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Online tourism, virtual identity and sexual exploitation

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Abstract

This article presents a literature review that aims to provide a framework of reference for the interpretation of issues related to sexual exploitation in the context of travel and tourism. Its main objectives are to identify and establish relations of intertextuality between online tourism and commercial sexual exploitation, and to define categories of analysis for the interpretation of these phenomena. To this end, the article examines in depth the construction of the virtual identity that takes place during the interaction between social networks users and media consumers. The literature available on the three variables of study -online tourism, virtual identity and sexual exploitation- is examined in details to systematise the detected fragmented knowledge and identify the tourism communication strategies that are used in the internet and can facilitate the exploitation of children and adolescents in the context of travel and tourism.

Keywords

Online tourism; virtual identity; sexual exploitation; commercial sexual exploitation of minors, human trafficking.

Contents

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Translation by **Cruz Alberto Martínez-Arcos**, Ph.D. (Universidad Autónoma de Tamaulipas)

1. Introduction

This article presents a review of the literature on three thematic fields -online tourism, virtual identity and sexual exploitation- in order to systematise the fragmented knowledge and identify the tourism communication strategies that are used in the internet and facilitate the commercial sexual exploitation of children and adolescents (CSECA) in the context of travel and tourism.

The review of the literature on the first thematic field, online tourism, describes the behaviours of tourists in social networks and the influence of social media in the construction of the image of tourist destinations.

The analysis of the second field, virtual identity, offers information that allows us to understand the influence of the internet, advertising, and other media in the historical and social construction of youth identities.

The third field, sexual exploitation, presents the various forms of sex tourism and the CSECA in Brazil, Peru, Mexico and Argentina. The article also offer a description of the strategies developed and used in other Latin American countries, such as Colombia, to persecute sexual exploiters through the internet, and an analysis of the social representations of sex tourism offered by the press. Finally, the article defines the CSECA and its modalities, focusing on the modality associated with sex travel and tourism due to its direct relation with this article, as well as the locations in which it occurs and its consequences. The legislation related to the CSECA is also briefly described.

2. Methods

This study is based on the exploratory research technique known as intertextual bibliographic survey whose objective, according to Popper (1974), is to explain the key concepts of a problem. This technique involves: the establishment of the parts of the problem to investigate, the identification of the key concepts or keywords, the search for literature and research results, as well as the selection of the body of literature or material to be reviewed in depth.

A total of 32 literary sources were found in academic databases and later compared to demonstrate their intertextuality, and to identify categories of analysis that will serve as the basis for future research. The keywords used for searching were: online tourism, advertising, internet advertising, virtual identity, sex tourism, and CSECA.

3. Results

The results are presented according to the previously described groups and classifications: online tourism, construction of virtual identities, and the social vice of sex tourism, and the CSECA.

3.1. Online tourism

Mendes (2013) in the article titled *Innovación en la promoción turística en medios y redes sociales* (“Innovation in the promotion of tourism in the media and social networks”), reveals that technological developments have an impact on the behaviour of consumers and define a new type of tourists: the independent tourist, who manages by himself/herself the information about the products and services of tourist destinations in order to choose the destination that fully responds to his/her expectations.

The independent tourist is enabled by the use of social networks, which are virtual spaces where travellers and tourism promoters meet to share information, knowledge and opinions, to create and transmit contents in the form of text, images, videos and audio files.

The use of this type of contents becomes the raw material for a new and successful form of marketing, the so-called “word of mouth” strategy, as it is much more reliable for people to see recent pictures and videos taken by other independent tourists who have already been in the considered destination, than listening to the offers of traditional tourism promoters without taking time to see and perceive the destination instead of just imagining it.

The nature of the data and the strategy itself become the basis when it comes to making the final decision. Social networks, concludes the author, are environments that gather groups of people with common interests; and these groups of people carry out activities through web-based contents such as texts, images, videos, audios; while the behaviours refer to what users do with each of the these contents and tools during the meetings.

White (2013), in *Turismo en la red: adiós al intermediario* (“Online tourism: Goodbye to the intermediary”), adds that social networks and the web 2.0 offer people not only the possibility of “learning through others” but also a variety of tailored options that the traditional traveling agent is not able to provide. The proliferation of electronic product and service providers (e-commerce) has prompted the emergence of flight, hotel and car rental search engines that allow people to find the cheapest deals.

These search engines have become the response demanded by Mendes’ independent tourist. Prompted by the independent tourist’s internet search practices, many hotel and airlines companies have created Facebook pages and Twitter accounts, to be able to communicate in real time with clients in order to meet their needs according to their lifestyles. Blanco has identifies TripAdvisor.com, Despegar.com, Kayak.com, and Mobissimo as travel websites that allow people to plan the perfect trip, as all of them offer travel advice, options and planning functions with direct links to the reservation tools of airlines, hotels, car rental agencies, and can simultaneously compare hundreds of destinations (Kayak.com) and prices (Despegar.com).

This author points out that other websites like hotwire.com, priceline.com, and jetsetter.com offer express deals and a shopping club where members can take advantage of specific discounts for certain periods of time. This “demand and supply” is invigorated with the participation of millions of

potential tourists who use the resources of the so-called network-based interconnection to share travel-related experiences through blogs, pictures and videos, and give advice, reviews and rankings of a diversity of destinations and services. Blanco also mentions that video blogs have become the preferred tool of inquiry in viajeros.com as it give users, after registration, the option to browse videos and review them without having to provide personal data. Blanco concludes that more and more the end users are directly responsible for planning their trips: they get information from other users and negotiate directly with service providers the dates and conditions that suit them best.

