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City brand projected personality: a new measure to assess the consistency of projected personality across messages

Abstract

Building a strong and consistent brand personality is crucial to position cities in the global context and a key element to influence potential visitors' behavior. City brands' communication endeavors to project consistent messages to position a unique personality in consumer's mind. However, the variety of target groups that cities aim to attract and the number of stakeholders contributing with their messages to create the city brand makes it more difficult to uphold a single consistent proposition. Thus, brand managers require resources to coordinate and assess the consistency of the city's personality projected through various sources of information. This study proposes a more accurate measure to assess the city brand projected personality [CBPP] on the websites. It extends the methodological approach proposed by Pitt *et al.* (2007) by considering two additional variables: the prevalence of the personality traits within the discourse and their link to the brand name. Furthermore, the study tests the CBPP measure to identify the consistency of Barcelona's projected personality through two different stakeholders' websites. The empirical study shows the capability of the measures introduced to assess more accurately the personality projected through several sources. The CBPP approach offers managerial implications by which marketers can assess more accurately the projected personality and more easily assess the consistency between different official messages.

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1. Introduction

Creating a strong and consistent brand image and personality is a critical issue in the cities' strategies (Kaplan, Yurt, Guneri & Kurtulus, 2010). In the era of symbolic consumption, a brand's personality has been found to be a very influential variable in the behavioral intentions (Usakli & Baloglu, 2011). Potential tourists are more favorable to those brands that project a solid and consistent personality perceived as coherent with their self-concept (Hultman, Strandberg, Oghazi & Mostaghel, 2017).

In today's context, city branding has become a major topic for governments that want to compete internationally in different markets in order to strengthen their economies (Braun, 2012; Gertner, 2011; Kavaratzis, 2004). Cities invest a substantial amount of resources to create a singular, differentiated and consistent image of the city brand to make it recognizable and relevant for the different audience in the same way companies work on their brands (Zenker, 2014).

However, place brand managers have to face several challenges beyond the traditional branding (Kavaratzis & Ashworth, 2010). For instance, the diversity of target groups that the same city brand aims to attract pushes brand managers to work on brands that are broad enough to encompass the diversity of promises targeting the different audiences and singular enough to be recognizable and coherent along all those messages. Additionally, there is a significant number of stakeholders contributing and participating to the place brand construction (Warnaby, Ashworth & Kavaratzis, 2015). These phenomena make the process of city branding less controllable by marketers, who require more resources to coordinate and assess the consistency of the city's personality projected through various sources of information (Hankinson, 2004).

In this regard, two different focuses prevail in the assessment of brand personality: perceived and projected (Govers, Go & Kumar, 2007), even though the study of perceived brand personality has dominated the research in this field. While there is a vast volume of research exploring the perception of consumers and tourists about different brands' personality, there is much lesser research focused on the assessment of the projected one (Kim & Lehto, 2012). It was the study conducted by Pitt, Opoku, Hultman, Abratt and Spyropoulou (2007) that proposed a systematized methodological approach to assess the projected personality for the first time. It proposed the analysis of the vocabulary used in the discourse in order to identify terms related to personality traits; the synonyms of brand personality traits. Since then, several studies have followed this approach to evaluate the personality projected, mainly, through online sources.

However, this approach omits to consider some relevant characteristics of the online sources of information and, particularly, of the official destination websites that might influence the effect of the personality-related vocabulary. For instance, users do not read the website content as a linear source of information; instead, they navigate along different pages (Morville & Rosenfeld, 2006). Neither the different pages of the website have the same volume of content which might contribute to the visibility of the specific vocabulary present in the page. Furthermore, the complexity of the tourism offer makes that much content is dedicated to giving information about the different attractions separately (Pike, 2012); thus, some terms related to personality might be characteristics of specific attractions and others might be descriptive of the overall brand.

This research aims to overcome these limitations by providing a new measure to more accurately assess the presence of personality traits in the website discourse. It is argued that this approach is useful to evaluate not only different brands independently but also the same brand's projected personality through various sources. All in all, the primary goal of this research is **to propose an accurate measure for the assessment of city brands projected personality through their official websites.** Furthermore, with Barcelona as a test case, a

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secondary goal of this research is **to identify the consistency of Barcelona's projected brand personality through two different official websites**. With 8.36 million international arrivals and almost $9 billion spent in the city in 2016 (MasterCard, 2017), attracting visitors has become a priority. However, this city brand faces several challenges. On the one hand, Barcelona responds to a multidimensional demand of visitors (Forgas-Coll, Palau-Saumell, Sánchez-García & Callarisa-Fiol, 2012; Pearce, 2001), meaning a diverse profile of visitors with different interests. On the other hand, several stakeholders contribute to build the city's brand. The study analyzes explicitly the personality projected on two official websites: barcelonaturisme.com (managed by Tourism of Barcelona) and meet.barcelona.com (managed by the City Council).

2. Place brands' complexity and consistency

In the postmodern society context, where symbolic consumption has become a critical component of individual and social identity construction (Berthon & Pitt, 2018; Venkatesh, 1999), the value of the territory and mobility have gained relevance. In particular, the globalized context that defends the value of particularity and authenticity; the commercialization of symbols (Castells, 2003); and a society that tends towards nomadism and increasingly values mobility (Bauman, 2000), have favored the emergence of an identitarian value of places. There is a change in the role of the geographical territory, now full of symbolism to be consumed.

