Proximity tourism: An observational analysis of the use of instagram to promote the northeast of Brazil

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ABSTRACT: With the changes in consumer profile, especially in tourism activity, facing the issues brought by globalization, greater access to and use of Technologies, and more recently, the restrictions imposed by the protocols to prevent contamination by the Covid-19 virus and its consequences, it has been necessary to change the way of experiencing tourism, leading the market to adapt to the new reality. Thus, the incentive to implement so-called Proximity Tourism has gathered strength, prompting the following research question: how has this type of tourism been addressed and how have the cities of the Brazilian Northeast have been working with this theme to promote their potential on the social network platform Instagram? The main objective of this study was to perform an observational analysis of what is being posted on this social network concerning proximity tourism, by investigating the use of the hashtag #turismodeproximity, and whether the cities of the Northeast of Brazil are using this Instagram tool. As the result of this research, it was found that of the total posts indexed with this hashtag, only a small number are directly related to this region, indicating a lack of dissemination, and consequently, failure to generate greater visibility for this tourism modality.

Keywords:
Proximity tourism.
Touristic experience.
Northeast Region (BR)

INTRODUCTION

The perception that consumer behavior has changed significantly in recent years is nothing new. Whether these changes are influenced by globalization, increased access to and use of technology, or the countless changes that have occurred in social behavior, we can see that consumers no longer fit the profile that the market had grown accustomed to until recently.

The impacts of these changes have been significant, particularly in activities that rely on services as their primary source of supply. Tourism, in particular, is one of the sectors that generally involves the provision of services and, if well planned and structured, has significant economic potential. Therefore, in order for tourism to have the potential to promote local development, it must be carefully planned, ensuring a positive experience for the tourists and positive results for the communities visited.

This change in consumer behavior has forced tourist destinations to rethink and restructure their spaces to promote so-called Experience Economy, which despite being first mentioned in the studies of Pine and Gilmore (1998), took a long time to be perceived as something that needed to be thought about and changed, in the enjoyment of cities as an experience and as a tourist attraction, since this subject was previously only addressed in terms of business management.

Adding to these changes, at the end of 2019, a health crisis of unprecedented proportions emerged, which became a Pandemic in early March 2020 - COVID-19. According to Hall, Scott, and Gossling (2020), it was a pneumonia of unknown cause, initially detected in the city of Wuhan, China, and reported to the WHO (World Health Organization) on December 31, 2019.

Bringing enormous challenges, in addition to the loss of countless lives, this disease caused hindrances in the way people used to relate, have fun, and travel, affecting several sectors of the economy; particularly tourism, because social isolation and border closures were necessary due to the form of contagion of this disease.

For Lebrun, Corbel, and Bouchet (2021), while tourism companies and operators predicted a significant loss of revenue worldwide in 2020, some professionals were already forecasting the development of a more local forms of tourism; and governments, particularly in Europe, were encouraging the population to take vacations in their own countries to support this sector, and reduce the financial burden.

As a result, there was an increase in short trips closer to home, to places that residents often did not know about, because they always prioritized longer trips.

Because these short trips are mostly made by private car, usually with only one family per car, rather than by airplane or bus, the possibility of contamination by Covid-19 is greatly reduced.

Thus, the possibility emerged of rescuing "Proximity Tourism" - a term already used by studies such as those of Bochma, Torré, Bouba-Olga, and Grossetti, who sought to define it and developed ways to categorize the concept (Díaz Soria & Llurdés Coit, 2013). And so a different movement was observed, taking place within the countries, cities and their surroundings, immediately after the first wave of Covid-19 began to ease in the localities, still in the year 2020.

Also, in recent years, there has been increased access to and use of information technology in the tourism sector, as well as a change in consumer behavior in this regard. According to Neuhofer, Buhalis, and Ladkin, (2014), technology has not only become an integral part of tourism, but has also revolutionized the way travel is planned, how businesses in the industry are directed and, as a result, how tourism services and experiences are created and consumed.

Travel has changed in terms of the way it is researched and organized; customers now Search for information on specialized web pages before traveling, and not only buy tickets, accommodation, and so on, but also seek out the opinions of others who have already visited the destination, and who often post this content on specialized pages or social networks.

As previously stated, besides using social media platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter, tourists also rate and leave comments on specialized tourism platforms, such as VirtualTourist, TripAdvisor, Expedia, and Lonely Planet which are the most successful professional platforms in tourism and provide valuable travel information (Akehurst, 2009; García-Pablos et. al., 2016 apud Kar, Kumar & Ilavarasan, 2021).