For his part, Martínez (2012), in *Estrategias de promoción turística a través de Facebook* (“Strategies to promote tourism via Facebook”), highlights that Facebook is the social network used the most in the field of online tourism because, undoubtedly, it brings agencies and tourists closer through photographs, surveys, wall posts and videos that allow constant and immediate interactivity. In this sense, Martínez says that the digital environment is a “requirement” to achieve better results in the tourism industry.

On the other hand, Gomes (2012), in *Oferta turística virtual. Un estudio del metaverso* (“Virtual tourism offer. A study of the metaverse”), presents the results obtained of the study of the virtual world known as Second Life. Gomes describes how users of this platform can create an Avatar that allows them to immerse themselves into virtual tourist destinations, visit their attractions, contact other people, and to find out about food and accommodation options. In short, the so-called metaverse offers independent travellers the ability to quickly teleport themselves to a virtual destination, although it still does not replace the “physical” trip to the chosen destination.

Novo (2012), in *Imagen turística y medios de comunicación. Una construcción social* (“Tourist image and the media. A social construction”), introduces the study of the importance of the media in the construction of the image of a tourist destination, i.e. the effect of the flow of social data through advertising, entertainment and news on people’s decision to visit or not a tourist destination. Based on Niklas Luhmann’s model, Novo shows how the different types of idyllic or perfect social imaginaries are built.

Marujo (2012), in *Imagen y promoción de los destinos turísticos en Internet* (“Image and promotion of tourist destinations on the Internet”), analyses more thoroughly the construction of the image of a tourist destination, the influence of the media and the internet on this construction and the importance of the previous in the potential consumer’s decision on whether to visit or not certain destination that caught his/her attention.

This author uses definitions of image that have been offered from different disciplines such as psychology, human geography and marketing, which are applicable to the research project from which this article derives [2].

In psychology, the term image refers to a visual representation, ranging from geography to perceptions associated with knowledge, values, attitudes and beliefs, and from marketing to the attributes associated to an image and its relationship with consumers’ behaviour (Jenkins, 1999). Marujo offers a definition of the term image that is closer to our study, based on the contributions of several authors, including Crompton (1979: 18), who defines it as the sum of all beliefs, expectations, ideas, feelings and impressions of a person in relation to a place; Milman & Pizam (1995), who define it as the visual or mental impression of a place, product or experience held by the general public; Gartner (1993), who points out that an image is constituted by the cognitive and

emotional dimensions; and Echtner & Ritchie (2003), who argue that an image is not only the set of perceptions that individuals have on the psychological or functional attributes of a destination but also the holistic impression of singular components associated with certain aspects, such as the destination's climate, social hospitality and atmosphere.

In short, the image of a destination is composed of what is known of it and the feelings it produces, the information held about the product, the hosts' behaviour and attitude, and the place's atmosphere. Regarding the use of the media and the internet, the author says that the media (through propaganda) stimulates travellers' curiosity when choosing a destination, that through photography and slogans the media become the eyes and ears of the traveller, and that the internet emerges as a new battleground for promoters of tourist destinations since travellers' use of the internet derives in the creation of their consumer profile (traveller), which is more demanding than before: "currently, a destination that is not present on the Internet risks being ignored by actual or potential tourists" (Marujo, 2008, p. 28).

In relation to the importance of the previous three variables (image, media and internet) on the potential consumers' decision to visit or not the destination that caught their attention, the author concludes that the selection of a destination by a tourist is influenced by external and internal factors.

The former type of factors are the sum of the social interactions and marketing communications to which the potential traveller is exposed (Um & Crompton, 1990), while the latter type are the set of motivations, values and attitudes. What happens, in terms of the potential traveller's behaviour, is that the information provided by the external factors filtered by the internal factors, resulting in a selection of possible destinations to visit. In short, this process summarises the way in which the image of a tourist destination is formed. According to Hunt (1975), people's images, beliefs, and perceptions in relation to a destination can influence the development of a tourist area as much as or more than the tangible resources.

3.2. Virtual identity

Cáceres (2009), in *Comunicación interpersonal y vida cotidiana* ("Interpersonal communication and everyday life"), provides a description of the construction of multiple identities by young people based on the genuine or false/incomplete information they decide to publish in their personal web spaces/profiles, which includes physical, socio-demographic data (gender, age, class, occupation, likes and hobbies) and photographs. Social networks allow users to create a desirable image of themselves and to use it to make friends and contacts.

Young people, says the author, build their virtual identities depending on the contexts in which they interact with other people: "they behave according to their needs, expectations, interests and objectives at any given moment: make friends, achieve affective relationships, participate in virtual communities, talk about their hobbies, have fun, escape, discuss, showcase themselves, exchange and publish information (p. 12).

In short, young people exchange different types of information, including, in descending order: information about their life events, personal data, physical features, traditions and habits and level of studies, which results in the creation of multiple identities (p. 14). According to Pisani and Piotet (2008, p. 33), "profiles are like digital personalities, like the digital public representation of identity".

Muros (2011), in *El concepto de identidad en el muro virtual: el yo online* (“The concept of identity in the virtual wall: my online self”), engages in dialogue with Cáceres to sustain the importance of the so-called virtual identity, by saying that the belief of people (including young people) in the inexistence of consequences (be they psychological, institutional, etc.) helps them to adopt identities that do not belong to them (p. 53) and that, at the same time, not-belonging to a community of this nature can make them feel excluded.

This author proposes that undoubtedly people are, in one way or another, historical beings, critically united to the space and the time in which they live. Hence identity shall be understood as a construction of identities, where multiple factors (such as historically-specific activities, experiences, social organisations, and cultural representations) are combined for the individual (or group) to make sense of them. He adds that people’s intention to behave or not in certain way is determined, on the one hand, by what they think they need to do and, on the other, by their perception of what others believe they should do (subjective norms) and that the virtual identity combines the collective identity (which may resemble or depart from the group) and the individual or personal identity (in which people identifies themselves with different identities) (pp. 52, 53).

