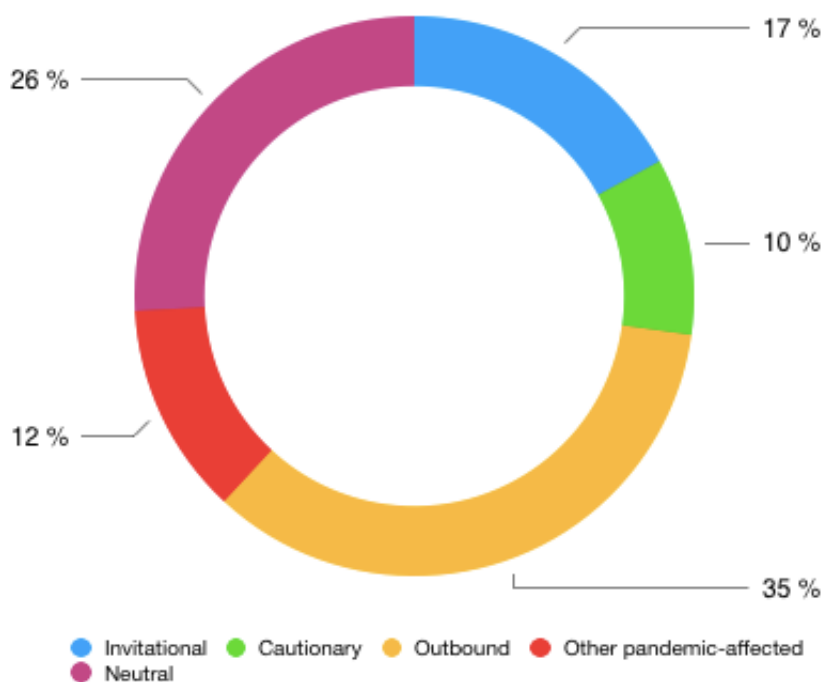


FIGURE 6 Type of messages in relation to the pandemic (total)

According to the monthly statistics, the highest number of outbound messages is in April, while in May-June the number goes down significantly (Figure 7).

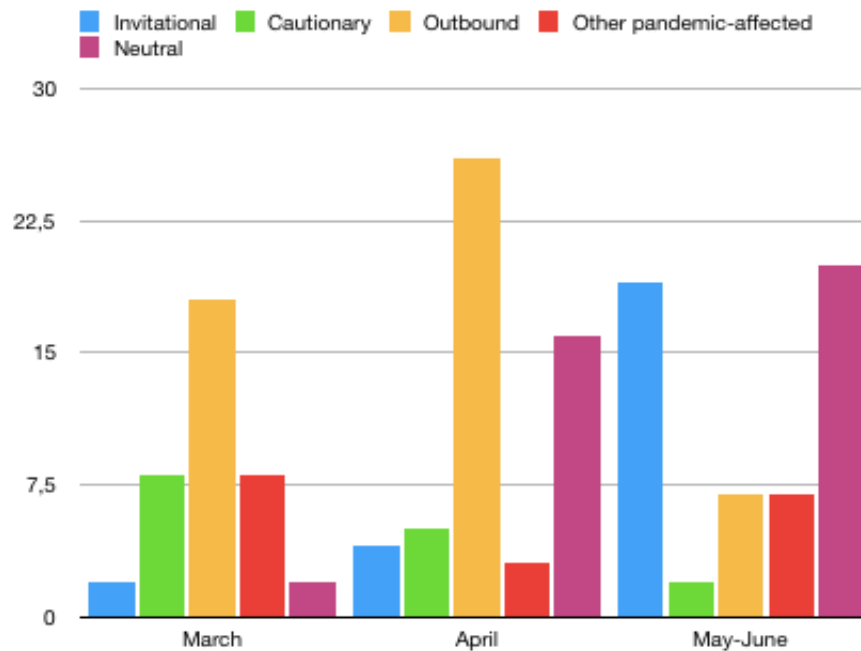


FIGURE 7 Relation to the pandemic of the messages (monthly)

On the chart, May is united with June as in the study were analysed only posts till the 3rd of June, due to the decision of the Italian government to ease travel restrictions on the 3rd of June. Thus, analysis of the messages posted in June cannot be representative.

On the monthly chart, Figure 7, it is visible that the number of invitational messages has a significant rise in May-June in relation to March and April, whereas the number of cautionary messages goes down.

The number of neutral messages grows every month. In May-June, the number of neutral messages exceeds the number of all other messages.

Other-pandemic affected messages in March exceed invitational and neutral messages; however, the number of cautionary and other pandemic-affected is even. In April, other pandemic-affected messages represent the minority of all messages. In May-June, the number of pandemic-affected messages is equal to the outbound messages but higher than the number of cautionary messages.

## (B) – ‘Message content’

To assess message content has been decided to assess the main theme of the messages (see Table 5). Were suggested five instances: ‘Culture, art and history’, ‘Traditions and food’, ‘Collateral themes’ (practical information for travellers), ‘Tourist destination’ and ‘Events’ (Figure 8).

TABLE 5 Examples of the main theme of the messages

Themes	Example
Culture, art and history	Today we celebrate the "Festa della Repubblica"... the Italian Republic turns 74. Enjoy the special flypast of the Frece Tricolori that in these days has united the country, from North to South, in one big embrace.
Traditions and food	Waiting for your next trip to #Sicily, how about experimenting with one of the most famous Sicilian recipes? <a href="http://www.visitsicily.info/en/anelletti-al-forno/">http://www.visitsicily.info/en/anelletti-al-forno/</a>
Collateral themes	COVID-19 – Information and updates for tourists In order to hinder and limit the possible spread of Covid-19 (Coronavirus) in Italy, the Italian Government has ordered a series of restrictions applied to the whole country. For further info visit: <a href="http://bit.ly/COVID19-Info_and_updates_for_tourists">http://bit.ly/COVID19-Info_and_updates_for_tourists</a>
Tourist destination	Liguria for the eleventh consecutive year is the region with the highest number of Blue Flags, a banner synonymous with clean water and excellent beach facilities. In fact, there are 32 places that have obtained this recognition which sees scattered throughout the region beaches of enormous beauty with clean and practicable sea.
Events	Stasera, dalle 20 alle 24 in onda su Rai3 e in contemporanea su Rai Radio2, RaiPlay e sul canale Youtube Rai, il Concerto del Primo maggio. Da Vasco a Zucchero, da Patty Smith e Sting. Quattro ore di maratona musicale dalla sala Sinopoli dell’ <u>Auditorium Parco della Musica - Roma</u> (dove è installato l’Auditorium Stage Primo Maggio 2020) e collegamenti con altre location sparse per l’Italia e scelte direttamente dagli artisti. Buon Primo maggio e buon concerto a tutti voi!

Based on the results, the main theme of the vast majority of the messages is 'Tourist destinations' - 61%. 28% of the messages were dedicated to the 'Culture art and history'. 'Traditions and food' messages share was 6%, 'Events' - 3% and finally 'Collateral themes' - 2%.

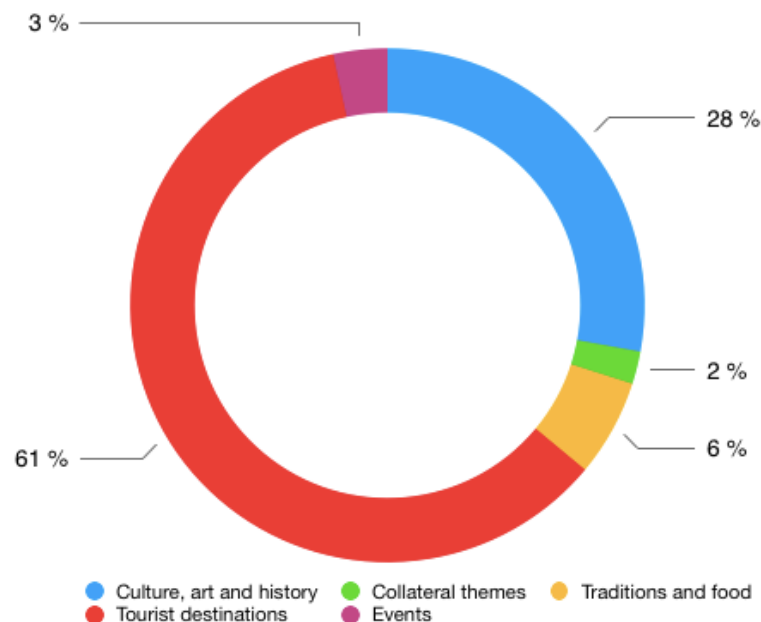


FIGURE 8 Main theme of the messages (total)

According to the monthly analysis of the main theme of the messages (see Figure 9), the number of messages about various tourist destinations in Italy is twice higher at the end of the analysed period in comparison to the beginning. However, throughout the whole analysed period, the number of messages with the main theme 'Tourist destination' was higher than others. The number of messages talking about 'Culture, art and history' is higher in March (16), in April (14), May-June (11) it goes down. However, the difference is not significant. The number of the messages with the main theme 'Traditions and food' remains low during the whole period in March it was only one message, in April there were four messages dedicated to the topic, and in May-June, the number of the messages achieved five. In March, were no messages dedicated to 'Events' found. In April and May-June, the number of messages grows. However, the messages were dedicated to online events.

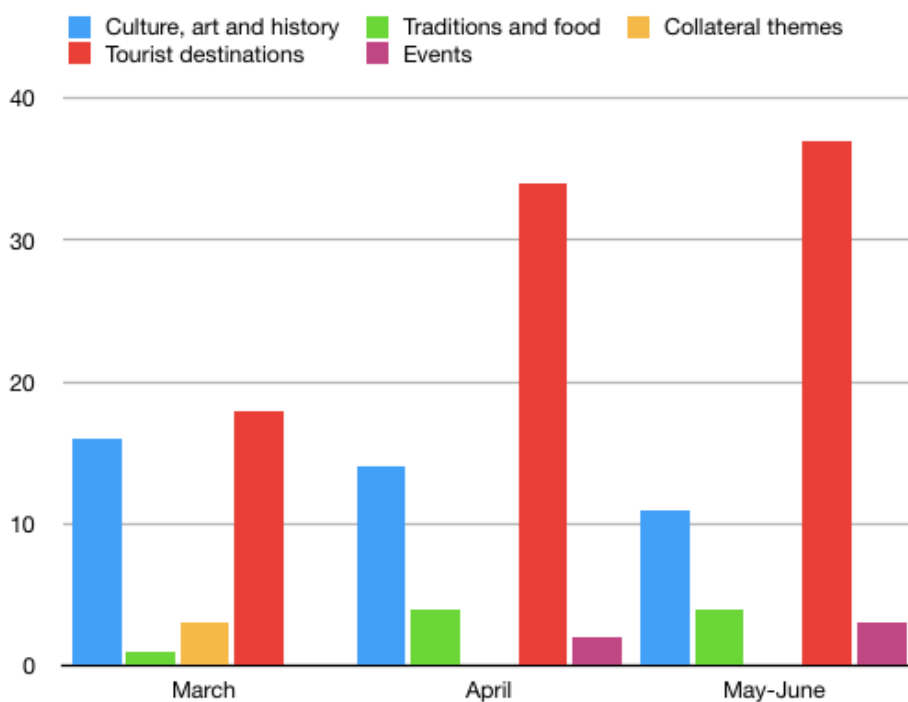


FIGURE 9 Main theme of the messages (monthly)

(C) – ‘Message format’

To assess message format were suggested variables that aimed to assess ‘Interactivity’ and ‘Vividness’ of the messages.

