

7-31-2020

BORACAY ISLAND DESTINATION IMAGE THROUGH TRAVEL BLOGS

Peter Lorenz Salmon

College of Management, University of the Philippines Visayas, Philippines

Ronelia Amen

College of Management, University of the Philippines Visayas, Philippines

Jan Patrick Aguilar

College of Management, University of the Philippines Visayas, Philippines

John Benedict Javellana

College of Management, University of the Philippines Visayas, Philippines

See next page for additional authors

Follow this and additional works at: <https://scholarhub.ui.ac.id/jessd>



Part of the [Environmental Studies Commons](#), [Life Sciences Commons](#), and the [Tourism and Travel Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Salmon, Peter Lorenz; Amen, Ronelia; Aguilar, Jan Patrick; Javellana, John Benedict; and Fernandez, Cheryl Joy (2020). BORACAY ISLAND DESTINATION IMAGE THROUGH TRAVEL BLOGS. *Journal of Environmental Science and Sustainable Development*, 3(1), 47-70.

Available at: <https://doi.org/10.7454/jessd.v3i1.1044>

This Original Research Article is brought to you for free and open access by the School of Environmental Science at UI Scholars Hub. It has been accepted for inclusion in Journal of Environmental Science and Sustainable Development by an authorized editor of UI Scholars Hub.

BORACAY ISLAND DESTINATION IMAGE THROUGH TRAVEL BLOGS

Authors

Peter Lorenz Salmon, Ronelia Amen, Jan Patrick Aguilar, John Benedict Javellana, and Cheryl Joy Fernandez



BORACAY ISLAND DESTINATION IMAGE THROUGH TRAVEL BLOGS

Peter Lorenz Salmon¹, Ronelia Amen¹, Jan Patrick Aguilar¹, John Benedict Javellana¹, Cheryl Joy Fernandez^{1*}

¹College of Management, University of the Philippines Visayas, Philippines

*Corresponding author: e-mail: cjfernandez@up.edu.ph

(Received: 21 May 2020; Accepted: 11 July 2020; Published: 31 July 2020)

Abstract

Destination images are important information for marketing professionals, local planners, and travel bloggers on social media. The rise of social media has allowed more tourists to share their knowledge, emotions, and experiences from their travels. However, despite the popularity of adapting online narratives to destination images, little or no qualitative analysis has been conducted about island's sustainable tourism development in the Philippines using information from social media. One type of destination are small islands in the Philippines. The examination is worthwhile inasmuch as the literature has been silent on destination images of top island retreats in the country, although there are many negative images of overcrowded and unsustainable resorts posted by both international and local tourists. Method of this research are using data from 83 travel blogs written from January 2013 to February 2018 by visitors of Boracay, the current study extracts underlying themes and subthemes relating to visitors' overall impressions, cultural exchanges, economic development, and environmental changes. It was determined that tourists are interested in the white beaches, breathtaking landscapes, and varieties of activities offered, such as island-hopping and "mermaiding." There is also evidence that Boracay continues to face issues concerning its sustainability, such as threats on its unfortunate transportation system, losing its cultural identity, uncontrolled urbanization, and unsustainable solid waste management practices. The findings here are useful for local government, small island tourism planners, and service providers in understanding visitor perceptions of quality and value, which in turn have influenced the island's competitiveness and sustainability.

Keywords: destination image; small islands; social media; sustainable tourism development.

1. Introduction

A tourism destination is a multidimensional product, comprising tangible (coastlines, mountains, landscapes) and intangible (history, culture) elements (Morgan 2007, Croes et al. 2015). Many travel experiences are described online by tourists, who have become major producers of information (Budeano 2014, Litvin, Goldsmith and Pan 2008). There are currently 4.6 billion Internet users (Internet World Statistics 2020) and the rapid advance of information

technology is changing how tourism information is disseminated (Jacobsen and Munar 2014). As a consequence, communication between tourists and other relevant stakeholders, e.g., tourism service providers, has become more convenient as they gain access to diverse and desired information at any time, any place, and on any digital device (Onkokwo, Eyisi and Ololo 2015). Thus, a new pattern of community empowerment has emerged, giving tourists confidence to scrutinize the public sector, tourism destination organizations (DMOs), and other tourism stakeholders.

Social media, notably known as Web 2.0, are vitally changing the tourism landscape by channeling reliable information from travelers about their travel experiences (Sigala, Christou and Gretzel 2016). According to the Digital 2020 reports, social media have 3.8 billion users (Datareportal 2020) and numbers are expected to grow in the coming years. This trend paved the way for social media to become an alternative framework for negotiations (Budeano 2014) that facilitate open exchanges of tourism experiences outside the market-based venues. Thus, social media posts have become a vital information source during a consumer's decision-making process (Ye et al. 2011). Tourists have now increasingly sought peers' experiences when preparing to buy products or services (Xie et al. 2014). Hennig-Thurau et al. (2004) cited reasons why individuals post online: "platform assistance", "venting negative feelings", "concern for other consumers," helping businesses, "advice seeking," among others. Since consumer decision-making process include use of web spaces, it is worthwhile to take advantage of the information found in social media.

Blogs are one of the most trusted social media platforms (Schmallegger and Carson 2008, Tudor 2012) and are a way to look at photos of tourism destinations (Wenger, 2008). Blogs allow tourists to share their travel experiences and perceived images of places thereby acting as an important means of communication with other tourists and tourism providers (Tudor, 2012). In particular, examining destination images (Pike 2009) allows tourism managers to understand their brands and intentions to visit (Tseng et al. 2015). The "attitude theory," which highlights the "cognitive component of image" or "beliefs about a destination," has become one of the popular measurements of destination images (Crompton 1979, Tseng et al. 2015). Country-level destination images are well-studied, as for example, Austria (Wenger 2008), Hong Kong (Law and Cheung 2010), Romania (Tudor 2012), China (Tseng et al. 2015), and Taiwan (Ruan et al. 2017).

The Philippines, in the western Pacific, welcomed six million foreign tourists in 2017, marking unprecedented growth of their tourism industry. It grew approximately 11% from the

previous year's five million arrivals. Philippine tourism bested the average growth of the other Asian and Pacific countries (6%) and Southeast Asia (8%) ([United Nations World Tourism Organization 2018](#)). However, the country's tourism image is faced with various problems, due to ongoing unrest in its southern province of Mindanao, corruption issues, and natural hazards.

Philippine destination images have been studied before. Using surveys of Australians, [de Guzman et al. \(2012\)](#) investigated the pre- and post-visit images of the Philippines. Before visiting the country, Australians imagined it as having "friendly" and "hospitable" people. Afterwards, they still thought the people "hospitable" but noted their "problems with traffic and pollution." The main motivations to travel there included to "have fun" and "see different attractions and destinations." [Arellano \(2020\)](#) examined Finnish destination images of the Philippines through a survey and found that Finns perceived the country as one with "beaches," "warm climate," "sea," and "beautiful." However, the same people, especially those aged 50 and above, were particularly concerned about "safety," "natural disasters," and "hygiene."