In the words of Munné (2000), people can refer to themselves and understand themselves through different situations, which make them plural beings (p. 50). By way of conclusion, Muros argues that the virtual identity is nothing more than the outcome of the individual’s adaptation to new circumstances and to the nature of the context -the web, the social networks and the virtual communities that establish their own protocols.

The other author selected to address the construction of identities is Mosqueira (2010), who argues, in *De menores y consumidores. Construcción socio-histórica de la(s) juventud(es) en la Argentina* (“Minors and consumers. Socio-historical construction(s) of youth in Argentina”), that youth must be analysed as a historical and social construction, and not a biological and objective fact separated from its context, since different ways of being young are configured in each historical period and in each position of the same social space-time. This author points out that after the second half of the 20th century, young people started to consume cultural images, i.e. representations, stereotypes and values, as well as goods, contained in advertising, music and other media.

As consumers, young people are seen by the cultural industry of the media as a differentiated social sector, independent from other age groups and, above all, suitable for consumption. The media represent their life, body and subjectivity; and simultaneously portray them as: free (independent), popular (in music, fashion and art) and subversive (as student leaders). This is because the cultural image of youth that is outlined by advertising engages with other images of youth built by other discourses disseminated by other media.

Therefore, all these images of youth, which interact with each other, refer to the emergence of an autonomous social sector, with strong visibility in the public space. In this sense, we can conclude that the use of young people’s bodies by advertising and youth idols in music, get mixed up with other cultural images of youth that the media’s cultural industry circulates, such as the image of freedom and independence provided by the use of the internet, for example, which puts young people’s subjectivity at risk when they do not recognise themselves as functional consumers for the market system and as productive beings in the power relations that emerge in terms of social class, gender and ethnicity, which facilitates their exploitation.

Vergara (2010), in *El impacto social y cultural de la publicidad entre los jóvenes chilenos* (“The social and cultural impact of advertising on Chilean youth”), points out that advertising has a direct relation with the construction of the collective imagination through the images disseminated by the media, where advertising takes on a central role based on a double articulation: the media’s financing and representation of everyday-life emotions. As a result of this relation, people’s image of themselves and of others is strongly influenced by advertising imagery, which aims to make consumers to identify with the image of a specific brand. To back up this argument, Vergara relies on Maffesoli (2000), who affirms that all members of society need to represent themselves through an aesthetic image that comes from their lifestyle and the image projected by it. In this same direction, Ritson and Elliott (1999) propose that advertising is used more as a socialising agent than as an informational tool for the consumption of products. Mitchell, Maklin and Paxman (2007) point out that conversations about advertising facilitate and strengthen people’s interpersonal relations within their group of reference, which implies the acceptance of advertising as a basic form of social interaction. From this perspective, advertising would provide its consumer common topics of conversation, and by doing so it would play a social-cohesion role, by including topics that facilitate conversation among young people in their own contexts, where knowledge on certain advertising topics is essential to participate. This gives the concept of advertising a more complex status, as it would be a cultural product that through experience, interpretation, metaphor, rituals, interaction and conversation, provides personal and collective meanings.

This is corroborated by the fact that in their discourses, young people rely on advertising as a tool for business and socialisation, which are useful to understand new trends. From the study carried out by Vergara in Chile it is interesting to discuss the most valued uses of advertising contents among the samples of young people in their conversations and repertoires of phrases: among lower-class minors one of the main uses associated with advertising is its ability to inform about discounts and offers, while among higher-class minors, the most valued aspect of advertising is its aesthetic value, which is mainly associated with TV spots and the graphic pieces included in magazines and outdoor advertising. Based on Thompson (1998), Vergara concludes that the meaning of a message transmitted by the media is not static, stable and transparent for all recipients but that meaning is a complex and changing phenomenon, transformed by the process of reception, interpretation and reinterpretation. Hence the meaning of a message depends on the structure the receiver uses to interpret it, being the latter able to change its intended meaning (Vergara, 2008: 33; Kotilainen, 2009).

For his part, Blanco (2004), in *Identidades mediáticas e identificaciones mediatizadas. Visibilidad y reconocimiento identitario en los medios de comunicación* (“Media identities and media identifications. Visibility and identity recognition in the media”), establishes the differences between the hegemonic or official identities and fringe or minority identities that the media reinforce and circulate. Blanco points out that official identities and identifications reproduce the discourses of the educational, political, scientific and legal institutions while the popular identities and identifications are shaped by ordinary people. For this reason, the hegemonic identities do not need to prove their legitimacy, because they are presented in the media as “normal”, and the identities that are not present as normalised will be stigmatised as minority, marginal or opposing identity (pp. 138-140). In this sense, the media tend to emphasise the binary opposition that underpins all identities.

These us-them binary oppositions highlight differences rather than the similarities, what is disputed rather than what is shared. That is why consumption and economic success have become the

principal vector of the identity normalisation of commercial television, which based on the need to sell “news and innovations” accelerates this construction of hegemonic identities (pp. 142-146). We can conclude, then, that the difficulties for self-representation overlap with people’s difficulties to recognise themselves and that the difficulties to communicate a collective identity in terms of equality join the difficulties to discuss and respond to the identities promoted by the traditional media (p. 148).

