

What most attracts us to a tourist destination? Attractions, culture and gastronomy

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Tourists' expectations when visiting a particular place are related to several features of the chosen destination: culture, architecture,

gastronomy, infrastructure, landscape, events, shopping and others. These features attract people to the destination and contribute to the overall experience of the trip. As a whole, they are crucial aspects of the destinations and have a profound influence on their success. Therefore, the study of the market segment of urban destinations is particularly important due to the impact on the economic development of cities.

A destination's competitiveness refers to the ability of the brand to successfully occupy a niche in the market in the long term. It is the potential to create and integrate value-added products to maintain the resources while keeping their position in the market compared with other competitors. For the [brand image](#), the uniqueness of the destination is key to its desired positioning and this makes the brand unique and distinguishable for tourists.

Sara Vinyals Mirabent, a researcher of the Communication, Advertising & Society (CAS) Research Group of the Department of Communication at UPF has raised the issue and has studied it at the 12 most popular urban destinations in Europe. This research helps to understand how European cities use their most attractive features to compete in the market segment of urban destinations and to stand out from other competing cities.

Vinyals has published the results of her study in the advanced online edition of *Journal of Destination Marketing & Management*. The aim of this study was twofold. On the one hand, it sought to identify the dominant features of communication to attract visitors to Europe's most popular urban destinations. On the other, the study aimed to determine the most relevant characteristics of the destinations that act as distinguishing elements. It is a baseline study on the most popular destinations in the context of European urban tourism that addresses the limitations of previous studies. The research is part of the ITOURIST research project.

The study performs a content analysis to identify the similarities and differences of the official communication channels of the twelve most popular urban destinations in Europe. The final sample includes twelve official websites operated by official [tourism](#) organizations from the following cities: London, Paris, Istanbul, Barcelona, Amsterdam, Milan, Rome, Vienna, Prague, Munich, Madrid and Frankfurt.

The results show that to compete in this specific market, tourist products and packages, cultural attractions and [gastronomy](#) are the critical elements chosen to attract visitors. The twelve cities studied showed a significant amount of content dedicated to these issues on all of the websites considered (over 40%). The prevalence of these strategies in all cases indicates their crucial role for these competitive urban destinations. The results also identify that strategies related to history, accommodation and leisure attractions are the main sources of differentiation between European cities.

Among the European urban destinations studied, the [content analysis](#) revealed three main areas of differentiation (D1, D2 and D3) which can be used to place smaller destinations on the market. The main difference between destinations can be explained by the dichotomy between the advertising strategies related to leisure and culture (D1). However, the areas related to infrastructure (D2) and location near tourist sites (D3) represent a significant source of differentiation. These three main factors among Europe's twelve most popular destinations may explain more than 70% of the differences between destinations.

The results of this study point to the clear need to promote the city's tourist products and packages, its cultural attractions and its gastronomy in the online competition as European urban [destination](#). In addition, infrastructure and transport, landscape and natural resources, events and sports also seem to have a more stable presence through communication practices, although these categories are less important in the discourse

than the previous ones.

More information: Sara Vinyals-Mirabent. European urban destinations' attractors at the frontier between competitiveness and a unique destination image. A benchmark study of communication practices, *Journal of Destination Marketing & Management* (2019). [DOI: 10.1016/j.jdmm.2019.02.006](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jdmm.2019.02.006)

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