To date, there have been few studies that have looked at specific attractions or places and how they are perceived by tourists. Images of astrotourism in Cebu, a province south and east of Manila have been investigated by [Najafabadi \(2012\)](#). These include astronomical views such as sunrise, sunset, and star trail activities. Using interviews and pictures, the author described the essential features of Cebu for astrotourism, such as stargazing. Certain areas identified include Mactan Island, Malapascua Island, Camotes Island, Olango Wildlife Sanctuary, Moalboal, and Tops Cebu City. For instance, [Jung \(2010\)](#) examined images of the city of Manila, which is typically described as having "crowds of people," "dense," "overpopulated," "congested," "full", and "overcrowded." This is typical of a megacity with urban sprawl and dense population. These images will surely be different from other destinations in the country or elsewhere, e.g., wildlife tourism, so destination-marketing organizations should be wary of pegging the entire country as such.

Our investigation focused on the top tourist destination in the Philippines, the island of Boracay, which generated a total of 2 million tourists in 2019 ([Sabal, 2020](#)). It is known for its famous beach with fine white sand and pristine waters. Data from the Aklan Provincial Tourism Office showed that from January to December 2017, the island welcomed a total of 2.068 million tourists, 20% higher compared to the previous year's figure of 1.725 million during the same period ([Philippine Information Agency, 2017](#)). Tourism development in the island has transformed Boracay from a "sleepy tropical island" to one of the Philippines' popular holiday destinations. Several studies about the impacts of coastal tourism development in Boracay were

conducted by Smith (1990, 1992, 2001) and, to some extent, Trousdale (1999) and Carter (2004), who narrated sustainability issues in the island, describing the fast rising imbalance between environmental conservation and tourism development, as well as discrimination and displacement of the indigenous Ati people. With the influx of tourists and development, issues include strained relationships between tourism stakeholders, politically weak local government, and land use planning issues (Maguigad et al. 2015).

Boracay is also experiencing alarming levels in its carrying capacity and solid waste management. An aerial survey conducted by the Department of Tourism and Department of Environment and Natural Resources (DENR) showed photos of garbage, overcrowding, and traffic congestion, with locals complaining about pollution and flooding. Thus, it was recommended by the government regulatory bodies, with the approval of President Duterte, to close the island for six months (Ranada 2018). With respect to the overall development of the island as a tourism destination, there are the exceptional costs to its natural resources, such as water, air, and sound pollution, ecosystem alteration, solid waste problem, and threats to the aquatic ecosystem.

Using Boracay in the Philippines as a case-in-point, this paper looked at destination image of Boracay from Web 2.0. There has been little or no qualitative analysis conducted using Web 2.0 in the context of sustainable tourism development, specifically in the island of Boracay. Exploratory in nature, this paper examines the blogs posted by tourists before Boracay's sudden six-month closure, which started on April 26, 2018. The study extracts underlying themes that contribute to the sustainable/unsustainable situation, based on the indicators of sustainable tourism development. Analysis on the themes noted and their connection to the overall tourism experience and perception of tourists on their blogs is explored.

2. Methods

2.1. Boracay, Philippines

Around 315 km from capital of Manila, Boracay Island is a 1,000-ha island located in the town of Malay in Aklan, Western Visayas (Figure 1). The island measures a relatively small 7 km by 1 km, comprising three barangays (or communities) namely Manoc-Manoc, Balabag, and Yapak. Tourism demand shows no sign of slowing down, recording an increase of 20% in 2017. Recent data show a total of 2.068 million tourists in 2017, of which 1.095 million and 973 million are foreign and local tourists, respectively. These numbers generated P56.14 billion

(US\$1.12 billion) of tourism receipts (Philippine Information Agency 2017). We followed a four-step method to answer our objective (Figure 2).



Figure 1. Map of Boracay, Philippines

Source: geoportal.gov.ph

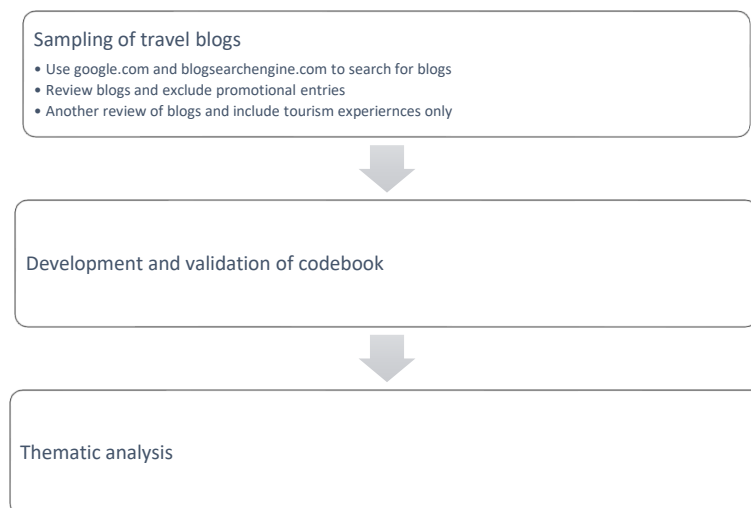


Figure 2. Methodological process implemented

2.2. Sampling of travel blogs

A qualitative research design was used in the conduct of this study, which demonstrates an interpretative and naturalistic approach than quantitative research. Although the processes are

similar, qualitative methods use textual and images to infer meanings to the concepts investigated. (Creswell 2014).

A non-probability purposive sampling technique was used to identify our sampling frame. The sample was selected based on our subjective judgment or arbitrary ideas, rather than a random selection. For example, author looked for a “representative sample” or explicitly sought for diversity of informants (e.g., for deviant case samplings) (Kaplan 2004). Thus, a set of criteria were determined and added sequentially to adequately capture a sample. What follows is a discussion about how author selected the travel blog entries and followed that with a discussion about codebook development. These two broad steps were taken to minimize the potential biases (Creswell 2014) from qualitative research designs.

2.3. Selection of blog entries

Our research utilized the latest data by uploading blogs from January 2013 to February 2018. The blog samples were generated by using the search engines google.com and blogsearchengine.com and by typing the keywords “Boracay Island” and “Boracay Island Blogs.” All 106 blogs from the search were reviewed one by one. Author excluded promotional entries and those not related to Boracay. During the second review, blogs with contents that did not indicate the bloggers’ narration of their tourism experience in Boracay were removed. Finally, a textual analysis was used to investigate underlying themes from these blogs as their stories revealed destination images of the islands (discussion of the codebook in the next subsection).

In summary, 83 blogs posted from January 2013 to February 2018 were analyzed. These stories are inclusive of travel guides, personal experiences, and opinions. Thus, all 83 blogs include narration of travel experiences, exclusive of promotional activities such as advertisements and marketing related agenda.

2.4. Development and validation of codebook

To complement the analysis, a codebook was utilized to assess blog contents. It served two essential functions; one, as a guide during the coding process and a second guide for data management and analysis (Babbie 2013). It is based on previous World Tourism Organization (2004) sustainability indicators to practice fairness and accuracy in this study. These indicators have undergone group discussions for internal validity (Table 1).