Méndez (2007), joined the conversation between scholars in *Comunicación e identidad. Una aproximación al estudio del consumo* (“Communication and identity. An approach to the study of consumption”), where he argues that consumption is a cultural process that is loaded with signification and operates in everyday life through the use and appropriation of objects, ideas and subjects (p. 293). The objects consumed by people are for the most part, forms to achieve objectives and are not objectives in themselves (Douglas & Isherwood, 1996: 48). The objects are a way for people to show what they are and what they are not, which results in the creation of their own definition based on difference (p. 298). Méndez argues that one of the reasons why people consume is the satisfaction of real or symbolic needs generated by their culture, like the communication needs. People consume with a communicative intention and that is why they invite us to see consumption as a communication process that assigns identities and realities to subjects and turns objects into instruments of communication that allow us to communicate with others, based on the imaginaries on which they have been created (p. 298).

Méndez presents advertising and marketing as spaces that become bridges of meaning, where “advertising works as a potential meaning transfer method through the union of consumer goods and the representation of the culturally-constructed world within the framework of a particular advertising campaign” (McCracken, 1986: 74, translated by Méndez, p. 301). This makes clear that while advertising and marketing create new ways of perceiving reality, this creation is not fully alien to the reality that maintains it. In other words, everyday life reality is learned, played and manipulated by the media, based on marketing purposes. However, although the autonomy of the consumer in consumption is recognised, advertising also works as a naturalisation institution, i.e. it naturalises behaviours by making them invisible to individuals. The field of consumption has valuable resources to understand ourselves not only as members of a culture, but as products of it. It is necessary to understand the processes that make us what we are.

Regarding the consumption of objects and the objectification of people through the media and advertising, Carbajo (2012) points out, in *El espectáculo de la intimidad. Raíces históricas de la comunicación centrada en el yo* (“The spectacle of intimacy. Historical roots of communication focused on the self”), that advertising provides countless products for people to take care of their own image and become the centre of attention. Carbajo affirms that currently people want to feel good by contemplating their careful constructed image in other people’s mirror because social success and self-esteem depend on the image that people manages to project to make themselves attractive to others. In this sense, the author adds that aesthetic surgical procedures, diets, sex changes, dramatic body modifications, beauty products, hormones, stimulants, tranquilisers, antidepressants and other psychiatric drugs are promoted as the best way for people to be themselves, to bring to light their authentic side, and to achieve self-fulfilment.

The author also addresses what he calls people’s difficulty to open up to others, and in this regards he points out that individuals who focus on themselves live their personal and even sexual relations as if they were another product of consumption and that in this way, they becomes the perfect

consumer: one who uses all products unscrupulously just to abandon them as soon as they are no longer useful, one who does not feel freely and affectionately attached to people and things, and one for whom everything is fleeting, ephemeral, functional. Carbajo concludes, then, that when a product is created, the need to buy it is also created.

In relation to the virtual dimension, Mejía (2011), in *De la persuasión a la relación: convenciendo a la publicidad de su fin comunicativo* (“From persuasion to relation: convincing advertising of its communicative purpose”), examines the changes that have occurred between traditional and current advertising. Mejía understands the former as a way to promote a product or service based on a persuasive strategy preconceived by those who build the message, limited by the demands of the media, and the later as the result of a communication strategy that integrates marketing, social networks and digital media. Traditional advertising, the author says, is unable to send a different message to each individual through the mass media and seeks a unifying element with which the majority of the target audience of the promoted product can identify; in order for the messages to be understood by all the public, it appeals to stereotypes (not just people), moulds or objectified visions of reality shared by many. In contrast, in the new advertising, the participation of consumers in the communication of brands allows us to assert that the brand is not owned by the company, nor that the campaign is only created by the agency, but instead that the conversations of consumers about the brand on the social networks and the strategy developed by the brand to become part of these conversations make advertising increasingly more segmented, causing an “apparent rupture of massive stereotypes”.

Mejía concludes that it is evident that brands must establish a dialogue with their audiences, through advertising strategies that seek to generate affection (*top of heart*) and trust based on truthful arguments, which promotes consumers’ participation (*top of hand*) in the positioning of the brand. To participate in the creation of the messages the new advertising encourages consumers to get involved and engaged with the brand, to know and highlight the attributes with which the brand identifies, and to engage other consumers with the process. In addition, messages created in this way are closer, use a real and accessible language, common for all audiences, since they lead to greater identification with advertising and, therefore, with the brand.

3.3. Sexual exploitation and CSECA

Piscitelli (2009), in *Industria del sexo y mercado matrimonial* (“Sex industry and marriage market”), presents the results of a study on the marriage between Brazilian women and Italian men, who obtained mutual benefits in parenthood, social recognition and economic level. However, as this author points out, women involved in this type of union were also discriminated against on the grounds of race, subjected to under paid jobs and monitored in their daily life by their husbands and their families and friends, which is practically a form of slavery. In the 1990s, 22 to 31 year-old women who worked as prostitutes (in a situation of prostitution) in Fortaleza, Brazil, designed a migration plan to Italy: “establishing successive relationships with foreigners... the migration plan became viable with the Italian boyfriends who provided the money to pay for travel and passport and also welcome them in their country”. This type of marriages gave these women access to lifestyles with levels of consumption and comfort that were unachievable for them in Brazil, and allowed them to occupy a social and political position that was different from the one they had in their native land.