To assess the interactivity of the messages were suggested the following variables: ‘Call to action’ (Absence / Presence), ‘Traceability’ (Absence / Presence of hashtags), ‘Sentence style’ (Affirmative / Exclamatory / Question). Examples of the messages for each instance of variables are presented in Table 6.

TABLE 6 Examples of messages' interactivity

Variables and instances	Example
Call to action	
Absence	“A small village, Portofino, stretches crescent-shaped along the edge of this calm bay.” Guy de Maupassant Portofino, a name known all over the world, synonymous with elegance and dolce vita.
Presence	Sea, nature, breathtaking landscapes and industrial archaeology. Let's discover the amazing mine of Porto Flavia in <a href="http://bit.ly/masua-and-porto-flavia-EN">Visit Sardinia. http://bit.ly/masua-and-porto-flavia-EN</a>

Traceability	
Absence	4 recipes to taste the Asparagus of Altedo PGI, ancient green jewel of spring in the Italian #FoodValley <a href="https://bit.ly/2zb8jEn">https://bit.ly/2zb8jEn</a> Via inEmiliaRomagna Photo by: Consorzio dell'Asparago Verde di Altedo IGP
Presence	Discovering Ischia, the island of the sun god. <a href="http://bit.ly/the-islands-of-naples-bay-EN">http://bit.ly/the-islands-of-naples-bay-EN</a> Photo: Castello Aragonese/ Aragonese Castle by: alepetra_ <a href="https://www.instagram.com/p/BYWqLj6lBzu">https://www.instagram.com/p/BYWqLj6lBzu</a> <a href="#">#Italycomestoyou</a>
Sentence style	
Affirmative	A journey amid nature: 5 hiking routes to walk in spring in #EmiliaRomagna
Exclamatory	Sigurtà Park... one of the most beautiful gardens in the world, just a few kilometres from Lake Garda. 600,000 m <sup>2</sup> of greenery that envelops its visitors in a kaleidoscope of colours and scents: tulips, irises, roses, water lilies, aster, water gardens, hedges labyrinths, centuries-old oaks and medicinal plants will amaze you!
Question	If Palermo street food needed a flag, it would be the colour of the pannelle. Have you ever tasted it?

According to the results presented in Table 7, almost all posts from the data set have a call to action (90%). And the majority of the posts includes hashtags (67%), which serves as a measurement of traceability.

TABLE 7 Call to action and traceability of the messages

	Call to action	Traceability (hashtags)
Presence	90 %	67%
Absence	10%	33%

The results of the analysis also shown that mainly in the messages was used affirmative sentence style (65%), while the percentage of exclamatory and question sentences was almost even, 20% and 15% consequently (Figure 10).

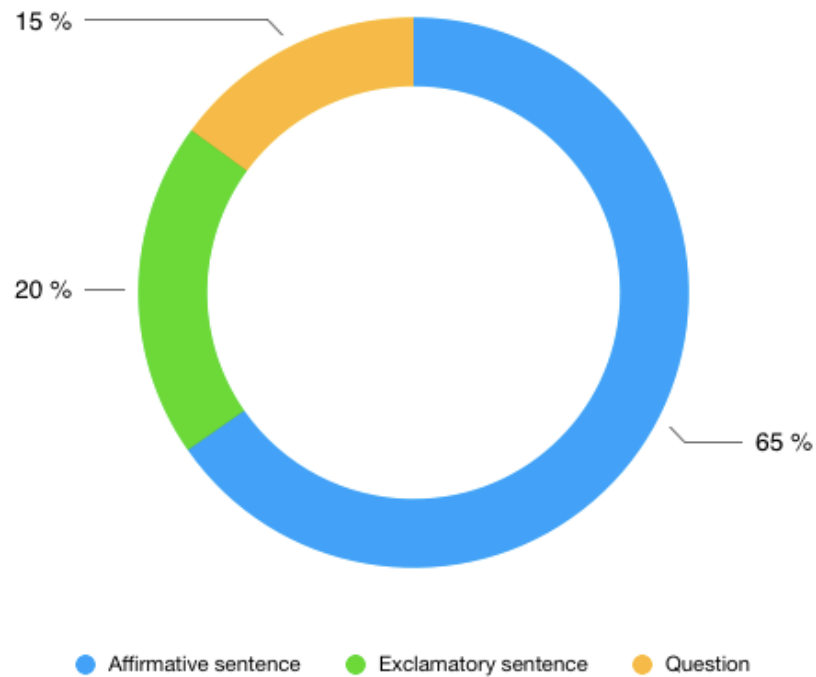


FIGURE 10 Sentence style

For assessment of the 'Vividness' of the messages were used such variables as 'Vividness' and 'Language'.

The results shown that all the messages in the data set have various vivid elements (Figure 11). In the vast majority of the posts have been used a combination 'Photo + link' of vivid elements (68%). Less common was the usage of combination 'Video + link' (13%) and simply 'Photo' (10%). In the 7% of the posts has been used 'Video' and only 3% of the posts utilised 'Link'.

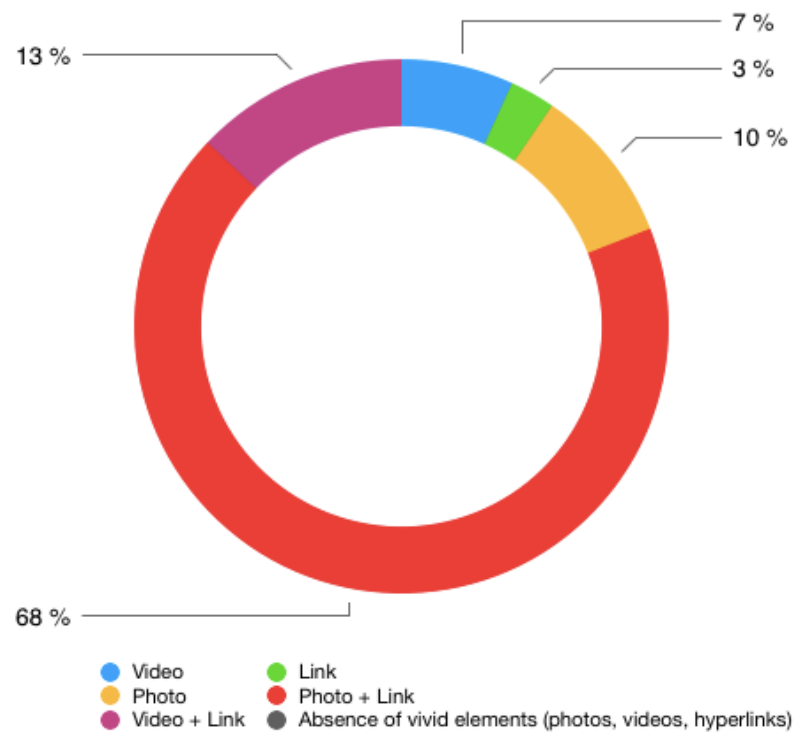


FIGURE 11 Vividness of the messages

Mainly all the posts of the data set were written in English (69%), some posts were written in two languages: English and Italian (18%), however the information in both languages was the same, and 12% of the posts were written in Italian (Figure 12).

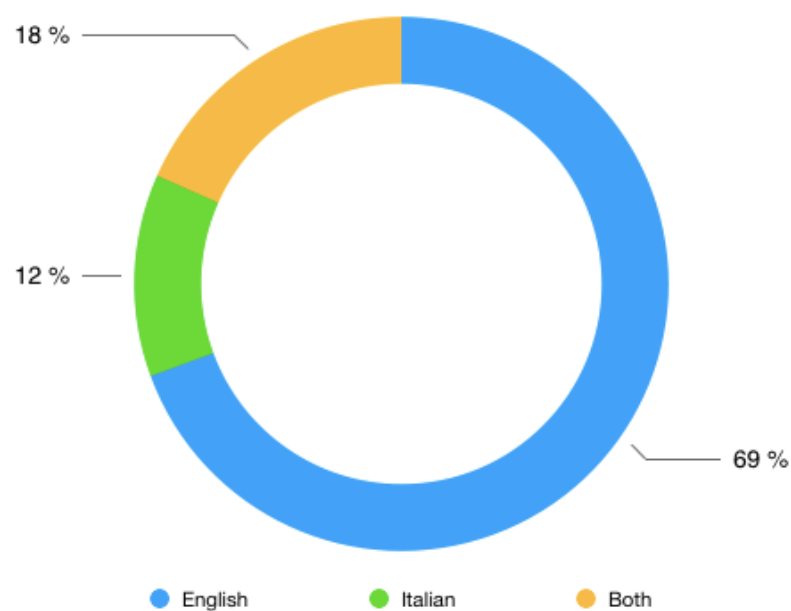


FIGURE 12 Language of the posts



The key finding of the conducted content analysis were ‘Outbound’ messages, which contained the key message ‘Italy comes to you’, with the stories and facts about various destinations inside the country, virtual tours at museums and historical facts. The finding of the outbound messages was unexpected. However, this key message contained the majority of the analysed posts. The number of outbound messages was significantly high in March and April, but in May-June, the number of neutral and invitational messages prevailed over the outbound messages. The finding shows that the messages communicating the key message ‘Italy comes to you’ were used by the DMO mostly during the beginning of the travel restrictions, with the period of the highest unclarity regarding the tourism performance. Closer to the ease of the restrictions, the DMO gave preference to the communication of neutral and invitational messages. Thus, it can be concluded that outbound messages were often used by the DMO during the period of unclarity.

To analyse message content has been examined the main theme of communicated messages. The main theme of the analysed messages was tourist destinations during the whole period.

To assess message format was examined whether the messages have CTA (call to action), hashtags, their sentence style, contained vivid elements and language of the messages. The majority of the messages contained CTA (call to action) and hashtags. Mainly messages had an affirmative sentence style. All posts contained vivid elements. However, the most commonly used vivid elements were the combination photo + link. Regarding messages language, the majority was written in English (69%).

## 4.2 The Italian DMO’s communication paradox

To understand (RQ2: *How did the Italian DMO navigate the **paradox** between openly invitational and discreetly cautionary FB messages during the first wave of Covid-19?*) has been examined the share of various types of (A) pandemic-affected messages and has been measured the correlation between the messages’ (A) Relation to the pandemic and (B) Message content (Main theme).

To assess the share of messages’ relation to the pandemic have been utilised the results of the content analysis. For the correlation has been utilised SPSS software. The correlation between the variables has been examined with Spearman rho Correlation which is used to assess whether there is an association between two non-metric variables (Hair et al., 2015).

According to the results, the majority of the analysed posts has a relation to the pandemic (Figure 13). 74% of posts were counted as pandemic-affected; among them were **cautionary, invitational, outbound and other pandemic-affected** messages.

