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Emerging Scholar Profile

My interest in research and teaching started during the Bachelor in Rome (Italy), where I studied Foreign Languages and Cultures. After obtaining the degree, pursuing my passion for academia, I moved to Lugano, Switzerland, where I completed a 2-year Master in Economics and Communication, Major in International Tourism at *USI – Università della Svizzera italiana*.

A few months after finishing the Master, I started a PhD in Communication Sciences at the same university, focusing on cultural differences in tourism marketing and communication. During the studies, I received an 18-month SNSF Doc.Mobility grant, which allowed me to complete my PhD research as well as expand my knowledge in quantitative methods at the *Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam* (the Netherlands).

Currently, I am a Lecturer in Digital Marketing for Hospitality and Tourism at the *International University of Languages and Media* (IULM), in Milan (Italy), and an External Research Associate at the *UNESCO Chair in ICT to develop and promote sustainable tourism in World Heritage Sites* (at USI). My research interests are in online marketing and communication, social media, and cultural tourism. In this regard, I am currently working on a study on crisis communication and social media in tourism.

My PhD dissertation analyzed the role and effectiveness of cultural adaptation (localization) in online tourism promotion. Taking a mixed-methods approach to investigate the topic of localization, the cumulative thesis was composed of five studies. In short, **Study 1** (Mele & Cantoni, 2018) provided a "helicopter view" of the definitions of localization, examples and discussion on possible limitations. **Study 2** (Mele, Kerkhof, & Cantoni, 2021) used a manual and an automated content analysis to explore whether official (cultural) tourism promotion on Instagram differed, from a cultural perspective, across four National Tourism Organizations (NTOs). Using interviews, **Study 3** (Mele & Cantoni, 2017) investigated the viewpoints of experts, from 11 Destination Marketing Organizations

(DMOs), on the role of localization activities for tourism marketing. **Study 4** (Mele, Kerkhof, & Cantoni, 2020) tested via two highly powered experiments the effects of localizing cultural values (e.g., Collectivist vs Individualist cues) on participants' perceived image and willingness to visit a heritage site. Finally, **Study 5** (Mele & Lobinger, 2018) – consisting of a semiotic analysis of tourism pictures – was used as basis to build the framework for the content analysis of Study 2 and to elaborate the experimental manipulations of Study 4.

Findings of the PhD dissertation showed that, overall, (cultural) tourism promotion on Instagram differed across NTOs, from a cultural perspective; DMOs considered localization as an important set of practices to market a destination to an international audience; localizing cultural values – which is one type of localization – had limited benefits (at best) for publics from the same geographical region of the destination (e.g., Europe).

Besides research, I have taught courses in tourism, (social media) marketing analytics, and online communication to university (Bachelor and Master level) as well as hospitality school students. I have also taught web/mobile marketing and e-commerce to professionals, including the definition of business strategies, audience segmentation and performance measurement. Following my passion for teaching, I have also been Teaching Assistant for two Massive Open Online Courses (MOOCs) on e-Tourism and Tourism Management.

In parallel, I have been an active member of the *International Federation for IT, Travel and Tourism* (IFITT) since 2015. I started as Coordinator of Volunteers at the annual IFITT event, ENTER2015, served as Online Communication Officer for 1 year (2016-17) and then as General Secretary (2017-18). It was (and it still is) a fantastic experience that allowed me to meet many great, inspiring researchers. Other activities include my research collaboration with the *UNESCO Chair in ICT to develop and promote sustainable tourism in World Heritage Sites*, whose Chair Holder is prof. Lorenzo Cantoni (at USI), and my passion for data analysis and machine learning using Python – with libraries like Pandas and Scikit-learn.

With the conclusion of my PhD in October 2020, I have moved to Geneva (Switzerland), with my wife Laura, where I am currently looking for a research and / or teaching position in a university in the Francophone region of Switzerland. Apart from this, I am always open to teaching and research collaborations on topics concerning online communication and marketing.

References

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