On the other hand, most “Italian husbands were 32 and 38 years old. They had studied at technological higher education institutions and had a higher levels of education than the Brazilian women, whose highest education level was high school. The level of income of these men varied, but at the time of the study it ranged from 2,000 to 5,000 euros per month. They worked in small family businesses and microbusinesses and in the services sector” (p. 186). For the foreign women, getting married was a dream of upward mobility come true, which involved the illusion of full membership to Europe through legitimate entrance and legitimate insertion into an Italian family” (p. 188). For men, marriage involved the search for “less independent” femininity styles which included openness to motherhood –which was hard to find among Italian women. Fatherhood was an important project for the Italian men (p. 187). Men who got engaged to these Brazilian women seemed to obtain added value, based on their ability to “get” younger women who embodied an intense sensuality, were willing to virtually accept all of the domestic work and get pregnant, even in an unfavourable context, away from their families and without domestic support (p. 191).

Women, on the other hand, strove to embody the femininity style desired by the Italian men through waxing, impeccable nails and hair, and the cleaning of the house, as they perceived Italian women as “hairy” and sloppy, with broad hips, flat arse and flaccid bodies, cold, manipulative and greedy (p. 190). These women obtained many benefits in exchange for these unions, but were also subjected to a surveillance system that included forms of violence against women: none of the Brazilian women learnt to speak Italian in school, which limited their employment opportunities for a time, all of them had worked in paying jobs outside the house, but in small business owned by their husband’s relatives or friends. Moreover, the trips to Brazil tended to be restricted to those in which the husband could accompany them. The control also covered central aspects in the definition of these women’s identity, such as their temperament and body expression. A former waitress, in a double attempt to erase her past and get closer to obtain her “cultural citizenship” put on 10 pounds in the two years she lived in Italy, cut her long curly hair and began wearing glasses (p. 192, 193). Racism reappeared more monolithically than in Brazil. In Fortaleza, these “brunettes” were sexualised and racialised by the locals, especially when they were accompanied by foreign tourists. In Italy, they experienced racism in their everyday life, in which their ‘colour’ permanently reflected their “foreignness”

Valcuende del Río & Cáceres (2014), in *Bricheros: sexo, raza y etnicidad en contextos turísticos* (“Bricheros: sex, race, and ethnicity in tourist contexts”), discovered the so called *cazadores* (native Peruvian hunters) of *gringas* (American female tourists) and addressed this cultural shift, since traditionally it was men who sought exotic women. The authors explain that white men are no longer those who have at their disposal the bodies of indigenous or mestizo women; and that white women are now those who seek and desire mestizo and indigenous men, breaking traditional gender, class and race relations in heavily racialised societies (p. 81).

According to the authors, the bodies that are desirable for female tourists are those who are associated with an exotic Peruvian prototype, which coincides with mestizo men (cholos) and Indian/Inca men (p 83). In the midst of this cultural shift there are imaginaries that reinforce discriminatory conducts. One of them is the association of male *bricheros* (“fair haired hunters”) with prostitution, while female *bricheras* are associated with romance tourism. The authors conclude that the relationships between tourists and the local population is marked by a double inequality (sex and social class), in a geopolitical context that reproduces the coloniser/colonised duality (p. 73).

López & Carmona (2008), in *Turismo sexual masculino-masculino en la Ciudad de México* (“Male-male sex tourism in Mexico City”), address the issue of sex tourism among men in the Capital City’s most visited district, Zona Rosa, and differentiate between *turismo sexual* (sex tourism) and *sexoturismo* (tourism sex): the first refers to sex trade between tourists and locals, while the latter refers to all the sex-related aspects of a trip, like honeymoons or gay cruises. The authors carried out interviews with men identified as *sexoservidores* (male sex providers) or prostitutes, who admit preferring foreigners because they treat them better and confirm their low level of education, their exposure to HIV/AIDS and the extortion to which they are subjected by the police. It is concluded that male-male sex tourism in Mexico is relevant at the social and economic levels, and that the Zona Rosa is one of the most suitable districts for this kind of encounters.

However, the authors also mention that the low level of education of *sexoservidores* puts them in a disadvantageous position when it comes to preventing sexually transmitted diseases (STDs), like HIV. Finally, it is important to note that of all sex providers, the *trottoir* have the lowest level of formal education and, thus, are the least informed about the dangers of sexual infections, namely HIV/AIDS” (pp. 109-110). It is important for human rights and health institutions to closely analyse the phenomenon and solve basic and immediate problems such as aggression to sex workers by police and to contribute to the prevention of the STDs, through an intense information campaign in this area (p. 110).

Piscitelli (2010), in *Buenos Aires, qué ciudad más acogedora. Racialización y sexualización de sudamericanas en sites destinados a turistas sexuales* (“Buenos Aires, what a welcoming city. Racialisation and sexualisation of South American people in websites catering for sex tourists”), presents the results of an analysis of websites that enable sex tourism practices marked by discrimination against transvestites, and the racialisation and sexualisation of South American. Regarding the discrimination, Piscitelli says that the heterosexism of the website is evident in the messages, which explicitly reject transvestites, who are pejoratively called *transtesticles* or imposters, as if they polluted the masculine style promoted in the website (p. 39). In relation to the racialisation, the author says that the messages posted by travellers make clear that they appreciate the European features of Uruguayan and Argentine women, which are perceived as phenotypic aspects adapted to Latin American sexuality styles. Some messages praise these women’s “Caucasian” traits and high education level, a combination that reflects on their high price (pp. 50-51).

Users establish an intimate association between poverty, particularly recent poverty, and the entrance of new women into the sex market. The countries that become of special interest for these users are those that have been recently affected by economic problems (p. 40), those where the dollar and the euros have better exchange rates, those that have opened new markets and touristic cities. The author concludes that international sex tourism circuits are conditioned by economic factors, and that sex tourists tend to prefer countries whose population is poor and lack opportunities to get out of poverty.