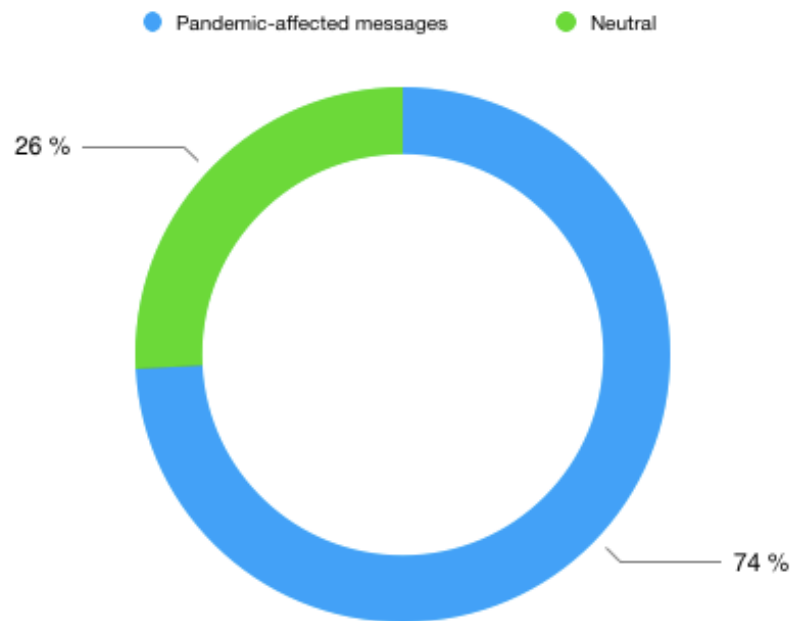


FIGURE 13 Percentage of pandemic-related and neutral posts

Thus, to understand *how* the DMO of Italy navigated the communicational paradox between cautionary and invitational messages has been counted the number of messages with different relation to pandemic (Table 8).

TABLE 8 Distribution of the messages based on relation to pandemic

Relation to pandemic	N of posts	%
Invitational (PA - pandemic-affected)	25	17
Cautionary (PA)	15	10
Outbound (PA)	51	35
Other (PA)	18	12
Neutral	38	26

As it presented in Table 8, the analysed data set included invitational, cautionary, outbound, other pandemic-affected and neutral messages. Initially, were suggested that the message can be 'Invitational', 'Cautionary', 'Other pandemic-affected' or 'Neutral', a more detailed description of the coding procedure is presented in Appendix 1.

However, on the stage of content analysis of the whole data set was discovered a group of the messages that were called as 'Outbound'. The posts allocated into this group contained a key message that can be formulated as 'Italy comes to you'. Thus, as a result, additional recoding has been done in order to draw a distinction between 'Outbound' and 'Other pandemic-affected' messages. The finding of this group has been an unexpected outcome.

The number of the messages allocated into the 'Outbound' group is the highest; it includes 1/3 part of the whole data set. Mainly in the group were included messages with hashtags, for example, #Italycomestoyou, #ItalyComesToYou, #Italycometoyou, #Abruzzocomestoyou. To communicate that Italy comes to travellers the DMO of Italy used various virtual tours, stories about travel destinations, historical facts.

The 'Invitational' group included 25 messages, while 'Cautionary' messages were in the minority - 15 messages. And 18 messages were labelled as 'Other PA'.

In the group, 'Neutral' were included 38 messages. A more detailed overview of the frequency of the messages is presented in Figure 7.

To examine what were the main themes of the pandemic-affected (invitational, cautionary, outbound, other) and neutral messages, has been used the correlation analysis (Table 9).

TABLE 9 Correlations between posts' pandemic relation and the main theme

		Culture, Art & History	Food & Tradi- tions	Collateral themes	Tourist Destina- tions	Events
Invitational	Pearson Corre- lation	-.295	-0,48	-0,68	.347	-0.89
	Sig. (2 tailed)	.000	.565	.410	.000	.284
Cautionary	Pearson Corre- lation	.060	-0.92	.249	-.056	-.068
	Sig. (2 tailed)	.473	.266	.002	.499	.414
Outbound	Pearson Corre- lation	.057	-.127	-.105	.062	-.058
	Sig. (2 tailed)	.496	.127	.205	.455	.486
Other pan- demic-af- fected	Pearson Corre- lation	.030	-.136	-.010	-.049	.246
	Sig. (2 tailed)	.722	.101	.903	.556	.003
Neutral	Pearson Corre- lation	.172	.241	-.102	-.197	-.133
	Sig. (2 tailed)	.038	.003	.219	.017	.109

Spearman rho Correlation was used in order to assess whether the association between the variables of (A) construct 'Relation to the pandemic' and variables of (B) construct 'Main theme' exists. Spearman rho Correlation coefficient ranges from -1.00 to +1.00, where 0 represents no existing correlation and numbers in the range from -1 to +1 represent whether there is a negative or positive association between the variables, while 'Sig. (2 tailed)' demonstrates the level of significance of the correlation (.000 – demonstrates a significant correlation) (Hair et al., 2015).

Based on the results presented in Table 8, has been created Figure 14, which shows the occurred associations between variables in all the posts in ascending order.

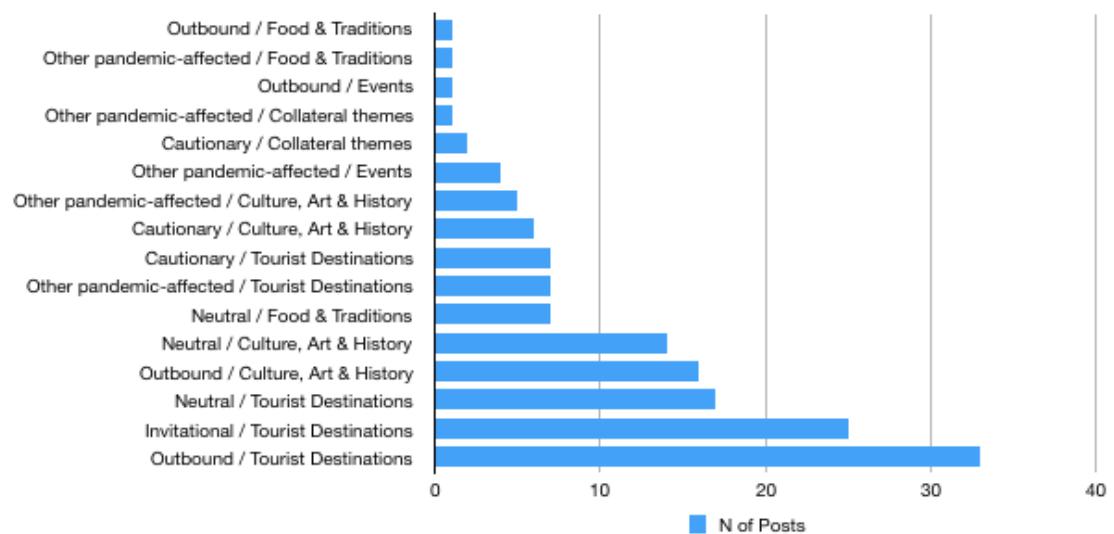


FIGURE 14 Occurred association between relation to pandemic and the main theme in the posts

From the chart (Figure 14) have been excluded variables with null association: Invitational / Culture, Art & History, Invitational / Food & Traditions, Invitational / Collateral themes, Invitational / Events, Cautionary / Food & Traditions, Cautionary / Events, Outbound / Collateral themes, Neutral / Collateral themes, Neutral / Events.

Thus, the most significant correlation has occurred between 'Outbound' and 'Tourist destinations' variables, during the analysed period have been found 33 posts that had the outbound content and the main theme of the posts were tourist destinations in Italy. The second most strong association is 'Invitational' and 'Tourist destinations'. 26 posts of the data set have been allocated into the category. The third most common association in the analysed period is 'Neutral' with 'Tourist destinations', which has 17 posts. It is followed by 'Outbound' and 'Culture, Art & History' - 16 posts.

Associations that have medium correlations are 'Neutral' and 'Culture, Art & History' (14 posts), 'Neutral' and 'Food & Traditions', 'Other pandemic-

affected' and 'Tourist destinations', 'Cautionary' and 'Tourist destinations'- each group has 7 posts. 'Cautionary' and 'Culture, Art & History' (6 posts), 'Other pandemic-affected' and 'Culture, Art & History' (5 posts), 'Other pandemic-affected' and 'Events' (4 posts) and 'Cautionary' and 'Collateral themes' (2 posts).

The least significant correlation has occurred between 'Outbound' and 'Food & Traditions' (1 post), 'Outbound' and 'Events' (1 post), 'Other pandemic-affected' and 'Food & Traditions' (1 post), 'Other pandemic-affected' and 'Collateral themes' (1 post).

Thus, it can be concluded that the DMO of Italy during the first wave of the pandemic, in accordance with the suggested coding scheme, posted invitational (PA), cautionary (PA), outbound (PA), other (PA) and neutral messages. Outbound messages were discovered during the content analysis. With the help of outbound posts, the DMO of Italy delivered a key message 'Italy comes to you'. Therefore, it can be deduced that to navigate the communicational paradox between openly invitational and cautionary messages, the DMO of Italy has chosen to maintain communication via telling that the country comes to travellers in their own country, while, physical travelling is not permitted due to the implemented restrictions.

To communicate pandemic-related and neutral messages were used various main themes. The most common were outbound, invitational and neutral messages with the main theme tourist destination.

### 4.3 User engagement with Italian DMO's Facebook messages

Engagement indicates to which extent organisations engage the public (Shin et al., 2015), and in social media, online engagement is usually measured with likes, comments, and shares (Pino et al., 2018). In social media marketing, engagement rates play an important role, as they help assess the performance of messages and build communicational strategy accordingly (Mariani et al., 2016). Thus, to address the third research question (*How did users engage with the DMO's messages on Facebook?*) this study quantitatively assessed the performance of the messages communicated by the DMO of Italy during the first wave of the pandemic.

Similarly to Pino et al. (2018), has been operationalised users' engagement with each message in terms of likes, comments and shares. On average, each post received 1442 likes (SD=3237.814), 54 comments (SD=149.518), and 509 shares (SD=2174.007). For the messages has been counted an overall indicator of the engagement. Then a series of one-way ANOVAs to establish whether message content- and format-related characteristics, as operationalised by the proposed coding scheme, affected users' engagement with the Facebook messages of Italia.it community (Table 10).

TABLE 10 Users' engagement with the analysed messages

				Likes		Comments		Shares						
Variables	N	%	En.	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD	Df	FEn.	FLikes	FComments	FSh.
<b>Relation to pandemic</b>										4	.366	.378	.211	.390
<b>Invitational</b>	25	17	1416	1343.5	1381.6	41.3	49	313.1	679.1					
<b>Cautionary</b>	15	10	2163	1560.4	2480.9	54.4	76.3	548	1113.3					
<b>Outbound</b>	51	35	2618	1764.2	4941.1	66	227.2	787.3	3488.5					
<b>Other PA</b>	18	12	876	687.6	728.3	33.1	49	155	252.6					
<b>Neutral</b>	38	26	1861	1387.7	2032.2	55	114.5	418	1097.5					
<b>Main theme</b>										4	.426	.554	.339	.283
<b>Culture, art and history</b>	41	28	2634	1811.2	2972.1	71.4	131.4	750.8	1667.1					
<b>Traditions and food</b>	9	6	376	320.1	126.7	14.4	9.5	41.8	16.7					
<b>Collateral themes (practical information for travellers)</b>	3	2	699	581.7	630.8	46	33.1	71	45.3					
<b>Tourist destinations</b>	89	61	1996	1467.7	3614.4	51.4	169.5	476.7	2550.9					
<b>Events</b>	5	3	753	510.8	890.7	27	49.9	215	432.4					
<b>Call to action</b>										1	1.131	1.230	.981	.978
<b>Presence of call to online action</b>	98	67	1662	1233.4	2034.6	45.1	88.4	383.9	1114.2					
<b>Absence of call to action</b>	49	33	2692	1861.2	4822.2	71	227.5	760	3430.9					