Table 1 List of sustainable tourism development indicators.

Destination images	Indicators
Overall tourist impression	Overall or general experience or impression of the place
Cultural changes (e.g., cultural impact, changes in community lifestyle, values, and customs)	Tourist perception on cultural changes in the island (e.g., people interaction, socio-cultural, values, and customs)
Economic development (e.g., growth in business establishment, and tourism attractions)	Tourist perception on the business boom in the island (e.g., changes in infrastructures, business landscape, practices)
Environmental changes (e.g., sea water quality, sewage, marine, and wildlife)	Tourist perception on quality of seawater and sewage Marine and wildlife practices

Source: [World Tourism Organization \(2004\)](#)

2.5. Data analysis

The research focuses on the analysis of blogs, which is a form of unobtrusive research as it indirectly collects data from tourists. Thus, researchers appropriately applied content and thematic analysis to examine the text found in blogs. Per Mayring's structuring content analysis ([Mayring 2004](#)), its aim is to identify and extract information in an existing text based on coded descriptions. This allows the researcher to make inferences about the characteristics and meaning of the written material. This involves "formal, content-focused, topologizing, and scaling procedures, depending on the type of structuring dimensions that have been developed in accordance with the relevant theory, and these are then subdivided into individual categories."

On the other hand, as cited in the study of [Braun and Clarke \(2006\)](#), thematic analysis is about "identifying, analyzing, and reporting patterns (themes) within data," in which concepts are described comprehensively. For example, during at the start of data collection, researchers are able to "to notice, and look for, patterns of meaning, and issues of potential interest in the data." For this research, individual variables analyzed from the blog entries were grouped into the four corresponding categories as provided previously in Table 1. As the analysis proceeds,

the codebook was steadily refined along the way. Thus, new features were added while other variables were removed if not applicable or they did not meet the criteria.

3. Results and Discussions

Tourists write blogs about their perceived destination image and satisfaction at Boracay. As mentioned earlier, high satisfaction means repeat travelers and effective word of mouth. In contrast, dissatisfied tourists means not keeping them and losing to other competing destinations (Reisinger and Turner 2003, as cited by Chen and Chen 2009). Thus, negative comments also adversely affect the market reputation of a tourism destination.

Based on the samples gathered, out of 83 blogs, 13 blogs (16%) were written by multiple persons (e.g., couple) while 70 blogs (84%) emanated from individuals. The multiple-authored blogs comprised two local blogs and 11 foreign blogs. On the other hand, individual blogs consisted of 33, or 47%, local blogs, while 37, or 53%, came from foreign countries. Of the 70 individual blogs, 17, or 24%, were identified as male and 53, or 76%, were female.

This section presents significant themes arising from blogs: 1) overall tourist impression, 2) culture, 3) economic development, and 4) natural environment. Subthemes were also generated and were categorized as positive or negative attributes. Positive attributes reflect elements of sustainable tourism development in the island while negative attributes highlight undesirable (or unsustainable) information. The findings are discussed below:

3.1. Theme 1: Overall tourist impression

The majority of the bloggers examined were generally impressed with their tourism experience. This may imply that the majority met their pre-travel expectations. Generally, tourists described their trip to Boracay as: “Better than expected,” “I’d love to do it again next time,” “I will definitely be back!” Figure 3 presents a positive destination image of Boracay. Firstly, many expressed that seeing beautiful, powdery-white beaches gave them satisfaction. One blogger shared that:

I had found my own paradise, one with the most perfect white-sand beaches, coconut trees, and turquoise-blue water. Female blogger from Australia.

Boracay’s main asset is its four-kilometer white coral-sand beach (Carter, 2004). Popular activities there include swimming, beach strolling, snorkeling, sailing (paraw), trekking, sightseeing, and bar/restaurant-related activities.

Secondly, aside from its natural wonders, the island also offers exciting and multiple activities. Common tourism interests mentioned were food trips, island tours, water activities, and nightlife activities. Findings revealed that foreign male tourists were more likely to seek out nightlife and other lifestyle experiences as their primary activities, while local male tourists were into food trips, island tours, water activities, and guided tours. There was no difference between top activities for foreign and local female tourists – they all like water activities, food trips, and island tours. A male tourist from United Kingdom wrote:

One of our favorite destinations to date in Asia is the Ph-antastically Ph-riendly Philippines - particularly Boracay Island, where we got to learn to swim like mermaids.....because you can take a mermaid lesson, of course, and learn to swim and pose like a mermaid right on the main strip of White Beach!. Male blogger from United Kingdom.

Interestingly, one recent popular attraction includes “mermaiding,” or the wearing of the mermaid tail/costume (Porter and Luck 2018) offered by the Philippine Mermaid Swimming Academy. Activities include “mermaid photo opportunity” (i.e., photo session in dry and knee-deep water) and different levels of mermaid swimming lessons. Mermaid tourism has become popular around the world and there are many mermaid schools all around the world (Keate 2018).

The final theme attributed to positive tourist satisfaction was the breathtaking view of Boracay. The island may be viewed from the sky, beach-side, sea, or from the mountaintops. A blogger from the Philippines described his feelings about that scenic imagery:

It's a once in a lifetime experience for me! I enjoyed the activity, seeing the island from a bird's-eye view! Stunning! I'd love to do it again next time! Male blogger from the Philippines.

A possible explanation for these results stemmed from the fact that the destination is a small island, with rich natural resources, both marine and terrestrial. The activities are similar to other island destinations, such as in small and medium island chalets in East Peninsular Malaysia (Jaafar and Maideen 2018). These findings seem to be consistent with “destination images of the Philippines,” which unanimously directs to “beaches,” “diverse activities,” and “friendly and hospitable people” (Arellano 2020, de Guzman 2012, Jung 2010). Not all the comments were positive.