Thus, based on what has been presented so far, the following questions are raised: how has this new modality of proximity tourism been perceived and studied, and how have localities, specifically cities in the Brazilian Northeast, been working on this theme on the social media platform Instagram?

The primary goal of this study is to conduct an observational analysis of what is being posted on the social media platform Instagram concerning proximity tourism, with a focus on the Northeast Region of Brazil. This region was selected as the research locus because the cities and capitals are relatively close to each other, which could greatly facilitate proximity tourism, increasing the competitiveness of these locations compared with destinations further away.

The purpose of this study is to determine whether this theme has been discussed more since the Covid-19 pandemic, and to see if these posts and comments (whether from tourists or local management) can contribute to spreading the word about the destinations,

resulting in increased demand for these places.

This study is justified because the pandemic has brought numerous changes in the way tourism is practiced, particularly due to the restrictions imposed by the Covid-19 protocols, leading to changes in the production chain that were required to adapt to the new reality. Furthermore, it is believed the study will provide data that will contribute to theoretical and practical discussion of the subject, providing a better understanding of this tourism model, for researchers, entrepreneurs, and especially public-sector managers, given that it is still a little researched theme.

METHODOLOGY

To achieve the objectives of this study, exploratory-describe research was conducted, using a qualitative approach. It was decided to collect data in three stages: first, bibliographic research was conducted to understand the conceptualization of this type of tourism, thereby generating the theoretical framework of the study. Subsequently, it was decided to conduct a systematic review of the literature, with content analysis (Bardin, 2011), in one of the main databases of scientific publications, Scopus (Elsevier) to verify how studies in this area were being conducted and what the objectives of the research found in this database were.

Finally, the third stage of research sought to determine, using an applied technique, how the term "Proximity Tourism" has been presented with the use of hashtags in the users' posts, whether they are tourists who have experienced the activity themselves, or managers of the localities that are or could be working and encouraging this type of tourism. All this was done to see whether the Northeast region of Brazil has taken advantage of this opportunity to increase the attractiveness of its destinations.

To better clarify the stages of research, here is a brief explanation of how the systematized review was conducted in the Scopus database (Elsevier) to identify what has been produced so far concerning proximity tourism and these new tourist experiences. Scopus was chosen because it is one of the largest databases, containing many international publications.

The paths taken to carry out the research were listed in this step of the systematized review in search of the concepts and objectives of the studies, informing how the data was obtained and how the material was analyzed. To achieve the goal, the criteria for document selection (Chart 1) were established when searching the Scopus scientific publications database.

Chart 1: Criteria for document selection

Themes	Stage 01	Stage 02
Scientific Publication Basis	Scopus	Scopus
Keywords / Expression	"Proximity tourism"	"Proximity tourism" AND "tourist experience"
Language	English	English
Time Horizon	Not specified	Not specified
Research areas	Not specified	Not specified
Total of results found	**15**	**8**

Source: research data (2021)

The searches were carried out on October 18, 2021, using the term "proximity tourism", and a total of fifteen documents were retrieved. Of these, it was decided to analyze only "articles" written on the subject, and English was chosen as the language because it was more comprehensive. In a second step, the Boolean operator "AND" was used to refine the search, and the term "tourist experience" was added to find articles about proximity tourism and its relationship with the tourist experience. These second search yielded a total of eight published articles, which were then read in full to analyze their objectives.

To see how this term has been used in practice, it was decided to analyze "Proximity Tourism" on Instagram using the indexation of the hashtag #turismodeproximity. After all, according to Hays, Page, and Buhalis (2013), the "#" symbol (known as a 'hashtag') is used on social media to organize and search for posts. We therefore decided to track the frequency and use of these hashtags related to the theme of proximity tourism in Northeast Brazil.

When beginning the search for the term #turismodeproximidade, it was noticed that the use of the same term often appeared in other languages. Therefore, to gain a better understanding of the impact of this tourism modality, it was decided to search also in English, using the indexer #proximitytourism and in Spanish, using #turismodeproximidad.