<b>Sentence style</b>										2	2.079	1.789	2.476*	2.486*
<b>Affirmative sentence</b>	96	65	149	115	1477	38.	57.	303	862	**p-value < .10				
			8	6.2		7	8							
<b>Exclamatory sentence</b>	29	20	386	244	6546.	108	314	130	4557.					
			0	4.8	7	.21	.5	6.8	3					
<b>Question</b>	22	15	177	137	2025.	47.	57.	358	841.7					
			7	1.2	6	91	1							
<b>Traceability</b>										1	.794	.955	.823	.565
<b>Presence of hashtags</b>	13	90	213	152	3386.	57.	156	553	2281.					
	3		8	7.3	9	4	.7	.1	6					
<b>Absence of hashtags</b>	14	10	751	638	701.1	19.	20.	93.	130.5					
				.2		3	1	3						
<b>Vividness</b>										4	3.982**	3.886**	4.245**	4.080**
<b>Video</b>	10	7	557	362	4725.	122	154	182	2627.	**p-value < .05				
			0	4.6	7		.5	3.7	8					
<b>Link</b>	4	3	573	345	337.8	16.	14.	211	312					
						5	6							
<b>Photo</b>	14	10	102	824	824.7	26	29.	172	335.4					
			2				9	.3						
<b>Photo + Link</b>	10	68	117	984	682.3	31.2	26.	161	169.6					
	0		8	.4			9	.9						
<b>Video + Link</b>	19	13	551	339	7899.	164	381	195	5538.					
			5	2.6	7	.9	.3	7	5					
<b>Language</b>										2	5.202**	4.571**	6.445**	6.049**
<b>English</b>	10	69	134	109	940.8	34.	33.	215	387.9	**p-value < .05				
	2		8	8.6		2	6	.2						
<b>Italian</b>	18	12	120	906	2168	30	60.	269	931.8					
			6	.5			8	.2						
<b>Both (Italian/English)</b>	27	18	502	309	6988.	143	329	178	4830.					
			4	9.6	7	.8	.3	0.4	2					

Note: N - number of posts; % percentage of the total number of posts; En (Engagement) = No. of likes + No. of comments + No. of shares; M - Mean; SD - Standard Deviation.

### *Analyses regarding relation to pandemic (A)*

Outbound messages received the highest engagement rates ( $M = 2618$ ), followed by cautionary ( $M = 2163$ ), neutral ( $M = 1861$ ), invitational ( $M = 1416$ ) and other pandemic-affected ( $M = 876$ ). Users were mainly engaged with likes and shares, while comment rates were low. However, according to received results, relation to pandemic did not affect likes, comments and shares (all  $ps > .81$ ).

### *Analyses regarding messages' content (B)*

The users' engagement rates were higher with the messages posted by Italia.it community with the main theme culture, art and history ( $M = 2634$ ), by liking posts ( $M = 1811.2$ ). Messages with the main theme tourist destination also received high engagement rates ( $M = 1996$ ). Messages with the main theme events received higher engagement rates ( $M = 753$ ) than with collateral themes ( $M = 699$ ). The lowest engagement rates received messages with the main theme traditions and food ( $M = 376$ ). Users engaged with content primary via likes and shares. According to the results of the analysis, the main theme of the messages has not had a significant level of impact on engagement rates ( $ps > .69$ ).

### *Analyses regarding messages' format (C)*

Engagement rates of messages without call to action ( $M = 2692$ ) were higher than of those with call to action ( $M = 1662$ ). However, call to action had no effect on dependent variables. While sentence style of the messages had an effect on comments ( $F = 2.476, p < .10$ ) and shares ( $F = 2.486, p < .10$ ). The highest engagement rates received messages with exclamatory sentence style ( $M = 3860$ ), than affirmative ( $M = 1498$ ) and questions ( $M = 1777$ ).

Hashtags were embedded in 90% of the messages. However, the significance level of its effect on the engagement rates was low ( $ps > .330$ ).

Vivid elements were found in 100% of the analysed posts, and they had an effect on likes ( $F = 3.866, p < .05$ ), comments ( $F = 4.245, p < .05$ ), and shares ( $F = 4.080, p < .05$ ). The highest engagement rates received messages with video as a vivid element ( $M = 5570$ ) and messages with the combination of vivid elements: video + link ( $M = 5515$ ).

Language of the post significantly affected users engagement with the posts ( $F = 4.571, p < .05$ ), comments ( $F = 6.445, p < .05$ ) and shares ( $F = 6.049, p < .05$ ). The majority of the posts were written in the English language 61%, in the Italian language was written 12% of the posts and in both languages were written 18% of the posts. The highest engagement rates received posts written in both English and Italian languages ( $M = 5024$ ).

The following message attracted the highest engagement rate: *'La Fontana di Trevi in una prospettiva mai vista prima. (Il video è stato realizzato durante le riprese di un documentario su Roma) The Trevi fountain in a perspective never seen before. Simply amazing! (The video was filmed during the shooting of a documentary about Rome) Video by: snils*



<https://www.instagram.com/p/B-mVJ2Io4pj/> #BellezzaAdomicilio #Italycomestoyou' (Likes = 34000, Comments = 1600, Shares = 24000). Based on the conducted analysis, it can be concluded that the post received the highest engagement rates due to the usage of the exclamatory sentence, video as a vivid element and was written in both English and Italian languages.

Thus, it can be concluded that users' engagement with the messages posted by Italia.it mainly depends on the message format characteristics. More, sentence style, vivid elements and language contributed to high engagement levels. To increase users' engagement with the posts in terms of comments and shares is recommended to use exclamatory sentence style, video as a vivid element and write messages in both English and Italian languages to increase engagement level in terms of likes, comments and shares.

## 5 DISCUSSION

### 5.1 Italian DMO's Facebook messages

The RQ1 aimed to investigate what messages the DMO in Italy communicated through Facebook during the first wave of the Covid-19 pandemic. To answer has been used manual coding of the selected messages. Analysis of messages has been conducted using the suggested coding scheme (Appendix 1). Thus, was assessed messages' relation to the pandemic (**A**), messages' content (**B**), and messages' format (**C**).

As stated above, the variables of construct (**A**) relation to the pandemic were suggested for the research and have not been used in other studies yet. Thus, the findings cannot be discussed and compared with other research. However, one of the key and unexpected findings were **outbound messages**, the posts with the key message 'Italy comes to you'. Many messages allocated in this group had a hashtag #Italycomestoyou with variations. Recent studies highlighted the importance to investigate the response to the various types of crisis by tourism-related organisations in social media (Fraustino et al., 2017; Ritchie & Jiang, 2019), particularly to the Covid-19 pandemic (Gössling et al., 2020). Avraham and Ketter (2008), suggested message-focused strategies that destinations can use to improve their image during and after a crisis. The strategies were based on the recently conducted case studies; however, recent epidemics did not greatly impact the tourism industry and were not specifically focused on social media communication about the crisis. Thus, the finding of the **outbound messages** supplements the message-oriented strategies suggested by Avraham and Ketter (2008), focusing on social media and can be used by the DMO practitioners to continue communication during the crisis.

The study attempted to build a conceptual model to analyse communication about crisis via Facebook messages. Ritchie and Jiang (2019), state that there is a lack of conceptual models to analyse tourism organisations response to the crisis, and models can be adopted from other disciplines with context-based adjustments. The suggested conceptual model of the study addresses the gap in conceptual models and can be utilised by researchers to analyse the communication of tourism organisations in social media about health emergencies as Covid-19 in terms of (**A**) relation to the pandemic, (**B**) message content and (**C**) message format.

Based on the conducted analysis, it can be concluded that during the first wave of the pandemic of Covid-19, the DMO of Italy communicated invitational (PA), cautionary (PA), outbound (PA), other pandemic-affected and neutral messages. However, priority was given to the outbound messages.

Regarding (**B**) message content, it was found that the DMO of Italy, similarly to the findings of Pino et al. (2018), gave priority to the messages about tourist destinations. However, the share of messages with the main theme practical information (or collateral themes), was much lower (2%) in comparison to

the results (31%) of Pino et al. (2018). The difference may be caused by the implemented restrictions and lack of the efficiency to promote practical information about travelling.

Regarding **(C)** message format characteristics, were used similar variables to the proposed ones by Pino et al. (2018). The results regarding the frequency of usage of hashtags, sentence styles (affirmative, exclamatory and question), vivid elements and language were supported.

The findings of the RQ1 address the gap in studies on how specific disaster type, as health epidemics, is resulting in social media communication during different stages of a disaster (Fraustino et al., 2017), the study analysed communication during the response stage.

Ritchie and Jiang (2019) emphasised that studies about social media usage as a crisis communication tool, with a clear description of the crisis context, are in demand. Thus, the conducted study contributes to the research about the social media communication of tourism organisations in ongoing crises. Besides, the findings supplement the results of the research conducted by Pino et al. (2018), regarding the frequency of usage message content and message format characteristics in the DMO social media communication. Results regarding the main theme of the messages were partially supported. Regarding message format characteristics, the study supported Pino et al. (2018), results in terms of frequency of usage of hashtags, sentence styles, vivid elements, and language. However, results regarding usage of call to action were not supported, as in the analysed data set, call to action was used in the majority of the posts (90%), while in the study conducted by Pino et al. (2018), only 13% of the posts contained a call to action, this can be caused by the differences in the contexts of the studies, as during the pandemic, social media remained the main tool for communication. Thus the DMO attempted to engage users via interactive content.

## 5.2 The Italian DMO's communication paradox

The RQ2 aimed to understand how the DMO of Italy navigated the paradox between openly invitational and discreetly cautionary messages during the first wave of the Covid-19 pandemic. To answer the question were used the results of the manual coding analysis regarding **(A)** relation to pandemic construct. Additionally, has been assessed the correlation between the variables of construct **(A)** relation to the pandemic and the variables of construct **(B)** message content.

During the first wave of the pandemic of Covid-19, the DMO of Italy communicated invitational (PA) (17%), cautionary (PA) (10%), outbound (PA)(35%), other pandemic-affected (12%) and neutral (26%) messages. The share of outbound messages (35%) is higher than shares of all other types of messages.

The key message of the outbound posts is 'Italy comes to you', while invitational posts key message is 'Come to visit Italy' and cautionary posts key message can be formulated as 'Do not come to visit Italy yet'. Thus, the finding

of the outbound messages reveals that the DMO of Italy attempted to navigate the paradox that they faced due to the outbreak of the pandemic by using in their communication mainly outbound messages. formulating a new key message. The communicational paradox has been navigated via communicating that Italy comes to travellers (or tourists) with various messages about the country (i.e. stories about destinations, virtual tours, historical facts) while physical travelling is not permitted due to the active restrictions.

In addition, for deeper exploration of how the paradox has been navigated in the messages, has been examined the correlation between the variables of construct **(A)** relation to the pandemic and the variables of construct **(B)** message content.

The result of the examination showed that to communicate pandemic-related and neutral messages were used various main themes. The most commonly used were outbound, invitational and neutral messages with the main theme tourist destination Based on the finding, together with the findings of RQ1, it can be concluded that, nevertheless, travelling has limited the DMO of Italy from continued to promote tourist destinations on Facebook. However, during the first wave of the pandemic, they were supplemented with the content differently related to the pandemic.

The least commonly used were combinations of outbound messages with the main themes food and traditions/events and other pandemic-affected with food and traditions / collateral themes. Low usage of messages about events and collateral themes can be explained by the temporal suspension caused by implementing the restrictive measures. However, regarding low usage of food and traditions as the main theme, it can be concluded that to navigate the paradox, the DMO preferred to not switch from the promotion of the destinations to the promotion of local traditions.

The practitioners can utilise the findings for planning communication with the users in the times when pandemic-affected and neutral messages have to be communicated.

Due to the novelty of the occurred crisis, no studies exploring the navigation of the paradox in social media were found. However, in the recent studies, researchers emphasised the necessity of in-depth exploration of crisis communication in social media (Fraustino et al., 2017), with a specification of the type of crisis (Ritchie & Jiang, 2019).