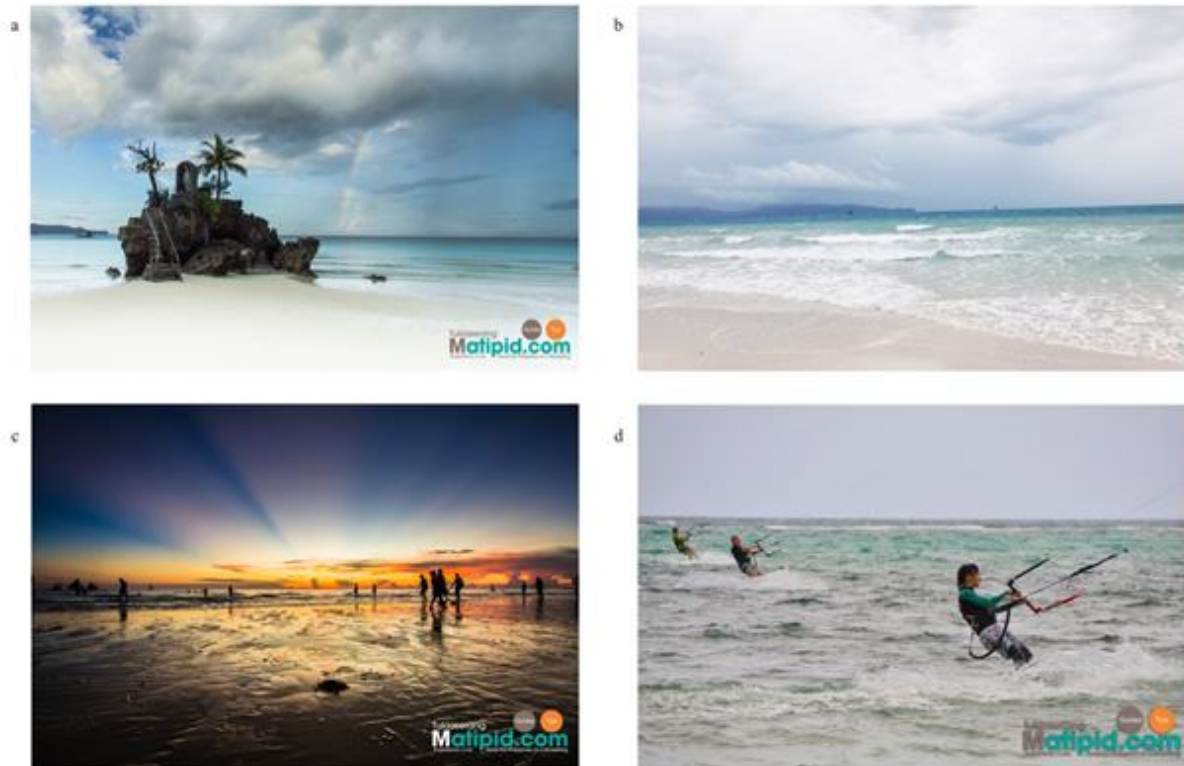


Figure 3. (a) Ave Maria Grotto, a popular attraction; (b) White sand beach; (c) A beach sunset; and (d) Water sports activity

Source: Photo Credits to Blog Owners

Negative comments were also mentioned in the travel blogs. Bloggers wrote about their bad experiences, including their dissatisfaction toward the transportation system, cost of living, and accommodations. According to them, Boracay is inconveniently located and they encountered problems during their transit to/from/within the island, including the local transportation called the “tricycle.” Tourists observed jagged rock and crag formations on the narrow semi-circumnavigating roads. Some complained that they were forced to walk long distances. These complaints affected their intentions to revisit Boracay, as noted by a foreign tourist:

However, it is too far away from Kalibo Airport, the long journey is a downside, making it less attractive for revisit. Male blogger from Japan.

In addition, a relatively high cost of living in the island contributed to dissatisfaction for some. Prices of basic commodities, such as water and food, were higher than other island destinations in the Philippines and abroad. In their investigation, Ong et al. (2011) found that prices of commodities had increased in Boracay, which brought about further hardships to the local residents despite earning income from tourism. Rising costs in the island had been cited

in much earlier studies of [Tousdale \(1999\)](#) and [Carter \(2004\)](#). This particular observation is not new in island destinations, such as in Northern Cyprus ([Akis and Warner, 1994](#)). One blogger compared Boracay to other islands she had visited:

I am really REALLY trying to be unbiased here, but I really cannot stop comparing our experiences to Thailand. It doesn't matter if you're in Phuket or Krabi, all island-hopping trips will cost roughly about the same or at most about 1.5 more, depending on where you are. Xxx If I ever come back to Boracay, I will never do this Island Hopping-thing again. Female blogger from Singapore.

Other factors that relate to their overall satisfaction were the condition of the transport system going to and around the island. Transportation facilities were poorly maintained, and transportation services were unsatisfactory. A female visitor from Poland shared that:

The ferry terminal is like an airport where they x-ray your luggage and make you wait patiently to board your boat. Scratch 'patiently.' I was trying to be polite while waiting for my luggage to be scanned when I was hit and pushed a couple of times by locals who absolutely didn't care that I was standing there. Xxx When we finally got to the island, nobody cared that Southwest left us all, around 40 people, in the pouring rain while they screamed out hotel numbers for at least 15 minutes before putting us in minibuses where we felt like sardines in a can. Suffice to say, it wasn't a pleasant experience. Female blogger from Poland.

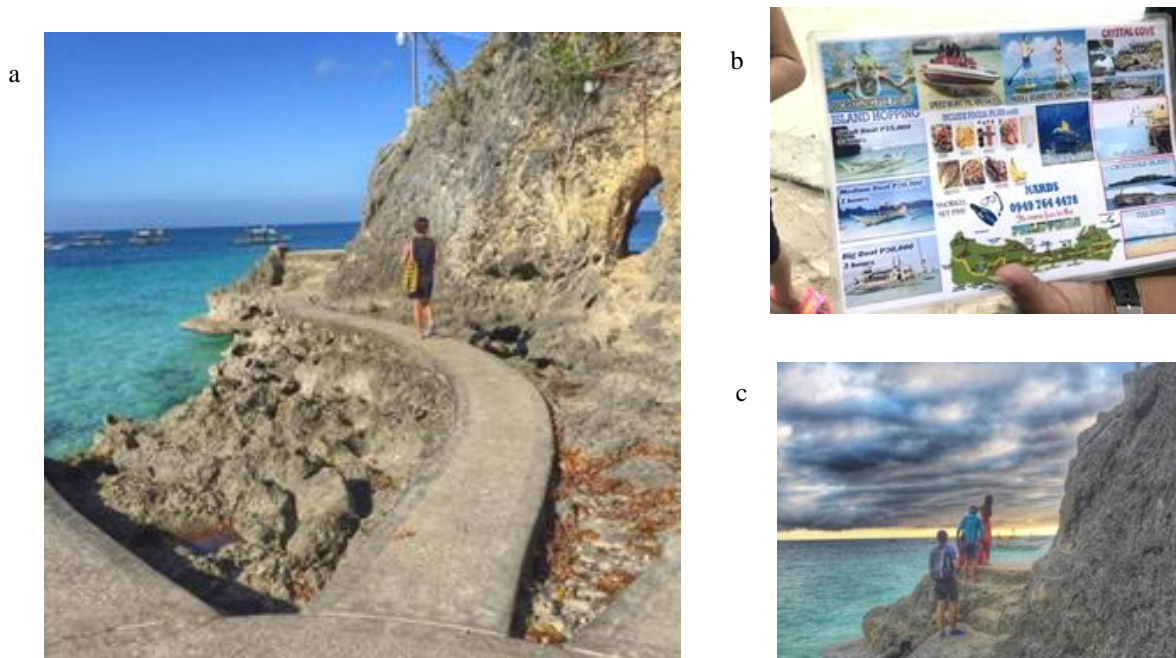


Figure 4. (a) Cemented viewing area; (b) A random pictorial session in concrete viewing area; and (c) Sample price list of tours and activities

Source: Photo Credits to Blog Owners

It was encouraging to compare these findings with those described by [Ong et al. \(2011\)](#), who found that traffic congestion was one of the perennial problems in Boracay, especially during peak hours in the “main road.” According to the authors, congestion may be explained

by the regulation “One-Entry/Exit Policy” or the “OE, OE,” wherein there is one entry and exit point in the island port. Popular modes of transport on the island (post-closure) included motorcycles and motorized tricycles, which usually crowd the narrow roads, polluting the air (Smith et al. 2011). Some tourists in Boracay, especially international visitors, complained about the poor maintenance of transportation going to the island, including airport facilities. Australians and Asian tourists perceived the Philippines as a place with bad traffic and poor transportation, especially in highly urbanized areas such as Manila (de Guzman 2012, Jung 2010). North Cyprus in Turkey also experienced these problems (Akis and Warner 1994), wherein there were inadequate flights, poor airport services, and insufficient public transportation in the island.