Bellenzani, Blessa, & Paiva (2008), in *Scripts en escena: VIH y mercado sexual en el contexto turístico* (“Scripts on stage: HIV and sex trade in the tourism context”), present a report about the sex trade in a tourist context focused on native young people, who are vulnerable to the spread of STDs as a result of unprotected sex, the growth of the tourism and sex industries, which includes child sexual exploitation and legal prostitution. The report consists of an analysis of observations and analysis of “scripts”, which are interviews with people with three different perspectives from those

directly involved in this problem. The scripts consist of testimonies that seek to describe the different sexual practices between locals and tourists, and to identify the possible causes and consequences of STDs on this population.

Beltrán Gómez & Ordóñez Salinas (2014), in *Sistema inteligente par la detección de diálogos con posibles contenidos pedofílicos* (“Intelligent system for the detection of dialogues with possible paedophilic contents”), address the vulnerability of children and adolescents who participate in online chats, where anonymous people seek to get in touch with young people for different interests, including sexual exploitation. Due to this problem, the authors proposed the creation of an intelligent system that is able to detect, understand and classify conversations. This is carried out through supervised learning and natural language processing techniques that allow people to detect online conversations that may contain paedophilic intentions. This new resource is preceded by two strategies: first, the creation of false websites to attract and catch paedophiles and, second, to report them to police agents who pretend to be minors in the website in order to arrange an encounter with the paedophile so that the person can be charged according to the laws of each country.

Delgado Coto & Franca Tarragó (2014), in *Flujo de material pornográfico online. Estudio exploratorio en 10 países de América Latina con foco en Uruguay* (“Flow of pornographic material online. Exploratory study in 10 Latin America countries with a focus on Uruguay”), presented the results of the volume of p2p downloads of pornographic material in Ares, where this type of content is abundant. The program can discriminate pornographic content in online channels to specifically analyse files that are exchanged on p2p download networks. Thus, one of the actions is inserting a unique and identifiable algorithm to each file and make it available over the p2p network, and then track the people who downloaded it, obtaining different data, including the IP address (p. 17).

The results of this exploratory study suggest that in 2011 the months in which more pornographic material was downloaded the most were the summer months, and that there was an increase of 57% in the volume of downloaded pornographic files from January to August 2012. According to direct and indirect sources there is an international upward trend in the consumption of child pornography” (p. 63). It is concluded that the flow of child pornography represents a physical and psychological violation of minors, especially when the new generations have increasingly more contact with technology and different web-based networks and applications. According to a study led by the USA National Centre for Missing and Exploited Children, one in five children with Internet access has received at least one sexual proposal (Cohen, 2006: 58). In terms of exposure to online content in general, it is estimated that 93% of minors with Internet access are members of a social network and have a 7% chance of engaging in online contact with a total stranger everyday (p. 58).

Amaral Silva & Àvila (2010), in *Turismo sexual y explotación sexual infantil: un análisis de la actuación del programa Sentinela en Ilhéus* (“Sex tourism and child sexual exploitation: an analysis of the performance of the Sentinela programme in Ilhéus”), highlights the concerns of several authors about the growth of sex tourism in various parts of Brazil, especially those that have a great potential for tourism development. The authors mention that this issue is closely linked to the trafficking of women and the sexual exploitation of children and adolescents. Sex tourism is caused by many reasons, such as the lack of tourism planning, social exclusion, unemployment etc. In this sense, the blame is placed on the policies of the capitalist system which promote inequality and allow the infringement of the rights of the poorest. Young people grow up without any expectations, without thinking about the future, in a quite unfavourable social environment, where all kinds of

crimes are committed, and there are too many bad influences such as alcohol, drugs, assaults, and misery.

These problems motivated the launch of the “Sentinela” programme in a specific region of Brazil with very peculiar features, which are unfavourable for the vulnerable population. This program aims to combat to things: the lack of planning by the tourist sector, which generates inequality and exclusion, and the lack of public policies that favour the community. The government and some NGOs are making efforts that are not enough to end this problem, but the mission of the programme is to have several areas that can protect the vulnerable population, especially children and adolescents, through the implementation of a set of articulated actions, which require the collaboration of all the social actors, as well as governmental and non-governmental organisations.

Damasceno Oliveira, Lopes Pinheiro, Luiz & Eron (2008), in *La organización de la actividad turística en Corumbá, bajo el enfoque de los conceptos de la cadena productiva y disposición productiva local* (“The organisation of tourism in Corumbá, from the perspective of the concepts of productive chain and local productive arrangement”), discuss the organisation of tourism in this place, identifying the main actors and external elements that interfere with tourism, in order to determine whether it meets the productive chain and local productive arrangement to achieve its goals. They conclude that in the production, distribution and consumption of a tourist product, there is no unity among companies, which complicates the existence of a pattern and decreases the quality of what is on offer. For them, tourism products should be strengthened through the interaction of two elements: tourist goods and services. This is because in order to have a good tourist organisation and a fairly productive chain the two levels need to be articulated and have a mutual need.

The poor business articulation and the low level of job training and qualifications, as well as the high dependence of the municipal government, have provoked a lack of moderation in tourism development in this town, which generates environmental and social problems such as child and teen prostitution, which constitute a barrier for the full development of this productive chain.

Barros (2013), in *Impactos del turismo de sol y playa en el Litoral Sur De Sergipe, Brasil* (“Impacts of sun and beach tourism on the South coast of Sergipe, Brazil”), highlights the importance and recognition of the sun and beach tourism and how it turns tourists into second-home tourists and how this affects the local population at the social, economic and ecological levels. The author offers a historical contextualisation of the relevance of sun and beach when it comes to choosing a second home, based on interviews with tourists and locals. Barros concludes that this tourism mechanism is helpful to largely improve the situation of some of the local residents and relate this to the culture of the southern coast of Sergipe (Brazil), the place chosen to carry out the study. In Sergipe, different economic activities support the local population in low seasons for tourism, when tourism is presented as an activity that increases the productivity of the local population.