Places have become new products that awaken consumers' interest. The territory is no longer only a contingent of all the goods that can be consumed within it: the place itself offers symbolism desired by consumers (de San Eugenio Vela, 2011). In other words, as new products to be consumed, territories are associated with signs, symbols, and narratives, transmitted from person to person, social group to social group, and managed through communication, advertising, and marketing fields.

As a consequence, at the beginning of the 21st century, new voices proposed a branding approach to place management (Kavaratzis, 2004). With this new approach, concepts such as image and communication became more relevant to place management. Nowadays, place branding goes beyond the traditional place promotion and focuses on create a strong brand image capable of binding together all these functional and new symbolic meanings; towards a more affective approach (Boisen, Terlouw, Groote & Couwenberg, 2018). Place brands' image does not only represent the architectonic legacy, autochthonous products, and museums, among others, but also values, citizens' attitudes, and the place's personality. Therefore, building a consistent and stable brand image linked to these symbolisms is crucial for the success and positioning of the cities (Kalieva, 2015; Zenker, Eggers & Farsky, 2013).

Nevertheless, several particularities of place brands make it more challenging to build a unique, coherent, and overall recognizable brand image. Branding territories and cities become more complicated than branding commercial brands that compete in a single market niche. For instance, the diversity of target groups that cities aim to attract and the number of stakeholders contributing to the brand's image construction are two challenges that place brands must overcome.

2.1. *Diversity of target groups to attract*

Different from commercial brands, cities compete in different markets simultaneously and city brands aim to attract several different target groups (Anholt, 2004). For instance, Kotler, Haider and Rein (1993) identified visitors, residents and workers, business and industry, and export markets as the four key targets that territories aim to attract. However, the number and diversity of audiences interested in cities have increased significantly in recent years. Recent research has pointed to more specific target groups such as immigration, investors, new citizens, and talent attraction, among others (Zenker, 2009).

Even though a detailed discussion of the different target groups that cities aim to attract goes beyond the ambition of this article, this research is interested in the brand's power to consistently attract different types of visitors to the city. Indeed, cities have a long experience in attracting visitors. As a result of the tourism activity popularization at the end of the 20th century, managing destinations as if they were brands has been exponentially promoted as a useful way to enhance their success (Daye, 2010; Morrison, 2013; Pike & Page, 2014). Cities' public administrations have endeavored to attract tourists for a long time. However, the complexity of place brands has lead the research to highlight the importance of identifying the different target groups' needs and, consequently, adjusting their message strategically to each target group, such as residents or tourists (Zenker, Braun & Petersen, 2017).

Therefore, the current brand strategies that cities employ widen the traditional destination branding ones (Braun, 2012). Nowadays, destination brands and their image coexist with the branded image of the city as a place to live, as a place to invest, etc. The city brand is not reserved to attract tourists but also many other profiles. The understanding of the visitor's target group is not only limited to the people willing to spend their leisure time at the destination, but it is also related to the power of attraction of talented visitors (i.e., people visiting the city to study, people who are visiting for work-related reasons, etc.). At the same time, these new visitors become potential new citizens desired by the place, since attracting qualified employees is another focus of interest for city brands (Zenker, 2009). This new scheme comes hand in hand with the diversification of the departments and organizations leading the branding efforts.

2.2. *Different stakeholders to build a single brand*

An updated understanding of city brand should include the concept of branding co-creation, or what more recent research referred to as inclusive place branding (Kavaratzis, Giovanardi & Lichrou, 2018): implicating the different stakeholders to participating in the branding efforts. This approach considers the various stakeholders' contributions to strengthening the place brand (Warnaby *et al.*, 2015). On the downside, the process of branding the city has become less controllable (Hankinson, 2004).

Different stakeholders take part in today's creation of public policies and even decide and take action on affairs that directly affect the city branding strategy (Braun, 2012). Public and private stakeholders should collaborate in order to develop a strong city brand, irrespective of each stakeholder's particular interests; otherwise, the targets might not perceive a clear, and well-delimited brand (Morgan, Pritchard & Pride, 2004). Hence, it is critical for cities to make decisions regarding how to create and communicate the ideal brand concept and its strategy to build a coherent brand image and strategically position it in the international market.

However, the literature on the topic states that governments are still leading the branding strategies with a top-down approach, through their departments of economic development and tourism (Aitken & Campelo, 2011). In other words, branding cities are ultimately the responsibility of the official organizations (i.e., the City Hall). Depending on the political structure of each city, the branding process could be led by a diversity of departments and powerful stakeholders linked to the government (Braun, 2012). Given this fact, city brand strategies have typically prioritized the government stakeholders' perspective (Aitken & Campelo, 2011). For instance, the departments of economic development, tourism, or the City Hall itself, are some of the most active leaders of a city's branding process.