3.2. Theme 2: Culture

The unprecedented development of the island through tourism had caused positive and negative impacts on the host communities and their cultures (Figure 5). Tourists have written positively about local residents of Boracay. Dominant themes include friendliness, as well as the approachable atmosphere of the island for social interaction. For instance, locals were “accommodating,” “friendly,” and “hospitable.” Even for a Filipina, the island was very accommodating!

The best thing is the friendly local people, which I feel contribute most to the island’s laid back and light-hearted vibe. Female blogger from the Philippines.

Boracay also offers avenues for meeting new friends, whether at hotel bars and restaurants, the D’Mall beach front, or the backpackers’ inns and hostels. A local tourist shared her unforgettable experience with fellow tourists:

Pubcrawl: turn strangers into friends. And we did! We’ve met plenty of people there and got to hang out with them afterwards. There are a lot of people from different countries. So many games, so many beers, so much vodka, so much music! And we literally went pub crawling to five different well-known bars at Boracay! Such a fun experience. Female blogger from the Philippines.

The entrepreneurial spirit of local communities has improved, due to diverse opportunities for small and medium enterprises brought about by tourism development. Aside from earning income from fishing and farming, more locals have ventured in small businesses, which eventually provided other locals with livelihood opportunities. This was noted by a visitor from New Zealand:

I was more than happy to give them a few dollars. I was most impressed with their entrepreneurial spirit, and it offered a lovely exchange for the girls with some local kids. Female blogger from New Zealand.

On the other hand, there were also broad themes that related to unfavorable cultural exchanges. Discussions focused on the displacement of Atis (an indigenous group in Boracay) and other local residents, mostly due to land tenurial issues. Many residential areas were also converted into accommodation and commercial areas. Local residents and migrant laborers occupied squatter areas near these new establishments. In addition, non-indigenous residents of Boracay historically earn their livelihoods through agriculture and fishing activities. There is a shift of livelihoods from practicing traditional fishing to operating boats to guiding (e.g. in various tourist activities such as diving and snorkeling) and to working as janitors or salespeople. These changes are believed to impact traditions and practices of locals. One foreigner quipped that Boracay is not authentically Filipino anymore:

I guess it's not surprising then that Filipino people quickly figured out what kind of people come to Boracay and 'adjusted' the place to the crowd. There was nothing Filipino in Boracay, everything was designed for tourists in the cheesiest and most horrible way possible. Female blogger from Poland.



Figure 5. (a) Dining at sea; (b) A beach side restaurant; and (c) Indigenous people and tourist the beach

Source: Photo Credits to Blog Owners

There have been studies that have discussed adverse impacts of tourism to locals: Atis in Boracay (Trousdale 1999, Ong et al. 2011), Mah Meri ethnic group in Malaysia (Kunasekaran et al. 2017), Taquile Island in Peru (Osorio and Best 2015), and Ngöbe settlements in Panama

(Mach and Vahradian 2019). Several studies have also highlighted the importance of local participation and engagement in planning and governance (Tousdale 1999, Ong et al. 2011, Smith et al. 2011), especially in the development of coastal zoning processes (Wong 2008) and other local plans (Carter 2004), as they understood the sensitivities of their cultures and natural environment.

3.3. Theme 3: Economic Development

The third theme is about the economic development of Boracay (Figure 6). It includes narratives about changes in infrastructure (e.g., ports, roads) and businesses (e.g., hotels, restaurants, other commercial establishments). From the months of January to December, tourist arrivals for the year 2017 generated a total of P56.14 billion (US\$1.12 billion) in total tourism receipts, including P38.78 billion (US\$776 billion) and P17.36 billion (US\$347 billion) from foreign (including overseas Filipinos) and domestic tourists, respectively (PIA, 2017). Taking about these changes, a tourist shared:

Although the effects of commercialization are there, I also see some positive effects of these establishments, which draw and attract more tourists to the island. Female and male bloggers from the Philippines.

Data from blogs revealed that tourists noticed positive impacts of tourism (e.g. quality of life improvements for local residents), but were also cognizant of the negative effects of unregulated commercialization. They felt that development was not well-planned and that most complaints were directed at development of commercial establishments near the beach areas. This sentiment is shared by a foreign blogger:

The white beach in Boracay is really a nice one, comparable to those in Fiji or any other Pacific island, but how can you even enjoy its beauty when you're surrounded by Starbucks, Pizza Hut, and other random restaurants right on the beach? Female blogger from Poland.

Residential and commercial areas were also disorganized. Expressing this issue, one blogger said:

“Xxx Everyone just seemed intent on partying loud and hard and it didn't seem like it was going to be that family friendly after all. Xxx It's a small place and there's big demand for land, so what does that mean for the majority of locals who live a pretty simple existence? Most of the developments looked like they were the work of multi-nationals rather than local investment xxx? Female blogger from the Philippines.

They also compared Boracay with islands that have a similar atmosphere (e.g. Ibiza, Malia, islands in Thailand) or islands that have opposite feelings (e.g. Nacpan-Calitang Twin beach).

Boracay has become very urbanized. While some tourists might like to be in such a place, my husband and I aren't really mesmerized with this set up. We'd rather be on an island where almost no one was there, like we have it for ourselves just like in Nacpan-Calitang Twin beach. Female blogger from the Philippines.

Crowding was also repeatedly mentioned in blogs. Some tourists felt that Boracay is a place for “*partygoers*” and “*those who enjoy night life*”, which was disliked by tourists who prefer peaceful and serene island experiences. They stated that the island had become clichéd due to its glamorous and extravagant vibe.

No number of spa treatments was going to change my impression of Boracay, a place for partiers or rich people, of which I am neither. This wasn't a love match — not for me. Maybe 30 years ago when Boracay and I were less overdeveloped. Female blogger from undisclosed residence.

By contrast, other tourists felt that Boracay is not as crowded as other island destinations, such as in Miami and Hawaii in the United States.

Unlike the beaches in Miami or Hawaii though, it never felt crowded. Male blogger from the USA

Similarly, tourists felt that over industrialization of some parts of Boracay has not affected their overall experience. A Filipino blogger shared that:

Many say that it is now too commercialized, but this island still hasn't lost its charm. It continues to mesmerize millions of local and foreign visitors every year. Male blogger from the Philippines.