Thus, the findings of the RQ2, together with findings of RQ1, address the gap in studies about the role of social media in destination marketing during the crisis and disasters (Fraustino et al., 2017; Ritchie & Jiang, 2019). Moreover, as the study assessed the communication of the DMO during the first wave of the Covid-19 pandemic, the findings of the study correspond to the call for studies about the effect of the pandemic on tourism (Gössling et al., 2020; Zenker & Kock, 2020). Finally, the study supplements the recent studies that applied paradox theory to explore the pandemic effect (Lapointe, 2020; Sharma et al., 2021).

### 5.3 Users' engagement with Italian DMO's Facebook messages

The RQ3 aimed to explore how did users respond to the analysed messages in terms of engagement. The methodology to assess the engagement rates has been adopted from the studies conducted by Pino et al. (2018), and Pletikosa Cvijikj & Michaelles (2013). To answer the question has been assessed the influence of the variables of constructs **(A)** relation to the pandemic, **(B)** message content and **(C)** message format on the construct **(D)** engagement.

Regarding the construct **(A)** relation to the pandemic, there were not found recent studies that assessed its effect on engagement rates. However, the study attempted to explore its effect on engagement rates. Users engaged much more with outbound messages than with any other type of messages. The second most engaging group of messages were cautionary messages, followed by neutral, invitational and other pandemic-affected messages. According to the study results, the message's relation to the pandemic does not have a significant effect on the number of likes, comments and shares. Nevertheless, the effect of the variable on engagement rates can be studied in other real-life settings for making generalisations.

Pino et al. (2018), and Pletikosa Cvijikj & Michaelles (2013), suggested that **(B)** message content, as the main theme of the message, affects users' engagement with the message. However, the findings of the conducted study did not support the results of the recent studies, as the main theme of the message did not have a significant effect on the engagement rates. Nonetheless, according to the results, the highest engagement rates received messages communicating about culture, art and history, followed by tourist destinations. Whereas the lowest number of likes, comments and shares received messages communicating collateral themes and food and traditions. This finding does not support the results of the research conducted by Lei et al. (2016), which has found that messages with the main theme practical information (or collateral themes) receive the highest engagement rates. The implemented restrictions can explain the difference during the researched period and lack of relevance of the collateral themes for tourists.

Thus, the findings suggest that the engagement rates of the messages are not always significantly affected by the main theme of the message. However, the findings across the studies are not consistent regarding the most engaging theme of the messages (Lei et al., 2016; Pino et al., 2018), including the findings of this study. The difference may be explained by the difference in the contexts of the studies. However, further investigation of the topic is required for generalisations.

Finally, the effect of the variables of construct **(C)** message format on **(D)** engagement has been assessed. Similarly to the results received by Pino et al. (2018), call to action (CTA) did not affect engagement rates. This finding does not support the results of the research conducted by Lei et al. (2016), where the presence of a call to action positively affected engagement rates. However, it supports Pino et al. (2018) finding that the absence or presence of a

call to action does not significantly impact the users' engagement. The difference may be caused by the difference of the studied organisations, as research conducted by Lei et al. (2016), investigated users' engagement with the messages communicated by integrated resorts, while a study conducted by Pino et al. (2018), and current study analysed messages communicated by the DMO. The research has found that sentence styled as exclamations receive higher engagement rates. The finding supports the findings of Pino et al. (2018). The research also supported the finding of Pino et al. (2018), that the presence or absence of hashtags does not affect engagement rates of the messages and that language of the messages affect users' engagement. However, in the study conducted by Pino et al. (2018), the effect of the language of the message on engagement has been studied on Twitter. Finally, recent studies (Pino et al., 2018; Pletikosa Cvijikj & Michahelles, 2013; Sabate et al., 2014; Su et al., 2015) have found that the incorporation of vivid elements in the messages positively affects the engagement rates. Results of the conducted study supported the recent findings. The highest engagement rates received messages with the incorporation of video as a vivid element.

The findings of the RQ3 supplement the findings of the studies that investigated the effect of the message-related characteristics on users' engagement conducted by Lei et al. (2016), Pino et al. (2018), Pletikosa Cvijikj & Michaelles (2013), and Su et al. (2015).

Furthermore, the findings address the gap in studies about users' engagement with different types of messages during crises and disaster, particularly about messages shared by users (Fraustino et al., 2017).

## 6 CONCLUSIONS

Overall, the conducted study made a thorough analysis to understand how the destination marketing organisation (DMO) in Italy navigated the paradox between inviting foreigners to visit Italy and telling them not to visit Italy yet because of the pandemic. Hence, the initially stated research goal was achieved, and valuable findings related to social media communication of the DMO during the crisis and its effect on engagement were provided, both for theory and practice.

### 6.1 Theoretical contributions

As mentioned earlier, the study's findings support the prior theoretical knowledge, although several distinctions were identified. Regarding the theoretical contributions of the study, some valuable findings were made concerning the communicational paradox navigation of tourism organisations on Facebook.

First of all, the study addresses the gap in studies of the role of social media in destination marketing during crises and disasters. Recent research has mentioned that studies exploring social media communication of specific organisations in various crises and disasters settings are in demand (Fraustino et al., 2017; Ritchie & Jiang, 2019).

The study attempted to investigate the messages communicated by tourism organisations during the crisis, how they were related to the pandemic, and what effect relation to the pandemic, message content, and format had on users' engagement. For investigation has been developed a conceptual model. Thus, the study addresses the gap in conceptual foundations and empirically tested models, highlighted by Ritchie & Jiang (2019). The model can be utilised for further studies, analysing the social media communication of tourism organisations and their effect on users' engagement.

Research has found that the DMO of Italy, to navigate the paradox between openly invite and caution tourists, used an unusual key message of the posts' Italy comes to you'. The finding of the communicated key messages may contribute to the studies investigating crisis response messages' characteristics (Avraham & Ketter, 2008).

The study approached the effect of the Covid-19 pandemic on the communication of the DMO with a paradox lens. Sharma et al. (2021), suggested that the studies utilising the paradox lens to explore the effects of a pandemic on various industries may challenge the paradox theory itself. However, the study did not attempt to challenge the paradox theory, as the study analysed the paradox the organisation faced, where the paradox theory is efficient. Thus, the study supplemented studies that apply the paradox lens to explore and analyse the Covid-19 pandemic effects (Lapointe, 2020; Sharma et al., 2021).

Furthermore, the study supplemented the research findings to assess the effect of social media message content and format characteristics on online engagement (Pino et al., 2018; Pletikosa Cvijikj & Michahelles, 2013; Sabate et al., 2014; Su et al., 2015). The research results did not support a recent finding that the main theme of the message affects engagement rates. However, the research findings supported the results of previous studies regarding message format characteristics effect on user engagement (Pino et al., 2018; Pletikosa Cvijikj & Michahelles, 2013; Sabate et al., 2014; Su et al., 2015).

Finally, as was mentioned before, the study aimed to assess the communication of the DMO during the first wave of the Covid-19 pandemic. Thus, the study addresses the call for researches about the effect of the pandemic on the tourism industry, mentioned in the recent papers by Gössling et al. (2020) and Zenker & Kock (2020). It can also be concluded that the study results may serve as a valuable source for prospective studies investigating the effect of the Covid-19 pandemic on the communication of destination marketing organisations or others.

In the next section will be discussed in detail the practical implications of the research findings.

## 6.2 Managerial implications

The study attempted to conduct an in-depth analysis of the communication of Italian DMO in times of restrictions during the Covid-19 pandemic. Due to the novelty of the context, the study has valuable managerial implications for the DMO practitioners responsible for planning and maintaining Facebook communication with the target audience, particularly in times of travel restrictions and health emergency.

As discussed earlier, a crisis is a sudden and unpredictable event that requires from organisation specific crisis communication strategy, and the choice of the strategy depends on the level of responsibility of the organisation for crisis (Cornelissen, 2017). In case of disasters, as a pandemic, an organisation is not responsible. However, it affects the operational cycles and, as a consequence, requires some adjustments in communication (Perry, 2007).

There were not found recent studies that explored navigation of communicational paradox in social media by the DMO in the circumstances of the ongoing pandemic and travel restrictions that jeopardised the key goal of organisations. Five groups of the messages' relation to pandemic were suggested to understand how the DMO of Italy integrated the communication about the pandemic into their messages after the preliminary analysis: invitational pandemic-affected, cautionary pandemic-affected, outbound pandemic-affected, other pandemic-affected and neutral. The outbound messages were discovered during the secondary analysis of the data set. To the suggested category belong posts with the key message 'Italy comes to you', referring to the implemented travel restrictions when tourists are not able to come to visit the destination. The analysis of the messages proved that suggested categories might be used to



categorise messages. As Nielsen (2001), states promotion of a destination is always a difficult task, and it becomes even more challenging during crisis or disaster. Thus, the content analysis results may serve as a useful source for practitioners for planning the communication in similar crisis settings to continue the promotion of the destination.

Content-wise, the study's findings did not support the results of the previous research that attempted to analyse the effect of messages' content on engagement (Lei et al., 2016; Pino et al., 2018; Pletikosa Cvijikj & Michahelles, 2013). Thus, Lei et al. (2016), have found that messages with collateral themes (practical information) receive the highest engagement rates. However, the study's findings have shown that posts communicating about culture, art, and history receive higher engagement rates. The finding can be valuable for practitioners in planning communication content during periods of restrictions.

Findings regarding format characteristics of the messages and their effect on the engagement rates supported previous studies (Pino et al., 2018; Pletikosa Cvijikj & Michahelles, 2013; Sabate et al., 2014; Su et al., 2015). The study has found that such message-format characteristics as sentence style, the language of the messages and incorporation of vivid elements positively affect engagement rates of the messages. In contrast, the presence or absence of call to action (CTA) and hashtags do not significantly impact users' engagement with the messages. The findings of the study support Pino et al. (2018), finding that sentences styled as exclamations receive higher engagement rates than sentences styled as questions or affirmations. Besides, Pino et al. (2018), studied the effect of the language of the posts on the engagement on Twitter and has found that the choice of language positively affects users' engagement if they are written in the mother tongue of the users. The study has found that the messages written both in English and Italian receive a higher level of online engagement, thus can be concluded that the audience of the community consists of Italian and English-speaking people, and it is wise for practitioners to incorporate posts written in both English and Italian languages to increase engagement rates. Finally, incorporating the vivid elements positively affects users' engagement (Pino et al., 2018; Pletikosa Cvijikj & Michahelles, 2013; Sabate et al., 2014; Su et al., 2015). However, the highest engagement rates receive messages with the incorporation of videos as vivid elements. Therefore, the research findings may help practitioners navigate their choice of the message format characteristics to increase users' engagement with the posts.

To summarise, various aspects of the messages communicated by the DMO in social media have to be considered for the promotion of the destination effectively during the ongoing crisis. The empirical findings of this study support the findings of the previous research. The social media communication of the tourism organisation plays a vital role in place promotion and serves as a valuable source for practitioners in planning the communication during a similar crisis. However, as in all studies, the research's quality has to be evaluated to identify its limitations and, consequently, to propose avenues for further investigation. Thus, the research evaluation, research limitations and future research suggestions are discussed in the following sections of the chapter..

### 6.3 Research evaluation

Bryman (2012), suggests that the most commonly used criteria for evaluating social research are its **reliability**, **replicability** and **validity**. The research can be considered reliable if the other researcher can repeat the research results at a different time but with the same measures. Replicability of the study refers to the possibility of its replication, whether the study can be replicated. Finally, the validity of the research refers to the integrity of the research results (Bryman, 2012), or how well the conclusions capture the nature of researched phenomenon (Eriksson & Kovalainen, 2008).