In this regard, recent literature has paid considerable attention to the topic from several perspectives: addressing the challenges that the current place branding process faces (Kavaratzis *et al.*, 2018); developing models of place branding based on the relationship between stakeholders (Hankinson, 2004); or even identifying the factors influencing a correct implementation of the city branding strategies (Braun, 2012). However, there is a paucity of

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research focused on developing tools that contribute to the control and overseer of the brand strategy implementation. More particularly, the organizations leading the branding process have very few resources that allow monitoring of the city brand image alignment and its consistency along time and sources. Based on the literature, the term consistency is here used as a synonym of alignment, which expresses the strategic similarity between the projected personality by different stakeholders (Campbell, Papania, Parent & Cyr, 2010).

City brands should invest efforts to create and maintain a consistent image across different messages, no matter the stakeholder promoting them or the audience they are targeting (Qu, Kim & Im, 2011; Zenker, 2014). Building a consistent image becomes a competitive advantage for the city brands (Brown, Dacin, Pratt & Whetten, 2006; Sahin & Baloglu, 2014). In this regard, the alignment of brands' image in co-branding strategies contributes to creating stronger positioning (Campbell *et al.*, 2010; Wang, Soesilo, Zhang & Di Benedetto, 2012). In particular, previous research highlight personality as a useful indicator to determine the alignment and congruence between different brands and between brands and consumers (Hultman *et al.*, 2017; Stokburger-Sauer, 2011).

3. Brand personality construct

Brand personality has become a major topic of discussion in the past and recent academic research. It is considered a very relevant construct due to its influence in the decision-making process (Hosany, Ekinci & Uysal, 2006; Keller, 2008). Brand personality can be defined as a set of human characteristics and traits of personality associated with the brands (Aaker, 1997; Geuens, Weijters & De Wulf, 2009). An anthropomorphic reading of consumers' perception that supports the idea of attributing human characteristics to non-human beings (Kallery & Psillos, 2004). It was the study conducted by Aaker (1997) that connected the concept of brand personality to the anthropomorphic theory for the first time and simultaneously imported a methodology from human psychology (Avis, Aitken & Ferguson, 2012).

Besides, symbolic associations to a brand's image have acquired a self-expressive role for consumers. Previous research showed how consumers feel engaged with specific brands which are perceived as congruent with their own self-concept (Schmitt, 2012; Sirgy, 1985); this is known as the self-congruity theory. In this process, brand personality becomes highly relevant. The perceived congruency between the inference of personality and the individual's personality plays an important role in purchasing decisions (Usakli & Baloglu, 2011).

On this basis, city brands must overcome the place branding complexity to create and project a singular, differentiated and consistent personality desired by the potential visitors. Thus, sharing a unique image proposition with the brand's stakeholders becomes one of the most relevant strategic decisions made by brand managers (Brown *et al.*, 2006; Foroudi, Gupta, Kitchen, Foroudi & Nguyen, 2016). Furthermore, previous research pointed that, among all the different associations forming the brand image, brand personality is a key component contributing to the different stakeholders' and partner brands alignment, creating a common, consistent proposition in consumer's mind (Campbell *et al.*, 2010).

However, even though the researchers agree on the relevance of brand personality construct in the brand image formation and its important role in consumers' decision-making process, brand personality theory is still developing. Creating scales of brand personality, studying the consequences of brand personality, and exploring how to promote brand personality impressions are some of the main areas of knowledge researchers are studying (Puzakova, Kwak & Taylor, 2013). In particular, this research contributes to the progress of marketing tools and communications optimization to promote the personality inference by consumers.

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3.1. *Brand Personality Scales*

One of the most popular and controversial areas of study is the development of brand personality scales. However, there is still no general agreement on a unified scale to evaluate brands' personality, even though researchers have proposed several measurements (Eisend & Stokburger-Sauer, 2013; Geuens *et al.*, 2009). For instance, the scale proposed by Aaker, the Brand Personality Scale [BPS], has become the most frequently used scale among contemporary research (Eisend & Stokburger-Sauer, 2013). It is a five-dimensional model for brand personality compounded of 5 dimensions: sincerity, excitement, competence, sophistication and ruggedness (Aaker, 1997). The BPS comprises 42 traits of personality aggregated to 15 different facets that the author identifies to be related to the different personality dimensions.

However, like any theory that has not accomplished its maturity, Aaker's BPS has some limitations (Eisend & Stokburger-Sauer, 2013; Geuens *et al.*, 2009): [1] The cross-cultural validity of the scale is uncertain (Ekinci & Hosany, 2006). For instance, similar research conducted by the same author concluded that only four of the five personality dimensions concurred with the ones in the first study (Aaker, Benet-Martínez & Garolera, 2001). [2] Some authors highlight the absence of within-brand variance. As Austin, Siguaw and Mattila (2003) point out, the framework proposed by Aaker is more suitable for investigations focused on data aggregated from different categories than measuring individual brands or specific categories.[3] The scope of Aaker's definition is considered too broad by some researchers; it includes characteristics such as social class or gender. A strict interpretation of personality construct should keep to a "generalized and focalized neuropsychic system" (Azoulay & Kapferer 2003, p. 147) and exclude other human characteristics.