Another tourist felt that the island's natural beauty still outweighed negativities from commercialization:

Boracay is one of the few places I've visited that has been virtually swamped by the tourism industry and yet somehow still manages to maintain its own character. Sure, there were occasions where we were herded like sheep but there were many other instances where sunsets like this and little wonders in Boracay still managed to make us stop in our tracks and take our breath away. Female blogger from Singapore.

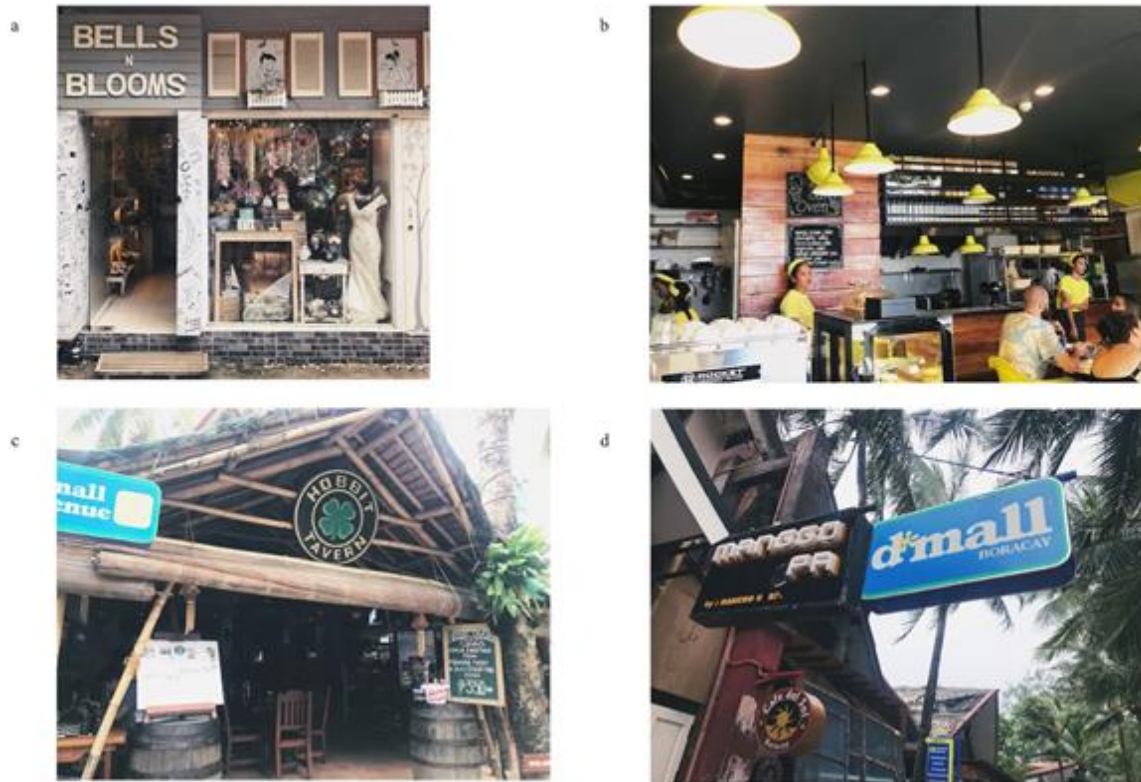


Figure 6. (a) A local store for wedding needs; (b) A local coffee shop; (c) A restaurant offering international cuisine; and (d) D'mall Boracay, a popular commercial complex

Source: Photo Credits to Blog Owners

Our findings show that perceptions were not homogenous when looking at urbanization and crowdedness. These findings further support the idea of sporadic tourism growth by Carter (2004), wherein older residents observed the physical and social developments of the islands and increasing numbers of visitors resulted in more tourist-related establishments, pollution from solid wastes, and migration of laborers to the island.

3.4. Theme 4: Natural environment

Another recurrent theme is about the natural environment of Boracay (Figure 7). Positive experiences relating to the natural environment include environmental awareness, clear water quality, and existence of wildlife. A common view among tourists regarded the “blue,” “clear,” “turquoise” waters of the island:

Look at the blue gradient color...OMG so nice. Female blogger from Malaysia.

Other tourists enjoyed seeing and interacting with local wildlife:

I loved our journey to Ilig Iligan past Puka Beach and the bats hanging upside down in the trees on the jungled and rugged coastline on our boat tour. Female blogger from Australia.

Conversely, problems related to solid waste management were also presented in blogs. A dominant discussion is on ineffective drainage systems and improper waste disposal:

Boracay faces the prospect of turning into an environmental disaster due to the spotty enforcement of sanitation and wastewater rules – a problem further compounded by the island’s incomplete sewage and drainage system. Female blogger from the UK.

Unsustainable practices on marine life were also discussed by tourists. The natural habitat has been bothered by tourists, especially with unregulated feeding of fish.

Then I spotted some bread that was uneaten and collected them to feed the fish so that I could get closer to them. Male blogger from the USA.



Figure 7. (a) Algal bloom near the Ave Maria Grotto; and (b) Beach activities despite the algal bloom

Source: Photo Credits to Blog Owners

The DENR reported a coliform outbreak in Boracay in 2007, which gained attention of national and international media. Tourism stakeholders were generally concerned, causing world-wide interest among various international organizations. Among these are the Japan International Cooperation Agency, the Canadian Urban Institute, and the World Bank–International Financial Corporation, which investigated sustainability issues, including solid waste management. The following year, development and infrastructure plans for wastewater/seawater disposal and runoff control under the OECF (“The Boracay Environmental Infrastructure Project Execution”) were developed. Also, sporadic developments, including those along the beach, were tackled when the 2000 Aklan master plan was adopted for Tourism development.

In summary, from the blogs written about the island of Boracay, it was found that tourists are interested in white beaches, breathtaking landscapes, and a variety of activities (e.g., water and island-hopping activities, trekking, etc.). However, there is evidence that the island has

problems like its poor transportation system, loss of its cultural identity, uncontrolled urbanization, and unsustainable solid waste management practices. According to [Ryan \(1997\)](#) and [Maguigad \(2013\)](#) tourism planners must control the level of risk at a destination through eliminating risk or enhancing policies in order to increase tourists' satisfaction. For instance, planners should look into the accessibility of the island in terms of constructing road networks. Tourism service providers should periodically assess their product and services because it forms part of the driving section of the overall satisfaction of the tourists. There is also a call for rehabilitation of degraded areas, sewage, and drainage systems around the island, with proper consultation with the business sector as well as local organizations. In order to improve tourism services, introduce relevant training and capacity building to enhance work ethics and quality of the tourism personnel and other stakeholders. Another value of our research is the notion that blogs may be used to portray destination images ([Wenger 2008](#)). Thus, blogging should be considered by destination-marketing organizations and tourism enterprises as a cheaper alternative to traditional marketing activities ([Schmallegger and Carson 2007](#)).