All the steps of the research conduction are described in detail in the 'Data and research method' chapter of this thesis to ensure the reliability and replicability of the study. In addition, the coding book utilised for the data collection and qualitative analysis is provided in the appendices to enable replicability of the study. Naturally, in the case of replication of the study, the findings would slightly differ, depending on the selection of the destination marketing organisation to study and time frames and the content they communicated. Furthermore, a detailed description of methodological choices and considerations is presented in the thesis. The methods and criteria for analysis of the collected data were discussed in this thesis as well. Finally, the intercoder reliability testing, which was also described in details in the 'Data and research method' chapter of this thesis, was conducted to ensure the reliability of the research. The reliability test results showed a sufficient percentage of agreement between the two coders. Thus, the reliability of the data analysis and research findings was ensured.

Eriksson and Kovalainen (2008), suggest that to ensure the validity of the research can be adopted various forms of triangulation, including a combination of qualitative and quantitative research methods in the same study. Thus, in the case of the study, validity was achieved by the adoption of qualitative and quantitative analysis techniques. Besides, measures used in the research were adapted from the recently conducted studies. Nevertheless, some were modified and added to fit the context of this research.

In conclusion, the study reached its main goal and answered all three research questions. In addition, the findings of the research provided both theoretical and managerial implications. The findings of the current research can serve both for theory and practice. Nevertheless, the study naturally has some limitations, which will be discussed in the following section of the chapter.

### 6.4 Research limitations

For the study has been selected a single case study as a research strategy. Therefore, the study has a number of limitations that are common for the case studies.

One of the main case study limitations is generalisability. The findings cannot be generalised as a single case study was used to analyse the response of specific DMO in specific real-life settings (Saunders et al., 2019). Thus, the study has focused on analysing the Facebook communication of Italian DMO during the first wave of the Covid-19 pandemic. In order to make generalisations, research can be replicated to analyse the communication of other DMOs in the same real-life settings on Facebook.

As was mentioned above, the study focuses only on Facebook communication. However, the DMO of Italy has accounts on other social media platforms. Thus, the research results cannot be generalised to the overall social media communication of DMO.

Another issue important to mention is related to the selected period. The study is focused on the first wave of pandemic and does not analyse communication and its performance during the other stages of the pandemic or before. Thus, the findings of the research cannot be generalised for the whole period of the pandemic.

There is also an issue of objectivity. Even though the criteria used for this study to assess messages were based on the previous research, for the purposes of the study, not all possible message characteristics were utilised. However, in order to confirm message characteristics has been conducted intercoder reliability test. The results of the test ensured that the views of both researchers are alike.

In addition, in the study, the level of online engagement has been assessed using quantitative data. However, no in-depth analysis of comments and liking, as Facebook enables various reactions to the posted messages, has been conducted.

Naturally, the research had a number of limitations. However, as it was mentioned before, all in all, the research provided valuable theoretical and managerial implications. While the mentioned above limitations bring future research suggestions, which will be discussed in the following section.

## **6.5 Future research suggestions**

The coronavirus (Covid-19) outbreak is one of the most impactful events of recent years for many industries and the tourism industry (Zenker & Kock, 2020). As Zenker & Kock (2020), state such paradigm-shifts moments are the most valuable ones, and they enable a number of new research avenues.

As the study has been focused on communication of the Italian DMO during the first wave of the pandemic, the study had its limitations, and findings cannot be generalised. However, the study can be replicated to analyse the response of other countries' tourism organisations to approve or disapprove that the findings of this study can be generalised.

The study attempted to analyse messages and engagement on Facebook. However, similar research can be conducted for other social media platform in the same real-life settings or during the different stages of the pandemic.

Due to the length of the coronavirus pandemic, the study results can be supplemented with the comparative analysis of the communication on the different stages of the pandemic. Such analysis can bring valuable insights for social media crisis communication in tourism on different stages.

Similarly to Pino et al. (2018), the study was focused on message-related characteristics rather than user-related characteristics. However, the research can be continued with an in-depth analysis of users responses to the communicated messages (e.g. thematic or content analysis of the messages) in the same period. Such analysis may enable valuable insights regarding the expectations of stakeholders and supplement the results of the study.

Moreover, the research findings did not support content-wise findings of the previous researches conducted by Lei et al. (2016), Pino et al. (2018), Pletikosa Cvijikj & Michaelles (2013). Thus, further in-depth investigation of the messages' content communicated by the DMO in crisis and its effect on engagement can be conducted.

Finally, Zenker & Kock (2020), suggest that after the pandemic image of the tourist destinations can be affected. Thus, tourism organisations need to assess the image of the destination after the pandemic. Therefore, studies about Italy's perceived and projected image in the post-pandemic period can be valuable, and the findings of the current study can be used to understand the projected image of Italy during the pandemic.

## REFERENCES

- Akehurst, G. (2009). User generated content: The use of blogs for tourism organisations and tourism consumers. *Service Business*, 3(1), 51-61.
- Avraham, E. (2015). Destination image repair during crisis: Attracting tourism during the arab spring uprisings . *Tourism Management*, 47, 224-232.
- Avraham, E., & Ketter, E. (2008). *Media strategies for marketing places in crisis* . Oxford: Butterworth-Heinemann.
- BBC. (2020a). *Coronavirus: Italy extends emergency measures nationwide*. <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-51810673>
- BBC. (2020b). *Coronavirus: Italy's conte offers hope as travel restrictions end*. <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-52914089>
- Bosio, B., Haselwanter, S., & Ceipek, M. (2018). The utilization of social media market-ing in destination management organizations . *6th International OFEL Conference on Governance, Management and Entrepreneurship. New Business Models and Institutional Entrepreneurs: Leading Disruptive Change*. pp. 249-268.
- Bryman, A. (2012). *Social research methods* (4th ed.). United States, New York: Oxford University Press.
- Coombs, W. T. (2015). *Ongoing crisis communication: Planning, managing, and responding* (4th ed.). Thousand Oaks, California: Sage.
- Coombs, W. T., Clayes, A., & Holladay, S. (2018). Social media's value in a crisis: Channel effect or stealing thunder? . In L. Austin, & Y. Jin (Eds.), *Social media and crisis communication* (pp. 159-168). New York: Routledge.
- Cornelissen, J. P. (2017). *Corporate communication: A guide to theory and practice* (5th edition). London: SAGE Publications Ltd.
- Davalos, S., Merchant, A., Rose, G. M., Lessley, B. J., & Teredesai, A. M. (2015). "The good old days": An examination of nostalgia in facebook posts. *International Journal of Human-Computer Studies*, 83(November), 83-93.
- Dolan, R., Conduit, J., Fahy, J., & Goodman, S. (2016). Social media engagement behaviour: A uses and gratifications perspective. *Journal of Strategic Marketing*, 24(3-4), 261-277.

- Eriksson, P., & Kovalainen, A. (2008). *Qualitative methods in business research*. Los Angeles, [Calif.]; London: SAGE.
- European Observatory on Health Systems and Policies, Merkur, S., Maresso, A., Cylus, J., & Van Ginneken, E. (2020). Lessons from the first wave: The COVID-19 health system response monitor (HSPM) an evidence resource and a source of analysis. *Eurohealth.*, 26 (2), 5-9. Retrieved from <https://apps.who.int/iris/handle/10665/336282>
- Foroudi, P., Gupta, S., Kitchen, P., Foroudi, M. M., & Nguyen, B. (2016). A framework of place branding, place image, and place reputation: Antecedents and moderators. *Qualitative Market Research: An International Journal*, Vol. 19, No. 2, 241-264.
- Fraustino, J. D., Liu, F. B., & Jin, Y. (2017). Social media use during disasters: A research synthesis and road map. In L. L. Austin, & Y. Jin (Eds.), *Social media and crisis communication* (pp. 283-296). New York, NY: Taylor & Francis.
- Gössling, S., Scott, D., & Hall, C. M. (2020). Pandemics, tourism and global change: A rapid assessment of COVID-19. *Null*, , 1-20. doi:10.1080/09669582.2020.1758708
- Gretzel, U., Yuan, Y., & Fesenmaier, D. (2000). Preparing for the new economy: Advertising strategies and change in destination marketing organizations. *Journal of Travel Research*, 39(2), 146-156. doi:10.1177/004728750003900204
- Hair, J. F., Wolfinbarger, M. E., Money, A. H., Samouel, P., & Page, M. J. (2015). *The essentials of business research methods* (Third ed.). London: Routledge.
- Hanna, S., & Rowley, J. (2008). An analysis of terminology use in place branding . *Place Brand Public Dipl*, 4, 61-75. doi:<https://doi.org/10.1057/palgrave.pb.6000084>
- Harden, L., & Heyman, B. (2009). *Digital engagement: Internet marketing that captures customers and builds intense brand loyalty*. New York, NY: AMACOM.
- Hays, S., Page, S. J., & Buhalis, D. (2012). Social media as a destination marketing tool: Its use by national tourism organisations. *Current Issues in Tourism*, doi:10.1080/13683500.2012.662215
- Italia.it. (2021). *Legal information*.<http://www.italia.it>
- Ketter, E. (2016). Destination image restoration on facebook: The case study of nepal's gorkha earthquake. *Journal of Hospitality and Tourism Management*, 28, 66-72.

- Kim, S., Lee, K. Y., Shin, S. I., & Yang, S. (2017). Effects of tourism information quality in social media on destination image formation: The case of sina weibo. *Information & Management*, 54(6), 687-702.
- Lapointe, D. (2020). Reconnecting tourism after COVID-19: The paradox of alterity in tourism areas. *Tourism Geographies*, doi:10.1080/14616688.2020.1762115
- Lei, S. S. M., Pratt, S., & Wang, D. (2016). Factors influencing customer engagement with branded content in the social network sites of integrated resorts. *Asia Pacific Journal of Tourism Research*, 22(3), 316–328.
- Lewis, M. (2000). Exploring paradox: Toward a more comprehensive guide . *Academy of Management Review*, 25, 760 -776.
- Lombard, M., Snyder-Duch, J., & Bracken, C. C. (2002). Content analysis in mass communication: Assessment and reporting of intercoder reliability. *Human Communication Research*, 28(4), 587–604.
- Mantere, S., & Ketokivi, M. (2013). Reasoning in organization science. *The Academy of Management Review*, Vol. 38, No. 1, 70-89.
- Mariani, M., Di Felice, M., & Mura, M. (2016). Facebook as a destination marketing tool: Evidence from Italian regional destination management organizations. *tourism management*.54 (June), 321–343.
- Molina-Azorin, J. F., Bergh, D. D., Corley, K. G., & Ketchen, J., D.J. (2017). Mixed methods in the organizational sciences: Taking stock and moving forward. *Organizational Research Methods*, Vol. 20, No. 2, 179–192.
- Nielsen, C. (2001). *Tourism and the media*. Melbourne: Hospitality Press.
- Noguti, V. (2016). Post language and user engagement in online content communities. *European Journal of Marketing*, 50(5/6), 695–723.
- Oliveira, A., & Huertas, A. (2019). How do destinations use twitter to recover their images after a terrorist attack? *Journal of Destination Marketing & Management*, 12, 46-54.
- Page, S., Yeoman, I., Munro, C., Connell, J., & Walker, L. (2006). A case study of best practice – visit scotland's prepared response to an influenza pandemic. *Tourism Management*, 27, 361-393.
- Palen, L., & Hughes, L. A. (2018). Social media in disaster communication. In H. Rodriguez, W. Donner & E. J. Trainor (Eds.), *Handbook of disaster research (2nd edition)* (pp. 498-518). WI, USA: Springer International Publishing.