Nevertheless, recent research supports the validity of the BPS to assess brands' personality (Eisend & Stokburger-Sauer, 2013). A meta-analysis of 74 empirical studies using the BPS, conducted by Eisend and Stokburger-Sauer (2013), concludes with revealing results supporting the transferability of the five-factor personality model to brands. On the one hand, [1] the study points to the instability of the methods used to test the BPS as the origin of some of the variation across cultures. The results highlight only minor variations that could be the consequence of the different culture's level of uncertainty avoidance (Hofstede, 2001; Eisend & Stokburger-Sauer, 2013). On the other hand, [2] the authors also refute the critique about the generalizability of the model at an individual brand or specific categories. In their words, "the BP scale does not vary due to data aggregation across brands or respondents" (Eisend & Stokburger-Sauer, 2013, p. 957).

Furthermore, [3] the ongoing discussion about which traits should be included in a brand personality scale has its origin in the different foundations to explain brand personality. As Avis *et al.* (2012) point out, different perspectives coexist: the 'humanlike brand' perspective, which defends that consumers actually perceive brands as humans, a more strict interpretation; and the 'researcher metaphor,' which understands it as a broader construct used as a metaphor to explain consumers perception. This research is founded on the more second perspective: the use of metaphoric language to understand consumers' perception of a brand's symbolism.

Conclusively, even though there is still work to do to develop a globally accepted brand personality measure, the BPS remains the reliable and suitable measure for a comparative brand personality research (Ekinci & Hosany, 2006; Kim & Lehto, 2012). Furthermore, it is the most used scale among contemporary research (Eisend & Stokburger-Sauer, 2013; Geuens *et al.*, 2009).

3.2. *Projected personality assessment*

Another popular area of study of brand personality construct is how communication practices contribute to creating brand personality inference (Puzakova *et al.*, 2013). Questions like 'how

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can brand managers create, maintain, and feed brands with personality?' and 'how can they enhance brand image in consumers' minds?' have been addressed by scholars.

Therefore, the concept of projected personality is used here to describe the efforts of a specific brand to promote the desired brand associations. The set of brand personality traits linked to a brand name which brand strategists aim to position in consumers' minds (Keller, 2008; Schmitt, 2012). Nevertheless, even though marketers endeavor to transmit the brand's desired image to influence consumers' perception, the previous research identified that desired and perceived images often do not correspond (Kim & Lehto, 2012; Költringer & Dickinger, 2015). As Kotler and Keller (2012, p. 32) point out, "all companies strive to build a brand image with as many strong, favorable and unique brand associations as possible," thus, further knowledge and useful tools which contribute to the image management and consistency will be of great value.

In this regard, several investigations have proposed different assessment methodologies to analyze the projected personality. Among other techniques, content analysis has been recently found to be useful to highlight the brand personality traits embedded in the content (De Moya & Jain, 2013; Pereira, de Jesus Henriques Correia & Schutz, 2014; Pitt *et al.*, 2007; Sahin & Baloglu, 2011; Youn Kim & Yoon, 2013). It was the study conducted by Pitt *et al.* (2007) that used a computer-assisted content analysis methodology for the first time. Before their approach, researchers relied on more expensive techniques, such as interviews and surveys, to assess the projected personality of specific brands.

Based on the BPS (Aaker, 1997), Pitt *et al.* (2007) developed a list of personality traits' synonyms and introduced them in a software called WordStat to track them in the discourse. The elaboration of this computerized technique allowed the researchers to analyze and compare a broader sample: in this case, the study of the projected personalities of 10 African countries. The key factor of this methodological approach success is the creation of a thesaurus of brand personality traits useful to automatically track the synonyms embedded in the text. The automatized process of examining the textual content by the software concludes identifying several words related to brand personality traits.

This methodological approach was a turning point in the study of projected personality. De Moya and Jain (2013), Opoku (2009) and Rojas-Méndez and Hine (2017) use a very similar process of analysis. Likewise, other authors such as Kim and Lehto (2012) and Pereira *et al.* (2014) follow an inverse process: first the most frequent words are identified, and then their correspondence with synonyms of personality traits is assessed. The research presented in this paper supports the validity of the methodology to assess a brand's projected personality and proposes improvements.

4. Methodology

The methodological approach explained hereafter follows the method proposed by Pitt *et al.* (2007) to assess projected personality. The original brand personality thesaurus developed by Pitt *et al.* (2007) consists of a 922-word list of synonyms of the different traits and dimensions of the BPS (Aaker, 1997). The authors used the Encyclopedia Britannica's thesaurus function to identify the different synonyms, and the software WordStat to automatize the search those words in the text.

In addition, this research also considers the upgrades that prior research proposed to this content analysis approach (De Moya & Jain, 2013; Kim & Lehto, 2012; Opoku, 2009; Pereira *et al.*, 2014), and proposes improvements. In particular, this investigation introduces two new measures to improve the methodological approach: [1] it considers the weighted value of each synonym of personality relative to the total content in the page and [2] it takes into account the proximity of these synonyms to the brand name.

4.1. *Personality Thesaurus*

To build the thesaurus of brand personality synonyms, the researchers used the English database WordNet 3.1. This software presents a large lexical database of English developed by Princeton University. It groups nouns, verbs, adjectives and adverbs based on their meanings, and it includes the conceptual-semantic relations between words (https://wordnet.princeton.edu, 15/09/2016). To be more accurate in choosing suitable terms, WordNet classifies the words into sets of cognitive synonyms called *synsets*.