4. Conclusion

The use of social media opens a new opportunity for tourists (customer-to-customer or C2C), government (government-to-customers or G2C), and tourism enterprises (customer-to-business or C2B) to gather information for positive and negative destination imagery. Our findings suggest that if the tourism industry is not managed properly, the island of Boracay may lose its natural beauty. By examining tourists' positive and negative attitudes toward Boracay, future tourists may use such information (e.g., poor solid waste management) in their travel decision-making processes. Similarly, tourism operators may benefit from travel blogs through market research. Relevant departments, such as the regional Department of Tourism should consider the positive images of Boracay (e.g., breathtaking views or diverse tourist activities) for their promotional videos/photographs. When using bloggers to promote Boracay, the professional and value-adding blog contents derived from these perceptions should be noted.

What is not included in our study is the segmentation of these tourists (i.e., profiles of those who prefer "park-like" and urban Boracay vs. those who like "serene" and "quiet" Boracay), so future studies may focus on these differentiations. Market segmentation allows marketers to target tourists and plan appropriate marketing strategies. Future investigations should also focus on examination of associations between destination images and intentions to visit/revisit

in order to understand the effectivity of travel blogs as a communication tool. This will allow tourism managers to decide whether investment in bloggers for promotion is warranted.

Acknowledgement

The authors would like to thank all bloggers who gave their permission to use their photographs of Boracay and to the municipality of Malay, Aklan for sharing information about Boracay.

Author Contribution

Peter Lorenz Salmon and Cheryl Joy Fernandez conceived the idea of blogs in sustainable tourism research. Ronelia Amen, Jan Patrick Aguilar, John Benedict Javellana collected and analyzed data, under Cheryl Joy Fernandez supervision. All authors discussed the results and contributed to the final manuscript.

References

- Akis, S., & Warner, J. (1994). [A descriptive analysis of North Cyprus tourism](#). *Tourism Management*, 15(5), 379-388. Retrieved from <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/abs/pii/0261517794900922>
- Arellano, A. C. (2020, July 4). [The Image of the Philippines as a Tourism Destination in Finland](#). *Theseus*. <https://www.theseus.fi/bitstream/handle/10024/342306/Thesis%20-%20Amarie%20Arellano%20%28Final%29.pdf?sequence=2>
- Babbie, E. R. (2013). *The basics of social research*. Cengage learning. <https://www.cengage.com/c/the-basics-of-social-research-7e-babbie/9781305503076PF/>
- Braun, V., & Clarke, V. (2006). [Using thematic analysis in psychology](#). *Qualitative Research in Psychology*, 3(2), 77-101. <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1191/1478088706QP063OA>
- Budeanu, A. (2014). [Sustainability and Tourism Social Media'](#), *Tourism Social Media: Transformations in Identity*. *Community and Culture*, 18. <https://www.theseus.fi/bitstream/handle/10024/342306/Thesis%20-%20Amarie%20Arellano%20%28Final%29.pdf?sequence=2>
- Carter, R. W. (2004). [Implications of sporadic tourism growth: extrapolation from the case of Boracay Island, The Philippines](#). *Asia Pacific Journal of Tourism Research*, 9(4), 383-404. <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/1094166042000311264>

- Chen, C., & Chen F. (2009). [Experience quality, perceived value, satisfaction and behavioural intentions for heritage tourists](#). *Tourism Management*, 31, 29-35.
<https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/abs/pii/S0261517709000338>
- Creswell, J. W. (2014). [Research design: qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods approaches \(4th ed.\)](#). SAGE Publications, Inc.
<https://us.sagepub.com/en-us/nam/research-design/book255675>
- Croes, R., & Semrad, K. J. (2015). [The relevance of cultural tourism as the next frontier for small island destinations](#). *Journal of Hospitality & Tourism Research*, 39(4), 469-491.
<https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/abs/10.1177/1096348013491599>
- Crompton, J. L. (1979). [Motivations for pleasure vacation](#). *Annals of Tourism Research*, 6(4), 408-424.
<https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/abs/pii/0160738379900045>
- Datareportal. (2020, July 1). [Digital 2020: Global Digital Overview](#).
<https://datareportal.com/reports/digital-2020-global-digital-overview>
- de Guzman, A. B., de Castro, B. V., Calanog, J. F. V., Taguinin, A. J., Afalla, J. R., Aldover, A. L., & Gotangco, M. T. (2012). [The Australian tourists' travel motivation and pre-and post-images of the Philippines as their destination](#). *Asia-Pacific Journal of Innovation in Hospitality and Tourism*, 1(2), 143-164.
https://www.academia.edu/download/42395148/Factors_Determining_Choice_of_Full_Servi20160208-14055-130pgmb.pdf#page=26
- Hennig-Thurau, T., Gwinner, K. P., Walsh, G., & Gremler, D. D. (2004). [Electronic word-of-mouth via consumer-opinion platforms: what motivates consumers to articulate themselves on the internet?](#). *Journal of Interactive Marketing*, 18(1), 38-52.
<https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/abs/pii/S1094996804700961>
- Internet World Statistics. (2020). [Internet Usage Statistics](#). Retrieved July 1, 2020 from
<https://www.internetworldstats.com/stats.htm>
- Jaafar, M., & Maideen, S. A. (2012). [Ecotourism-related products and activities, and the economic sustainability of small and medium island chalets](#). *Tourism Management*, 33(3), 683-691.
<https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/abs/pii/S0261517711001531>
- Jacobsen, J. K. S., & Munar, A. M. (2014). [Motivations for sharing tourism experiences through social media](#). *Tourism Management*, 3, 46-54.
<https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/abs/pii/S0261517714000132>

- Jung, T. (2010). [Tourism in Metropolitan Manila-Philippines: An Analysis](#). Doctoral dissertation: Universitätsbibliothek.
<https://d-nb.info/1013833139/34>
- Kaplan, D. (2004). *The Sage handbook of quantitative methodology for the social sciences*. Sage Publications, Inc.
- Keate, G. (2018). 'Mermaid schools are making a splash', *The Times* 1st January.
<https://www.thetimes.co.uk/article/mermaid-schools-are-making-a-splash-28mcx9nwq>.
- Kunasekaran, P., Gill, S. S., Ramachandran, S., Shuib, A., Baum, T., & Herman Mohammad Afandi, S. (2017). [Measuring sustainable indigenous tourism indicators: a case of Mah Meri ethnic group in Carey Island, Malaysia](#). *Sustainability*, 9(7), 1256.
<https://www.mdpi.com/2071-1050/9/7/1256>
- Law, R., & Cheung, S. (2010). [The perceived destination image of Hong Kong as revealed in the travel blogs of mainland Chinese tourists](#). *International Journal of Hospitality & Tourism Administration*, 11(4), 303-327.
<https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/15256480.2010.518521>
- Litvin, S. W., Goldsmith, R. E., & Pan, B. (2008). [Electronic word-of-mouth in hospitality and tourism management](#). *Tourism Management*, 29(3), 458-468.
<https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/abs/pii/S0261517707001343>
- Mach, L., & Vahradian, D. (2019). [Tourists want to be spooked, not schooled: sustaining indigenous tourism in the Bastimentos Island National Marine Park, Bocas del Toro, Panama](#). *Journal of Ecotourism*, 1-15.
<https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/14724049.2019.1585439>
- Maguigad, V., King, D., & Cottrell, A. (2015). [Political ecology, island tourism planning, and climate change adaptation on Boracay Island](#). *Urban Island Studies*, 1, 152-179.
<https://researchonline.jcu.edu.au/42120/>
- Mayring, P. (2004). [Qualitative Content Analysis](#). In Flick, U., von Kardorff, E. And Steinke I. (Eds.) *A Companion to Qualitative Research*. (pp 266-269). SAGE Publication
- Morgan, N., Pritchard, A., & Pride, R. (2007). *Destination branding*. Routledge.
- Najafabadi, S. S. (2012). [Astronomical tourism \(Astrotourism\) in Cebu, Philippines: Essential features in selected destinations and its complementing visitor attractions](#). *In Int. Conf. Trade Tour. Manag* (pp. 129-133).
<https://pdfs.semanticscholar.org/7b15/9a1dcbe69ff246ebc319bcf8f77ab4f3cacb.pdf>