The main economic impacts of tourism are: reduction of regional imbalances, contribution in tax collection; income multiplying effects, production and employment; and contribution to the GDP (Fernandes & Coelho, 2002: 540). The study highlights the importance of the promotion and development of cultural products and identifies the different features of the coastline that could increase the tourism sector, which according to polls is very positive for the local population. The support and promotion of popular and traditional cultural demonstrations and uses, such as craftworks, dance and gastronomy, are presented as alternatives of social inclusion for the different social groups in tourism planning (p. 543).

Marinho Ferreira (2008), in *Turismo Sexual: análisis de los contextos acerca de la teoría de la Representación Social* (“Sex tourism: analysis of the contexts of Social Representation theory”), offers an analysis of the underlying conceptions of sex tourism and social representations in the press releases published by the *Gazeta de Alagoas* newspaper between 2007 and 2009.

He concludes that, while there are advances in the conceptualisation of the term sex tourism, which include the identification of causes, there is no consensus about its relationship with human trafficking in the modality of sexual exploitation. With regards to the representations in the news pieces published by the analysed newspaper, there are contradictory statements within the same news item and between them, particularly with regards to the “sex tourism-child sexual exploitation” duality.

The analysis also puts in evidence the conceptual shifts, which are manifested in different ways: “(a) sex tourism as a phenomenon different from the sexual exploitation of minors; (b) sex tourism defined as the sexual exploitation of minors; (c) the sexual exploitation of children and adolescents in tourism; (d) the sexual exploitation of children and adolescents as motivation for sex tourism.

Based on these findings, “it is possible to infer that the printed media (methodologically represented by the news stories published by the *Gazeta de Alagoas*) hides shared symbolic productions of sex tourism, which are objectified predominantly in the dimension of wrongfulness and the sexual exploitation of children and adolescents and at the same time are anchored in the touristic and social context of the involved towns”.

The author wonders whether these “landslides are a reflection of inaccuracies, hybridism or conceptual remodelling that point out poorly structured social representations of sex tourism; or a reflection of new ongoing structuring associated to the reinterpretations that the social subjects (journalists) have started doing; or a reflection of both situations. Taking into consideration the construction processes of the social representations identified by Moscovici, are new objectifications and anchors being formed?” (p. 1192).

Finally, it is worth mentioning that “the sample of news stories published by the *Gazeta de Alagoas* newspaper focused directly on the topic “sex tourism”: police cases involving networks of travel agencies, organisation of events to discuss the topic, and campaigns against the phenomenon.

Even some of those issues were resumed the following year. These news stories put sex tourism in the field of organised crime (of national and international reach) in Alagoas and other Brazilian regions. According to the analysis, it is the association between sex tourism and the sexual exploitation of minors what gives the former an illegal status. The statements are marked by such terms as “process”, “accusation”, “justice”, “conspiracy”, “research”, and “prison”. This way the conceptual universe of sex tourism is inserted in the press, as a phenomenon opposed by public institutions, the civil society and organisations directly linked to tourism” (pp. 1190, 1191).

The RENACER Foundation (2014) challenges the use of the term sex tourism and proposes the use of commercial sexual exploitation of children and adolescents (CSECA) in the context of travel and tourism. In the document titled *Comunicar con enfoque de derechos y de género* (“Communicating from the perspective of gender and rights”), the author points out the CSECA occurs when a minor is forced to perform acts that involve the use of body parts to meet the sexual needs and desires of a

third person or a group of people, in exchange for any form of tangible or intangible rewards or promises (money, in kind, goods or favours), for the minor or for a third party. In the CSECA, children are treated as sexual object, as commodities; which constitutes a serious violation of their rights to life, health, dignity and development.

The modalities of CSECA include are: the use of children in prostitution, child pornography, trafficking of minors with sexual purposes, child marriage and servile marriage, and the use of minors in illegal armed groups and the child sexual exploitation associated with sex travel and tourism, which consists of the sexual offering or use of children by people travelling from one country to another, or within the same country. Sexual exploiters take advantage of the facilities offered by the tourism industry (hotels, bars, nightclubs, etc.). Usually, sex tours are arranged informally between friends or colleagues, paedophiles or not, and in some cases with the participation of travel agents.

This type of sexual exploitation is associated with the alleged liberalisation of sexuality and is incorporated into the logic of the commodified body: the less used the body is the most appreciated it is. The use of children reveals the attitudes of the abuser (client) who consider children as objects available to satisfy his/her sexual appetites.

The sensation of power, enabled by economic solvency, tempts many tourists to abuse not only children in the sexual aspect but also to abuse the population and the local environment. In addition, some tourists need to explore new sexual possibilities because their ordinary sex life does no longer satisfies them.

Some travel agencies and companies facilitate sex tourism through the promotion of places with “easy access” to local prostitution. There are specialised printed guides of the businesses where it is possible to have sexual access to male and female minors. Sex tourism is a big business for large and small companies, and a source of foreign investment for any country.

As the RENACER Foundation points out, the CSECA occurs anywhere: on the street (beaches, parks in non-residential areas, shopping malls, next to the traffic lights, wasteland); in market places, in direct relation with the collection of waste and begging; in slaughterhouses, which is a new scenario in relation to the traditional contact sites; in dance halls (discotheques, taverns, pubs, booths, kiosks), which are public spaces that have been socially justified for “recreation”; in bus stops and urban and intercity public transport stops, terminals, and underground/metro stations; in beauty salons and modelling agencies (in several cities the use of this type of businesses as places of child sexual abuse is common) homes, motels and hotels; in sentry boxes and other military installations, vehicles, camps, prisons, drug stores, schools, internet booths, among other outlets. Its impacts include: STDs, cervical cancer, HIV/AIDS, early pregnancy, abortion, tuberculosis, malnutrition, drug abuse, physical violence (wounds caused by bladed weapons and firearms, or fractures cause by beatings.), and the cancellation of life projects (like forming a family, living as a couple, completing a professional degree).