To compile the synonyms list, two different researchers simultaneously searched for the maximum number of synonyms for the 42 personality traits plus the five dimensions, included in Table 1. The resulting lists were compared and unified into a single one. Only the words proposed by both researchers were included in the final list, and those considered only by one researcher were excluded or further discussed. The coders agreed on 94.38% of words. The initial list comprised 1,181 words including nouns, verbs, and adjectives. Next, the words with the same root were eliminated using the stemming function of NVivo software to prevent possible duplications, since the software identifies and groups terms with the same root.

Table 1: Brand personality traits

Sincerity	down-to-earth; family-oriented; small-town; honest; sincere; real; wholesome; original; cheerful; sentimental; friendly
Excitement	daring; trendy; exciting; spirited; cool; young; imaginative; unique; up-to-date; independent; contemporary
Competence	reliable; hard working; secure; intelligent; technical; corporate; successful; leader; confident
Sophistication	upper class; glamorous; good looking; charming; feminine; smooth
Ruggedness	outdoorsy; masculine; Western; tough; rugged

Source: Aaker, 1997.

Furthermore, an additional stage of the thesaurus creation that has not been addressed in previous literature is the polysemy disambiguation. Assigning words to a single dimension or category might entail a bias in the analysis due to some word polysemy. To overcome this shortcoming, the Word Embedding technique was used, a distributional semantics technique that uses vector representations to map words in space (Mikolov, Chen, Corrado & Dean, 2013); it is an algorithm that assesses the contextual similarity between words considering a broad database of content and information sources available online. It is built upon the following hypothesis: words that appear in the same context share semantic meaning. As Jaron Collins (2016) notes, assessing the contextual similarity is a more expressive representation of the distance between two words. Thus, in this representation, semantically similar words are located near each other.

All in all, the brand personality thesaurus developed contains 928 synonyms of personality traits. Of these, 21% were related to the dimensions of sincerity, excitement, and competence, while sophistication and ruggedness dimensions comprise 18% of the synonyms.

4.2. *Computerized content analysis*

The software NVivo was used to analyze the content of the websites. It is a highly flexible qualitative data analysis software that is useful to manage, shape, and examine any kind of multimedia content (Bazeley & Jackson, 2013). The QSR International (2015), defines the

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software as a "platform for analyzing all forms of unstructured data. Quickly interrogate data using powerful search, query and visualization tools."

This software allowed to identify each page uploaded to the project to one of the two different cases: meet.barcelona.com or barcelonaturisme.com. Once all the pages were assigned to one of the two cases, several word-search queries were conducted to identify the presence of personality traits among the content. Nvivo provides the option to introduce a group of words and search for them simultaneously. Thus, five search queries were needed, one for each dimension of personality: excitement, sincerity, competence, ruggedness, and sophistication. Furthermore, the stemming words option of the search query allowed identifying words with the same root but with gender variances, number difference, and other derived words.

In contrast to previous research, the presence of personality traits within the content was not assessed by frequency of words count, but this study instead sought for a more accurate measure to assess the personality synonyms visibility in the websites. As Herring (2010) points out, the traditional way to understand the content analysis is not equally effective considering the new information sources and formats, such as websites. On the one hand, websites' content is a much more complex system of content units than plain texts. On the other hand, users' behavior on the web does not correspond to linear reading: they do not read each entire page on the website, instead, they quickly overview and navigate along several pages until they find what they are looking for (Morville & Rosenfeld, 2006). For this reason, two measures were taken to assess more accurately the presence and visibility of personality-related vocabulary: evaluate the prevalence of the personality synonyms considering the specific characteristics of the page, and, assign additional value to those terms that are located close to the brand Barcelona.

First, instead of the overall frequency count, the **prevalence of the synonyms** identified in each page is considered. NVivo calculates the weighted coverage of the words: "the frequency of the word relative to the total words counted" (http://help-nv10. qsrinternational.com, 09/03/2018). This measure is based on the hypothesis that the total amount of content in the page affects the visibility and impact of a single synonym on users' perception. For instance, a single synonym in a long page with thousands of words (such as informational pages), does not have the same visibility compared to a single synonym in a page containing a couple of highlighted banners and only hundreds of words (such as navigational pages). All in all, this measure assesses the coverage of a synonym considering the characteristics of each specific page, thus, the synonyms' prevalence. The analysis only considers words with a minimum of 0.01% coverage of the entire text.

Additionally, the contextual position of the personality synonyms is also considered (direct vs. secondary associations). In particular, the analysis assesses the **proximity to the brand name** in the text (in this case, the proximity to 'Barcelona'). The software offers the possibility to conduct compound queries combining different techniques. This option allowed not only to seek for synonyms of personality in the text but also identified those that appear close to the name Barcelona. Even though all the content contributes to the city's brand image and personality, not all of it refers directly to the brand (i.e., content about the architecture of the place). For this reason, those synonyms located in the same sentence than the brand are considered to have a more direct contribution on the brand personality creation than those linked to other related content (i.e., elements of place's offer).