- Perry, R. W. (2007). What is a crisis? . In H. Rodriguez, E. L. Quarantelli & R. R. Dynes (Eds.), *Handbook of disaster research* (pp. 1-15). New York, NY: Springer.
- Perry, R. W. (2018). Defining disaster: An evolving concept. In H. Rodriguez, W. Donner & E. J. Trainor (Eds.), *Handbook of disaster research (2nd edition)* (pp. 3-23). WI, USA: Springer International Publishing.
- Pike, S. (2008). *Destination marketing. an integrated marketing communication approach*. Oxford: Butterworth-Heinemann.
- Pike, S., & Page, S. J. (2014). Destination marketing organizations and destination marketing: A narrative analysis of the literature. *Tourism Management*, 41, 202-227. doi:<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tourman.2013.09.009>
- Pino, G., Peluso, A. M., Del Vecchio, P., Ndou, V., Passiante, G., & Guido, G. (2018). A methodological framework to assess social media strategies of event and destination management organizations. *Journal of Hospitality Marketing & Management*, doi:10.1080/19368623.2018.1516590
- Pletikosa Cvijikj, I., & Michahelles, F. (2013). Online engagement factors on facebook brand pages. *Social Network Analysis and Mining*, doi:10.1007/s13278-013-0098-8
- Quarantelli, E. L. (2005). A social science research agenda for the disasters of the 21st century. In R. W. Perry, & E. L. Quarantelli (Eds.), *What is a disaster? new answers to old questions* (pp. 325-396). Philadelphia, PA: Xlibris.
- Ritchie, B. W., & Jiang, Y. (2019). A review of research on tourism risk, crisis and disaster management: Launching the annals of tourism research curated collection on tourism risk, crisis and disaster management. *Annals of Tourism Research*, 79, 102812. doi:10.1016/j.annals.2019.102812
- Roque, V., & Raposo, R. (2016). Social media as a communication and marketing tool in tourism: An analysis of online activities from international key player DMO. *Null*, 27(1), 58-70. doi:10.1080/13032917.2015.1083209
- Sabate, F., Berbegal-Mirabent, J., Canabate, A., & Lebherz, P. R. (2014). Factors influencing popularity of branded content in facebook fan pages. *European Management Journal*, 32(6), 1001-1011.
- Saunders, M. N. K., Lewis, P., & Thornhill, A. (2019). *Research methods for business students* (8th. ed.). New York: Pearson.



- Sharma, G., Bartunek, J., Buzzanell, P. M., Carmine, S., Endres, C., Etter, M., et al. (2021). A paradox approach to societal tensions during the pandemic crisis. *Journal of Management Inquiry*, 30(2), 121-137. doi:10.1177/1056492620986604
- Shin, W., Pang, A., & Kim, H. J. (2015). Building relationships through integrated online media: Global organizations' use of brand web sites, facebook, and twitter. *Journal of Business and Technical Communication*, , 1-37. doi:10.1177/1050651914560569
- Smith, K. W., & Lewis, M. (2011). Toward A theory of paradox: A dynamic equilibrium model of organizing. *The Academy of Management Review*, 36 (2), 381-402. doi:10.5465/AMR.2011.59330958
- Smith, K. W., & Tracey, P. (2016). Institutional complexity and paradox theory: Complementarities of competing demands. *Strategic Organization*, , 1-12. doi:10.1177/1476127016638565
- Statista. (2020). *Most popular social networks worldwide as of october 2020, ranked by number of active users*. Retrieved 15 January, 2021, from <https://www.statista.com/statistics/272014/global-social-networks-ranked-by-number-of-users/>
- Statista. (2021). *Total contribution of travel and tourism to GDP in italy from 1999 to 2019*. Retrieved 19 Mar, 2021, from <https://www.statista.com/statistics/627988/tourism-total-contribution-to-gdp-italy/>
- Su, N., Reynolds, D., & Sun, B. (2015). How to make your facebook posts attractive: A case study of a leading budget hotel brand fan page. *International Journal of Contemporary Hospitality Management*, 27(8), 1772-1790.
- Swani, K., Milne, G. R., Brown, B. P., Assaf, G., & Donthu, N. (2017). What messages to post? evaluating the popularity of social media communications in business versus consumer markets. *Industrial Marketing Management*, 62(April), 77-87.
- UNWTO. (2019). *UNWTO tourism definitions*. Madrid: UNWTO.
- WHO. (2020). *World health organisation events as they happen. rolling updates on coronavirus disease (COVID-19)*. <https://www.who.int/emergencies/diseases/novel-coronavirus-2019/events-as-they-happen>
- WHO, European Commission Directorate-General Sante & European Observatory on Health Systems and Policy. (2021). *Health system response monitor*. Retrieved 22 March, 2021, from <https://www.covid19healthsystem.org/searchandcompare.aspx>

- WTTC. (2020). *Corona virus brief: April 14 2020*.[https://wttc.org/Portals/0/Documents/WTTC%20Coronavirus%20Brief%20External%2014\\_04.pdf?ver=2020-04-15-081805-253](https://wttc.org/Portals/0/Documents/WTTC%20Coronavirus%20Brief%20External%2014_04.pdf?ver=2020-04-15-081805-253)
- Xiang, Z., & Gretzel, U. (2010). Role of social media in online travel information search. *Tourism Management*, 31(2), 179-188.
- Zenker, S., & Kock, F. (2020). The coronavirus pandemic – A critical discussion of a tourism research agenda. *Tourism Management*, 81, 104164. doi:<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tourman.2020.104164>

## APPENDIX 1: CODING BOOK

### 1 Instructions

As a participant in the intercoder reliability testing for the study that aims to understand how, during the Covid-19 pandemic, the DMO (Destination Marketing Organisation) in Italy used Facebook to navigate the paradox between (a) inviting foreigners to visit Italy and (b) telling them not to visit Italy yet because of the pandemic, you are expected to analyse and then code the organisation's Facebook posts. For analysis you are asked to follow the steps listed below:

- You will be provided with the data – Facebook posts of DMO of Italy (Facebook community name is Italia.it);
- Please analyse the posts manually according to the Excel file provided by the researcher;
- Before coding, please, familiarise yourself with the purpose and description of the study.

### 2 Thesis objective and research questions

As mentioned before, the research aims to understand how, during the Covid-19 pandemic, the DMO in Italy used Facebook to navigate the paradox between (a) inviting foreigners to visit Italy and (b) telling them not to visit Italy yet because of the pandemic. To achieve the aim of the research, the following research questions (RQs) have been formulated:

*RQ1: What messages did the DMO in Italy communicate through Facebook during the first wave of the Covid-19 pandemic?*

*RQ2: How did the Italian DMO navigate the **paradox** between openly invitational and discreetly cautionary FB messages during the first wave of Covid-19?*

*RQ3: How did users respond to these FB messages in terms of online **engagement**?*

The research utilises mixed-methods. More specifically, to analyse messages that were communicated by DMO in Italy on Facebook during the first wave of the pandemic, the collected data set will be analysed qualitatively, using the developed coding book. To understand how the DMO of Italy navigated in communication the paradox between invitational and cautionary messages regarding travel restrictions to the destination, firstly content analysis will be used and then its relation with the main theme of the messages will be assessed. Finally, to analyse how users respond to these FB messages in terms of online engagement will be analysed influence of message characteristics on online engagement with such metrics as likes, comments and shares.

## 3 Methodology

### 1.1. Content analysis

Following mentioned above aim of the research and research questions both qualitative and quantitative research methods will be used in this study. The conceptual model of the research is presented below (Figure 1).

As the first two research questions are related to the analysis of social media text-based posts, in accordance with previous studies (Pino et al., 2018; Pletikosa Cvijikj & Michahelles, 2013), manual content analysis has been selected as the most appropriate method. Accordingly, to understand the connections between elements of relation to the pandemic and main theme of the posts and the impact of various message characteristics on posts engagement metrics quantitative analysis will be used.

More specifically, to answer (RQ1) manual content analysis will be used. To answer (RQ2) will be utilised manual content analysis, and relationships between variables will be examined with correlation analysis in SPSS. While to answer (RQ3) quantitative analysis will be used, the relationships between independent and numerical dependent variables are to be assessed using one-way ANOVA. Thus, mainly the coding book is used to answer (RQ1) and (RQ2), and to collect metric data to answer (RQ3).

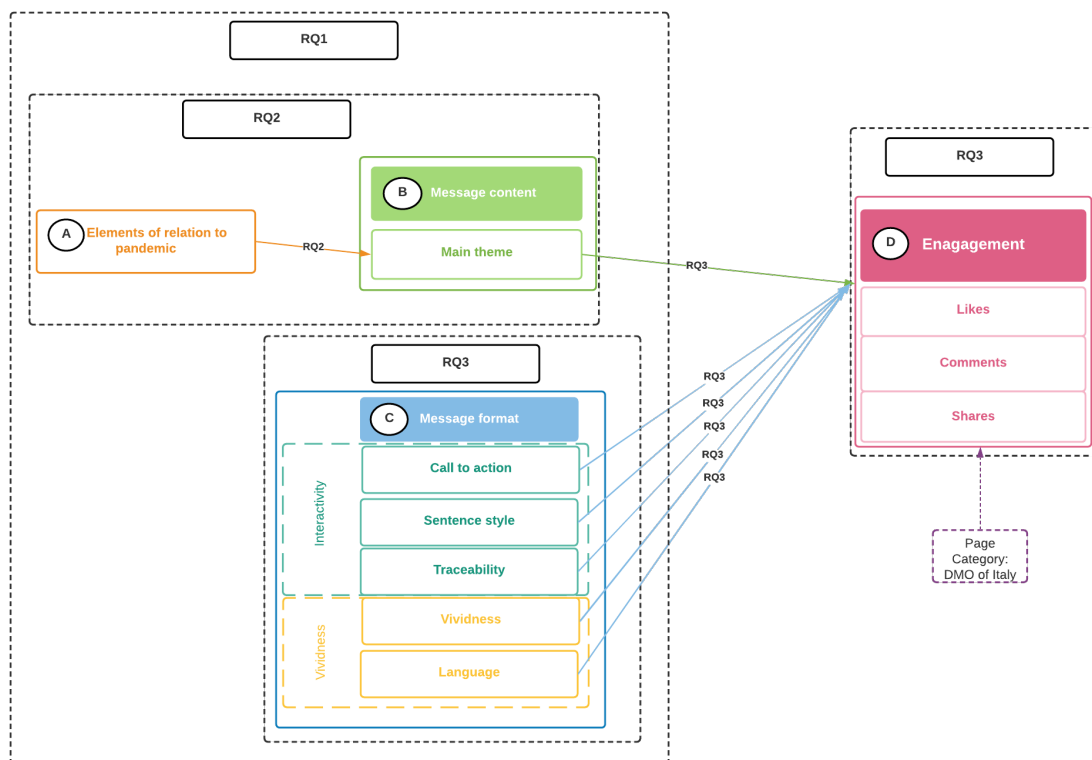


Figure 1. Conceptual model of the study

### 3.2 Case selection

The outbreak of the Covid-19 disease has affected many live and economic industries, particularly tourism (WTTC, 2020). Due to the travel restrictions to the national territory implemented by 166 countries, touristic organisations, as DMO faced an organising paradox because they could not perform one of their main tasks – to attract visitors. For the study has been selected Italy as (1) it was one of the first European country implemented travel restrictions and (2) tourism in Italy plays one of the key roles for the national economy. For the study have been selected Facebook posts posted in the community of Italian DMO – Italia.it. The data set consists of 147 posts from the 10th of March till the 3rd of June 2020. The period has been selected due to the implementation of travel restrictions, which started on the 10th of March and have been eased on the 3rd of June 2020.