- Ong, L. T. J., Storey, D., &Minney, J. (2011). [Beyond the beach: Balancing environmental and socio-cultural sustainability in Boracay, the Philippines](#). *Tourism Geographies*, 13(4), 549-569.
<https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/14616688.2011.590517>
- Onkokwo E., Eyisi A., &Ololo N. (2015). [Social media platform and their contributions to tourism development and promotion in Nigeria](#). *Nsukka Journal of the Humanities*, 23(2).
https://www.researchgate.net/profile/Afamefuna_Eyisi/publication
- Osorio, S. G., & Best, G. (2015). [A case study on culture brokers and their role in tourism management in the indigenous community of Taquile Island in Puno, Peru](#). *International Journal of Tourism Research*, 17(4), 347-355.
<https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/abs/10.1002/jtr.1992>
- Philippine Information Agency Region VI (2017). [Boracay tourist earns P56B in 2017](#).
<http://pia.gov.ph/news/articles/1003886>.
- Pike, S. (2009). [Destination brand positions of a competitive set of near-home destinations](#). *Tourism Management*, 30(6), 857-866.
<https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/abs/pii/S0261517708001994>
- Porter, B. A., &Lück, M. (2018). [Mermaiding as a Form of Marine Devotion: a Case Study of a Mermaid School in Borocay, Philippines](#). *Shima: The International Journal of Research into Island Cultures*, 18(2), 231-249.
<http://openrepository.aut.ac.nz/handle/10292/11919>
- Ranada, P. (2018). [How Duterte decided on Boracay closure](#). *Rappler*.
<https://www.rappler.com/newsbreak/in-depth/200075-duterte-decision-boracay-closure>
- Reisinger, Y., &Turner, L. W. (2003). [Cross-cultural behaviour in tourism: Concepts and analysis](#). Elsevier.
<https://www.sciencedirect.com/book/9780750656689/cross-cultural-behaviour-in-tourism>
- Ruan, W. Q., Li, Y. Q., & Liu, C. H. S. (2017). [Measuring tourism risk impacts on destination image](#). *Sustainability*, 9(9), 1501.
<https://www.mdpi.com/2071-1050/9/9/1501>
- Ryan, C. (1997). *The tourist experience.A new introduction*. London: Cassell.
<https://search.proquest.com/openview/b0b783ddee24fe906d9eb04bcb6178d6/1?pq-origsite=gscholar&cbl=49042>
- Sabal, B. R. (2020). [Boracay draws 2 million tourists in 2019](#). *Panay News*.
<https://www.panaynews.net/boracay-draws-2-million-tourists-in-2019/>

- Schmallegger, D., & Carson, D. (2008). [Blogs in tourism: Changing approaches to information exchange](#). *Journal of Vacation Marketing*, 14(2), 99-110.
<https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/abs/10.1177/1356766707087519>
- Sigala, M., Christou, E., & Gretzel, U. (Eds.). (2012). [Social media in travel, tourism and hospitality: Theory, practice and cases](#). Ashgate Publishing, Ltd.
- Smith, V. L. (1990) [Geographical implications of 'Drifter' tourism Boracay, Philippines](#), *Tourism Recreation Research*, 15(1), 34-42.
<https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/02508281.1990.11014566>
- Smith, V. L. (1992) [Boracay, Philippines: a case study in 'Alternative' tourism](#), in: V. L. Smith & W. R. Eadington (Eds) *Tourism Alternatives: Potentials and Problems in the Development of Tourism*, 135-157. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press.
<https://www.cabdirect.org/cabdirect/abstract/19931852011>
- Smith, V. L. (2001) [Power and ethnicity in 'Paradise' Boracay, Philippines](#), in: V. L. Smith & M. Brent (Eds) *Hosts and Guests Revisited: Tourism Issues of the 21st Century*, pp. 141–152. USA: Cognizant Communication Corporation.
<https://www.cabdirect.org/cabdirect/abstract/20033003491>
- Smith, R. A., Henderson, J. C., Chong, V., Tay, C., & Jingwen, Y. (2011). [The development and management of beach resorts: Boracay Island, the Philippines](#). *Asia Pacific Journal of Tourism Research*, 16(2), 229-245.
<https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/10941665.2011.556343>
- Trousdale, W.J (1999). [Governance in Context, Boracay Island, Philippines](#). *Annals of Tourism Research*, 26, 840-867.
<https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/abs/pii/S0160738399000365>
- Tseng, C., Wu, B., Morrison, A. M., Zhang, J., & Chen, Y. C. (2015). [Travel blogs on China as a destination image formation agent: A qualitative analysis using Leximancer](#). *Tourism Management*, 46, 347-358.
<https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/abs/pii/S0261517714001447>
- Tudor, R. (2012). [The image of tourist destinations represented in travel blog photography. Case study: Romania's image reflected in French bloggers photos](#). *Revista de turism-studiisicercetari in turism*, (13).
<http://www.revistadeturism.ro/rdt/article/view/10>
- United Nations World Tourism Organization (2018). [World Tourism Barometer](#). Volume 16.
<https://www.unwto.org/barometer>

- Wenger, A. (2008). [Analysis of travel bloggers' characteristics and their communication about Austria as a tourism destination](#). *Journal of Vacation Marketing*, 14(2), 169-176.
<https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/abs/10.1177/1356766707087525>
- Wong, P. P. (1998). [Coastal tourism development in Southeast Asia: relevance and lessons for coastal zone management](#). *Ocean & Coastal Management*, 38(2), 89-109.
<https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/abs/pii/S0964569197000665>
- World Tourism Organization (2004), [Indicators of sustainable development for tourism destinations: A Guidebook](#).
<http://www.adriaticgreenet.org>
- Xie, H. J., Bao, J., & Kerstetter, D. L. (2014). [Examining the effects of tourism impacts on satisfaction with tourism between native and non-native residents](#). *International Journal of Tourism Research*, 16(3), 241-249.
<https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/abs/10.1002/jtr.1922>
- Ye, Q., Law, R., Gu, B., & Chen, W. (2011). [The influence of user-generated content on traveler behavior: an empirical investigation on the effects of e-word-of-mouth to hotel online bookings](#). *Computers in Human Behavior*, 27(2), 634-639.
<https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S0747563210000907>