To summarize, the authors propose that a more accurate measurement of the impact of projected personality through the websites should consider the prevalence of the synonyms and their proximity to the brand. Therefore, the authors describe the City Brand Projected Personality [CBPP] as the sum of the prevalence of the synonyms [PS] in each page and the additional value of those synonyms' proximity to the brand [PB].

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CBPP = **PS** + **(PB*0.5)**

PS = N/Total words (in each single page)
PB = ± 10 words next to the brand

4.3. *Sample of study*

The pages of the two websites' English version were downloaded in pdf format between July and August of 2016. Both homepages plus all the pages in the first and second levels deep in the hierarchy were downloaded. Previous research supported the validity of the firsts two levels of the hierarchy as representative of the overall brand personality (Kim & Lehto, 2012). Only when the pages on the second level were navigational (Broder, 2002), the pages on the third level were also downloaded to ensure a significant amount of textual content. The final sample of analysis is compounded of 305 pages: 215 from barcelonaturisme.com and 90 pages from meet.barcelona.com.

5. Results

The analysis identified 4397 synonyms of brand personality within the two websites: 1520 in meet.barcelona.cat and 2877 in barcelonaturisme.com. Considering the different amount of pages downloaded from each site, it is not surprising to identifying that there are almost double synonyms of brand personality in the Tourism's website than in that of the City Council's site. However, this cursory reading of the data only considers the absolute frequency of the words. Differently, the information gathered through the prevalence and proximity to brand brings more detailed information. Table 2 summarizes the data obtained from the content analysis.

**Table 2**: Results of the Brand personality synonyms content analysis

Personality dimensions	meet.barcelona.cat			barcelonaturisme.com		
	Frequency counts	Prevalence (W. Coverage)	Proximity to Brand	Frequency counts	Prevalence (W. Coverage)	Proximity to Brand
Sincerity	327	0,29%	170	514	0,16%	169
Excitement	426	0,36%	145	1144	0,49%	197
Competence	471	0,55%	131	416	0,15%	75
Sophistication	208	0,17%	87	611	0,19%	166
Ruggedness	88	0,06%	33	192	0,05%	53
TOTAL	**1.520**	**1,43%**	**566**	**2.877**	**1,04%**	**660**

Even though the extension of each website influences the number of words found, the weighted coverage indicates the prevalence of this vocabulary considering the characteristics of each webpage. As opposed to that reported by the overall frequency of words, the synonyms of personality have a higher prevalence (weighted coverage) in the website of meet.barcelona.cat. In the City Council's website, the traits of personality cover 1.43% of the content, while in barcelonaturisme.com it only covers 1.04% of the total content.

An explanation for this surprising outcome could be that the tourism-focused site gives a higher volume of information than the other website. Barcelonaturisme.com site offers a vast amount of content related to the attractions, the tourism packages, and additional information associated with the touristic offer; it is descriptive information about the offer rather than a description of the overall city and the brand itself. This phenomenon might dissipate the visibility of the personality synonyms along a more extensive content.

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Furthermore, this could also be the reason why the analysis identified a lower amount of synonyms close to the brand. From the 2877 synonyms identified in barcelonaturisme.com, 660 appear in the same sentence as Barcelona, while from the 1520 synonyms in meet.barcelona.cat 566 of them are located close to the brand.

Figure 1: Overall frequency and the prevalence of the brand personality synonyms
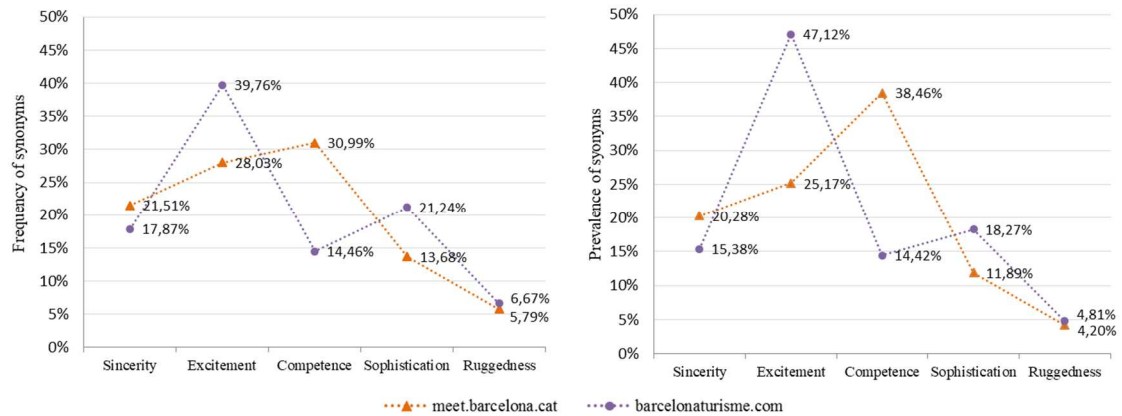
These data also have an impact on the separate personality dimensions' performance on the websites. As a general trend, both the observation through frequency count and prevalence point to the tendency of meet.barcelona.cat to represent a more competent city than barcelonaturisme.com, which focuses on the exciting dimension of Barcelona's brand personality. Specifically, 39,76% of the synonyms in barcelonaturisme.com are projecting an exciting personality, while 30,99% of the ones found in meet.barcelona.com project a competent one. However, as shown in Figure 1, when considering the prevalence of these synonyms rather than their overall frequency, the main differences between the two projected personalities become more accentuated.