### 3.3 Data collection

For the data collection has been created Excel file that consists of three sheets: 'Book', 'Sheet', and 'All posts' (Figure 1).

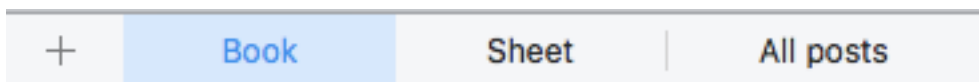


Figure 1. Excel file structure

**Sheet 1 - 'Book'.** Consists of a table with coding rules. The primary goal of the sheet is to explain the logic of coding and to help the researcher during the intercoder reliability test to navigate the choice because in the table are also included examples of postscripts. On this sheet, no actual coding has to be done. The table is divided into four sections: 'Post main info' that consists of: the Coded name of the post, N of likes, N of comments and N of shares; 'Elements of relation to pandemic' (A); 'Message content' (B): main theme (Table 1); and 'Message format' (C): Interactivity (call to action, sentence style, traceability) and Vividness (vividness and language) (Table 2).

Post main info		
Coded name of the post		
N likes		
N comments		
N shares		
Message components	Coding scheme	Instances
(A) Elements of relation to pandemic		
Elements of relation to pandemic		
	1.	Invitational (contains a call to visit)
	2.	Cautionary (tries to say that visit has to be postponed, suggests alternative way to visit Italy)
	3.	Pandemic-affected (e.g. any message shaped by pandemic but nor promotional nor cautionary)
	4.	Neutral (does not have any connection to the pandemic it can simply promote Italy)
	5.	Outbound (posts with the key message Italy comes to you, e.g. has hashtags #Italycomestotou)
(B) Message Content		
Main theme		
	1.	Culture, art and history
	2.	Traditions and food
	3.	Collateral themes (practical information for travellers)
	4.	Tourist destinations
	5.	Events

Table 1. Sheet one of the Excel file – ‘Book’

(C) Message Format			
Interactivity			
Call to action			
	to engage with content e.g. to open link, to download app, to watch video	1.	Presence of call to online action
		2.	Absence of call to action
Sentence style			
		1.	Affirmative sentence
		2.	Exclamatory sentence
		3.	Question
Traceability			
		1.	Presence of hashtags
		2.	Absence of hashtags
Vividness			
Vividness			
NOTE! Link to instagram of the photo author is not considered as a link!			
		1.	Video
		2.	Link
		3.	Photo
		4.	Photo + Link
		5.	Video + Link
		6.	Absence of vivid elements (photos, videos, hyperlinks)
Language			
		1.	English
		2.	Italian
		3.	Both (Italian/English)

Table 2. Sheet one of the Excel file – ‘Book’

**Sheet 2 - 'Sheet'** is a coding sheet (Table 3). On this sheet will be done actual coding of the data set. The table consists of 12 columns and 150 rows (147 posts + 3 rows of the coding scheme). The first row includes information about the names of the columns and constructs. The second row consists of the names of the variables. And the third row consists of the instances of the variables or coding scheme. A more detailed description of the columns is presented below.

Coded name of post	Post's body text	Main info about the post (D). Engagement			(A) Pandemic	(B.) Content	(C) Format				
		Variables	Likes	Comments	Shares	Elements of relation to pandemic	Main theme	Call to action	Sentence style	Traceability	Vividness
Instances	N	N	N	N	1. Invitational or Promotional 2. Cautionary 3. Other pandemic-affected 4. Neutral 5. Outbound	1. Culture, art and history 2. Traditions and food 3. Collateral themes (practical information for travelers) 4. Tourist destinations 5. Events	1. Presence of call to online action 2. Absence of call to action	1. Affirmative sentence 2. Exclamatory sentence 3. Question	1. Presence of hashtags 2. Absence of hashtags	1. Video 2. Link 3. Photo 4. Photo + Link 5. Video + Link 6. Absence of vivid elements (photos, videos, hyperlinks)	1. English 2. Italian 3. Both (Italian/English)

Table 3. Sheet two of the Excel file - 'Sheet'

**Column 1. Coded name of post.** In the column has to be filed coded name of the post. Coding is based on the date of the posting in the DD/MM/YY format (Example: 3/6/20). However, on some days two or more posts have been posted, for this case coding is DD/MM/YY - 2, DD/MM/YY - 3 (Example: 3/6/20-2). For the convenience of the researcher coded names of the post can be taken from Sheet 3: 'All posts', of the same Excel file.

**Column 2. Post's body text.** The column is pre-filled for the researcher. In the case of doubts collected data can be checked on Sheet 3: 'All posts', of the same Excel file.

**Columns 3, 4, 5. Main info about the post (D) Engagement): Likes. Comments. Share.** Here the researcher is asked to fill in numerical data about posts. The data can be taken from Sheet 3: 'All posts', of the same Excel file, from the columns: 'Screenshot 1', 'Screenshot 2', 'Screenshot 3', 'Screenshot 4'. Important, as the main idea is to analyse engagement, all emoji Facebook reactions have to be counted as likes.

**Column 6. (A) Pandemic: Elements of relation to pandemic.** The body text of the message has to be evaluated from the point of view of the pandemic if it is invitational, cautionary or neutral (Table 4).

Coding	Instances	Examples
1.	Invitational (contains a call to visit)	Looking for the perfect place to get away from it all? The unique Valadier Temple is a marble shrine built inside a mountain, in the heart of <u>Parco Naturale Regionale Gola della Rossa e di Frasassi</u> , in Le Marche region
2.	Cautionary (tries to say that visit has to be postponed, suggests alternative way to visit Italy)	Let's stay away today to hug each other more warmly tomorrow. Immerse yourself in a virtual tour of the Sistine Chapel and let yourself be enveloped by its stunning beauty <a href="http://bit.ly/Sistine_Chapel-Virtual_Tour">http://bit.ly/Sistine_Chapel-Virtual_Tour</a>
3.	Other pandemic-affected (does not invite and does not caution but content is related to pandemic in some way)	Let us take you on a virtual tour of Tuscany through the best movies shot across the region. Check out our selection and tell us: which is your favourite?
4.	Neutral (does not have any connection to the pandemic)	The Amalfi Coast, where reality overcomes imagination. Enjoy this stunning view of the garden of Villa Rufolo, also known as the "Garden of the Soul".
5.	Outbound (posts with the key message Italy comes to you, e.g. has hashtags #Italycomestoyou)	Locorotondo, with its charming, circular centre and characteristic white houses, sits high on the plateau known as the Murge dei Trulli. <u>#Italycomestoyou</u> with the Itria Valley and the Murgia dei Trulli in <u>WeAreinPuglia</u>

Table 4. (A) Elements of relation to pandemic

**Column 7. (B) Content: Main theme.** In the column, the researcher is asked to place a written message based on its content in one of the assigned themes: culture/art/ history; traditions/food; collateral themes; tourist destinations; event (Table 5).

Coding	Instances	Examples
1.	Culture, art and history	Today we celebrate the "Festa della Repubblica"... the Italian Republic turns 74. Enjoy the special flypast of the Frece Tricolori that in these days has united the country, from North to South, in one big embrace.
2.	Traditions and food	Waiting for your next trip to <u>#Sicily</u> , how about experimenting with one of the most famous Sicilian recipes? <a href="http://www.visitsicily.info/en/anelletti-al-forno/">http://www.visitsicily.info/en/anelletti-al-forno/</a>



3.	Collateral themes (practical information for travellers)	<p>COVID-19 – Information and updates for tourists</p> <p>In order to hinder and limit the possible spread of Covid-19 (Coronavirus) in Italy, the Italian Government has ordered a series of restrictions applied to the whole country. For further info visit: <a href="http://bit.ly/COVID19-Info_and_updates_for_tourists">http://bit.ly/COVID19-Info_and_updates_for_tourists</a></p>
4.	Tourist destinations	<p>Liguria for the eleventh consecutive year is the region with the highest number of Blue Flags, a banner synonymous with clean water and excellent beach facilities. In fact, there are 32 places that have obtained this recognition which sees scattered throughout the region beaches of enormous beauty with clean and practicable sea.</p>
5.	Events	<p>Stasera, dalle 20 alle 24 in onda su Rai3 e in contemporanea su Rai Radio2, RaiPlay e sul canale Youtube Rai, il Concerto del Primo maggio. Da Vasco a Zuccherò, da Patty Smith e Sting. Quattro ore di maratona musicale dalla sala Sinopoli dell' <a href="#">Auditorium Parco della Musica - Roma</a> (dove è installato l' Auditorium Stage Primo Maggio 2020) e collegamenti con altre location sparse per l'Italia e scelte direttamente dagli artisti. Buon Primo maggio e buon concerto a tutti voi!</p>

Table 5. (B) Content

**Columns 8, 9, 10, 11, 12. (C) Format: Call to action, Sentence style, Traceability, Vividness, Language.** In these columns, the researcher is asked to evaluate a message regarding its format characteristics. The coding scheme is presented in Table 6 below. For coding 'Vividness' researcher asked to take the data from Sheet 3: 'All posts', of the same Excel file, from the columns: 'Screenshot 1', 'Screenshot 2', 'Screenshot 3', 'Screenshot 4'.

	Coding	Instances	Example
Call to action			
	1.	Presence of call to online action	Sea, nature, breathtaking landscapes and industrial archaeology. Let's discover the amazing mine of Porto Flavia in <a href="http://bit.ly/masua-and-porto-flavia-EN">Visit Sardinia. http://bit.ly/masua-and-porto-flavia-EN</a>
	2.	Absence of call to action	"A small village, Portofino, stretches crescent-shaped along the edge of this calm bay." Guy de Maupassant Portofino, a name known all over the world, synonymous with elegance and dolce vita.
Sentence style			
	1.	Affirmative sentence	A journey amid nature: 5 hiking routes to walk in spring in <a href="#">#EmiliaRomagna</a>
	2.	Exclamatory sentence	Sigurtà Park... one of the most beautiful gardens in the world, just a few kilometres from Lake Garda. 600,000 m <sup>2</sup> of greenery that envelops its visitors in a kaleidoscope of colours and scents: tulips, irises, roses, water lilies, asster, water gardens, hedges labyrinths, centuries-old oaks and medicinal plants will amaze you!
	3.	Question	If Palermo street food needed a flag, it would be the colour of the pannelle. Have you ever tasted it?
Traceability			
	1.	Presence of hashtags	
	2.	Absence of hashtags	
Vividness			
NOTE! Link to instagram of the photo author is not considered as a link!	1.	Video	
	2.	Link	
	3.	Photo	
	4.	Photo + Link	
	5.	Video + Link	

	6.	Absence of vivid elements (photos, videos, hyperlinks)	
Language			
	1.	English	
	2.	Italian	
	3.	Both (Italian/English)	

Table 6. (C) Format

**Sheet 3 - 'All posts'**. This sheet has been used for the data set collection. It consists of six columns: 'Coded name of post', 'Script of the message', 'Screenshot 1', 'Screenshot 2', 'Screenshot 3', 'Screenshot 4' (Table 7). The sheet has to be used by the researcher to take numerical data for coding and for analysis of the vividness of the post.

Coded name of post	Script of the message	Screenshot 1	Screenshot 2	Screenshot 3	Screenshot 4

Table 7. Sheet 3 - 'All Posts'