In relation to the legislation in Colombia, it is necessary to mention that the Law 985 of 2005 includes sex tourism as a form of human trafficking, and defines it as the sexual exploitation or prostitution of others for tourism purposes. There are laws particularly targeting the CSECA. Law 1336 of 2009, in its article 219, defines the criminal committing *sex tourism* in the following way: the person that directs, organises and promotes tourist activities involving the sexual use of minors will be punished with four (4) to eight (8) years of imprisonment.

The penalty will increase by half when this crime is carried out with children under twelve (12) years of age. Law 339 of 2009 states that hotels, guesthouses, hostels, residences, apartment hotels and other lodging establishments will be punished with seizing of assets when they have been used for the sexual exploitation of minors. This same law stipulates that unregistered hosting services, Internet cafes, intercity airlines and land transports have to sign codes of conduct and comply with the duty of warning.

The warnings of the two aforementioned laws state: 1. I do not give information, promote or incentive contact with children and adolescents for sexual exploitation. This way I avoid being penalised and go to prison for at least 14 years. 2. I do not offer or allow in my business this type of sexual exploitation. This way I avoid being fined and the closure and seizing of the assets of my establishment. 3. I do not buy sex with a minor. This way I avoid up to 32 years in prison. 4. I do not have, produce or sell pornography involving persons under 18 years of age. This way I avoid a fine and up to 20 years in prison.

4. Conclusions

After reading the previous texts it can be argued that the intertextuality between online tourism, virtual identity and online tourism is weaved by the relation of correspondence between social networks and media (advertising, videos, photos, music, text) and the behaviour of those who use them:

The use of the web 2.0 enables real time encounters between those interested in exchanging preferably audiovisual information about what they want to make real, through personal contact, outside the virtual space or within it through the immersion in the metaverse. This is what the so-called independent tourists do when they self-manage their travel, without intermediaries.

This way, they make the decision without talking to anyone other than those who already have been in the destinations they want to visit. In this process, the travel agent is excluded from the decision-making process. In short, the independent tourist, by making use of the “word of mouth” marketing strategy, “learns from the experiences of others”, through “interconnection-aggregation”, or the process of constant and immediate interactivity.

The contents offered by web (videos, pictures, words, walls), as well as the experiences of those who make up the ‘we’ or other tourists who live in virtual places like Facebook become the “eyes and ears” of potential travellers. The image of the place to visit is the result of the information, perceptions and emotions referenced by “others”.

This type of behaviour can be associated with that of young people in the social networks, where they create multiple identities composed of various digital personalities that respond to affective or emotional needs from a different time, every time. The result of this practice is a desired fragmented identity, which is based on the belief that taking ownership of what does not belong to you does not have any consequences.

In this sense, the use of the web 2.0, added to the consumption of the information circulated by the media (advertisements, videos, photos, music, words) contributes to the construction of hegemonic virtual identities that exchange information, preferably audiovisual, about what makes them feel included and accepted within a social circle that provides recognition.

This happens because all members of society need to represent themselves through an aesthetically pleasing image derived from their lifestyle and the image it projects. And in this sense, advertising offers the members of society common topics for conversation, which play the role of social cohesion. The topics advertising brings to the table eventually contribute to the construction of a media, hegemonic and official identity, because those who choose a marginal or minority identity can be perceived as adversaries.

These identities consumed objects, as a way of showing what they are and what they are not. This ultimately means that the reality of everyday life is learned, reproduced and manipulated by the media based on the market's interests. In this same direction, consumption is defined as a cultural process loaded with significance that operates in everyday life through the use and appropriation of objects, ideas and subjects. In this consumption market people's own image is projected in the mirror of others to guarantee social success: be liked by others through participation in the manufacturing of products, services and people that make me feel accepted generates self-fulfilment.

Consumption based on self-fulfilment could be critically understood as one of the motivations of mixed race couples (composed of Brazilian female prostitutes [*jineteras*] and male Italian sex consumers) who get married for convenience; the *bricheros*, the Peruvian men who hunt American women who visit their country searching for exotic sex; or the Mexican *sexoservidores* (male prostitutes) who prefer exchanging sex for money with foreigners because they treat them better. In short, sex between consumer and consumed person is gratifying because it covers the consumer's needs: women looking European to marry a European man; men acting like heroes and "taking advantage" of their exotic objectification in order to conquer American women.

The consumed people do not realise that outside of these contexts, they will continue being discriminated against on the grounds of their skin colour, their origin, their education level, their HIV-positive status, or their own condition. Young *jineteras*, *bricheros* and *sexoservidores* do not recognise themselves as functional consuming subjects for the market and productive-bodies system in the middle of the power relations that it implies in terms of social class, gender and ethnicity, which facilitates their exploitation; much less if we take into consideration that they are the main users of the networks and media and consumers of advertising.

The categories of analysis provided by the review documents for future research include: the independent tourist, word-of-mouth marketing, vicarious learning, interconnection-aggregation, metaverse, teleportation, virtual-media-mediated identities, digital personalities, consuming subjects, productive bodies, mixed-race couples, convenience marriage, *bricheros*, sex tourism, *transtesticles* and second-home tourism, among others.

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