For instance, the data shows that not only the synonyms representing the most dominant dimensions of personality (competence, in meet.bcn.cat, and excitement in barcelonaturisme.com) are more frequent than the others, but that their prevalence on the websites is even higher. In the first case, competence-related synonyms represent up to 38,46% of the most prevalent vocabulary of personality while, in the second case, excitement represents almost half of the prevalence of the synonyms on the website, a 47,12%. Thus, taking into account the amount of content in each page, the weighted coverage points to a greater impact of these traits of personality in the overall website performance. This growth is a detriment of the prevalence of the remaining dimensions of personality. Sincerity, sophistication, and ruggedness are represented by a smaller percentage of synonyms in both websites and have a proportionally lower prevalence than those synonyms representing the most dominant dimension in each source.

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Figure 2: City Brand Projected Personality on the official websites
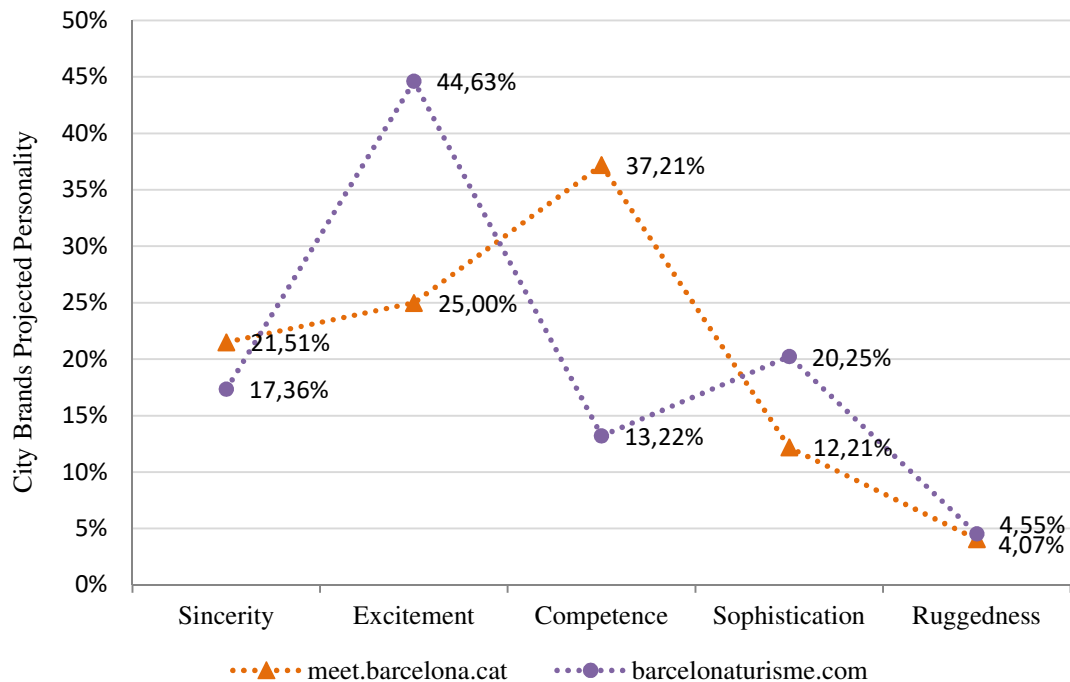
Furthermore, by considering both upgrades to the method (prevalence and proximity to brand), the study portrays a more accurate outline of how the personality traits are projected through the official websites and, thus, how they contribute to the destination's brand personality construction, as seen in Figure 2. Once combining the prevalence of the synonyms and their proximity to the brand, sophistication and sincerity dimensions recover relevance in the overall projected personality in both websites: sincerity represents 21.51% and 17.36%, and sophistication corresponds to 12.21% and 20.25%of the projected personality in meet.barcelona.cat and barcelonaturisme.com respectively. Instead, the low prevalence of ruggedness to describe Barcelona's personality becomes more accentuated when assessing the proximity of these synonyms to the brand name. The contribution of ruggedness to the overall city brand projected personality is 4.07% and 4.55% on the City Council and Barcelona Tourism websites, respectively. Nevertheless, the differences between these dimensions of personality projected in both sources are less significant.

When assessing the overall city brand projected personality, the main difference between both websites is still between the dominant personality dimensions: competence and excitement. Competence represents 37.21% of the personality projected in meet.barcelona.cat, while the same dimension corresponds only to 13.22% of the one projected in barcelonaturisme.com. In the second case, it is the dimension of excitement the one dominating the projected personality, representing 44.63%, while it is only a 25% in meet.barcelona.cat. In this case, the difference between these dimensions projected personality of both sites becomes a significant inconsistency.

6. Discussion and implications

This study focuses on the assessment of the projected personality through the website. Creating a solid and consistent place brand personality through the different information sources is a challenge due to its multiplicity of target groups it aims to attract and the several

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stakeholders contributing to creating it. The findings of this study highlight the importance of taking into account the specific characteristics of the websites to accurately assess the impact of the projected personality through the official websites. Three main contributions are offered as follows:

First, the case study shows that the information provided by the different sources of information project different personalities; thus, projecting an inconsistent overall personality proposition. These results are aligned with previous research pointing to the inconsistency between the perceived and the projected personality in different sources (Kim & Lehto, 2012; Költringer & Dickinger, 2015). While Barcelona Tourism builds a very exciting personality of the brand, a dimension of personality related to the ludic facet of the destination, the City Council presents an eminently competent city, which is more habitual in strategies that seek credibility.

Thus, it appears that the two stakeholders project different personality propositions; the different targets that they aim to attract plus the difference between the goals that Governmental Organizations or Promotional Agencies pursue, make more difficult to organize a common strategy (Stubbs & Warnaby, 2015). Such inconsistency could indicate either a lack of a common strategy, insufficient coordination between the different stakeholders in the strategy implementation, or a lack of tools to monitor and assess this implementation over time.

Second, the data also highlight the non-dependency between the volume of content and the intensity of the projected personality; a higher amount of content does not imply a heightened projected personality per se. The improvements of the methodology proposed provide revealing data related to the impact of the vocabulary related to personality in pages with different length. For instance, the synonyms identified in barcelonaturisme.com, become diluted in pages with a higher content density. Instead, meet.barcelona.cat pages are more concise, which gives more visibility to the personality-related vocabulary used. Thus, brand managers should note that offering a double amount of information does not imply, necessarily, reinforcing the projected personality.

Third, there is a significant difference between the numbers of synonyms used to describe the brand name directly in both sources. The authors attribute the lower presence of synonyms of personality close to Barcelona in the tourism website to the higher volume of information describing the elements of the offer rather than the global brand. One of the destinations' traditional promotional priority has been favoring the visibility of specific products the destination has to offer (Pike, 2012). It is argued that this tendency to describe the attractions of the destinations affects the strength of certain traits of personality to represent the global brand. In contrast, the personality traits projected through the City Council's website are proportionally more directly associated with the brand root, in this case Barcelona.

As for managerial implications, this study offers different managerial implications; it contributes to the projected personality assessment. Very little research has been dedicated to the assessment of communication practices as a portrayal of the desired image and personality. For instance, the study conducted by Pitt *et al.* (2007) proposed, for the first time, a useful tool of analysis to assess the actual projected personality of destinations in a systematized, affordable, and useful for marketers manner. However, brand managers need to take into account the improvements proposed in this research in order to accurately assess the projected personality through their official websites. This research combines two additional measures: (1) identifying the synonyms' coverage of the content of the page, and (2) weighting the value of those synonyms directly accompanying the brand name.

These two measures take into account some characteristics of the website discourse and the user's experience on the website. Analyzing the prevalence instead of the frequency considers user's behavior and experience with online sources. Assessing the importance and

visibility of each synonym relative to the overall content of the pages is a more accurate measure to evaluate the influence of this synonym on the user's experience. Users do not read websites as plane sources of information but navigate and explore several pages superficially until they find the desired information (Morville & Rosenfeld, 2006). Thus the characteristics of the overall pages influence the exposure of users to the specific synonyms.

Furthermore, those terms located close to the brand, in the same sentence, increase consumers' inference of the personality trait associated directly with the brand. In other words, synonyms referring straight to the brand would contribute to associate this trait with the city name and not as a trait linked to an attraction of the city. Thus, this measure takes into account the potential of the synonyms to promote a better inference of a brand's personality traits by users (Kardes, Posavac & Cronley, 2004). Altogether, the empirical study of the case of Barcelona shows the accuracy of the improvements proposed in the methodological approach.

7. Conclusion, limitations, and future research

Place branding requires tools to control and oversee the brand strategy implementation by the different stakeholders' communication. This study develops a measure to assess the projected personality through the official websites by taking into account some characteristics of this source of information that might influence the impact of the projected personality vocabulary. The method proposed is not only valid to accurately assess a brand personality projected in the website but it is also proposed as a functional tool to assess the consistency between the personality projected by different official sources.

For instance, the findings of the empirical study point to the need to strengthen the consistency between the personality projected by the official sources of Barcelona. Coordinating the official communications of the different stakeholders and explicitly paying attention to the projected personality would contribute to the consistency of Barcelona's, or any other city, brand image. As previous authors noted, positioning a unique image and personality proposition is a relevant strategic decision that would significantly contribute to the overall strength of the brand image (Brown *et al.*, 2006; Campbell *et al.*, 2010). This improved methodological approach provides a more accurate measure that enables brand managers to efficiently assess and monitor the consistency of the city brands projected personality through the official messages on the website spread by the different stakeholders.

Finally, this study has several limitations. Regarding the scope of the research, the study only focuses on a single case, two official sources, to test the methodological approach proposed. Thus, future research replicating this study with a broader sample of study would contribute to test the applicability of this method. Additionally, the analysis is conducted only on the textual information contained on the website. Even though advances in the analysis of audiovisual content have been done (Stepchenkova & Zhan, 2013), future research should consider operationalized and included the study of visual content in further versions of the methodology proposed. Finally, this study is based on the Aaker's (1997) Brand Personality Scale, which has been criticized by several authors. Therefore, future research could explore the applicability of other scales or new measure that could represent better the places' personality.

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