The hashtags #turismodeproximidade, #proximitytourism, and #turismodeproximidad were then monitored using the Instagram search tool, which displays the number of posts indexed by each hashtag, based on photos posted online by users. To determine whether the cities of the Brazilian Northeast have used this possibility of indexing the hashtags in order to be identified and appear in us-

ers' searches when searching for proximity tourism, thus publicizing their potential, a direct and detailed observation was conducted of all posts in which the hashtag #turismodeproximidad appears, in Portuguese.

By this means, we sought to learn about the use of these terms, by which locations, the dates of the first posts, whether before or after the pandemic, the quantities of each term, the main languages used, and whether there were any actions to encourage proximity tourism, through the use of this term by agencies and tourism companies of the locations, particularly in the cities of Northeastern Brazil.

Proximity tourism, local experiences, and mobilities

As a result of changes in the dynamics of the social fabric, and the crises caused not only by the pandemic but also by armed conflicts, environmental problems, and the resulting economic issues, another way to practice tourism activity may emerge. After all, for Sánchez, Pulgar, and Cabrera (2021), these issues may lead to the first post-pandemic tourism attitudes of the era being based on the improvement and support of the region and its local businesses. This combination of factors opens up the possibility of people valuing their immediate surroundings in a whole new way which, if well planned, could generate benefits for localities.

However, the best way to conceptualize this activity is still a matter of debate, and varies greatly among authors. According to Sánchez, Pulgar, and Cabrera (2021), one of the main problems with proximity tourism is precisely the ambiguity of the term, and one must first understand what the term 'proximity' means, which according to these authors is a concept that is broad enough to include everything from travel throughout the national territory to experiences less than twenty kilometers from home.

Associating the term proximity with tourism, these authors claim this activity is most prevalent in destinations that are close enough to the place of residence as not to require accommodation. Therefore, they define proximity tourism as tourist experiences that occur within one day, at a location close to the place of residence, that do not require overnight accommodation, and whose focus is to get to know an unknown place nearby (Sánchez, Pulgar & Cabrera, 2021).

For several other authors, proximity tourism is also known as a staycation, a combination of the terms "stay" and "vacation", referring to vacations in which people stay in their homes. Staycation has been defined as the practice of intending to spend a holiday at home or in close proximity to one's home, so staycation is, by definition, "to stay voluntarily" (Rosu, 2020).

However, local experiences show this term was used in other ways in the Brazilian territory when a tourism resumption plan was developed in this country, following the crisis caused by the Covid-19 pandemic. Thus, the "Resumption of Tourism" plan is a national alliance that brings together the public authorities, private initiative, the third sector, and the S System (Sesc, Senac, Senai), coordinated by the Ministry of Tourism, to mitigate the negative effects on the sector caused by the Covid-19 pandemic (TURISMO, 2022).

For the Brazilian Federation of Accommodation and Food (FBHA), short trips, called "staycations", or proximity tourism, are a trend in Brazil, helping to strengthen tourism recovery in the country. For Alexandre Sampaio, president of FBHA:

"Destinations up to 300 km away from those seeking to travel appear to be a viable option at the moment. With proximity, or road tourism, it is possible to make short trips or even round trips and get to know a new place without having to travel too far." (DIÁRIO DO TURISMO, 2022). "

Thus, as a concept that is still evolving, but with mobility and the extension of the territory to be traveled as its most characteristic factors, we chose to adopt, in this study, the broader definition, as used by the Brazilian Ministry of Tourism, in its National Plan for the Recovery of Tourism. It defines proximity tourism as shorter trips, between 200 and 300 kilometers around the capitals and large cities, focus on safely returning to work, without restricting it to the issue of whether or not the traveler stays overnight, i.e., for the national recovery plan, it can still be considered local tourism when there is accommodation (TURISMO, 2022).

However, a few months after the start of the resumption of the activity by the Ministry of Tourism of Brazil, after a great incentive for these domestic, regional, and short-term trips, especially at weekends; it can be seen that although the proximity tourism should still be carried out effectively, to encourage visits to nearby places, there is already an expansion of the activity, at this time when the pandemic situation is more controlled, due to the restrictions previously imposed and the vaccination of the population.

Even so, it was observed that this potentiality of proximity tourism, which gained more adherents and incentives after the start of the pandemic, should still be a strong trend, as it is not over yet, and many consumers still feel safer traveling in their own cars, closer to their cities of residence. In parallel, this trend of proximity tourism emerges more strongly at a time when society is also making other movements of equal intrinsic value and that are linked in some form, such these more local experiences.

This work discusses some of the trends that are prompting people to support local, small producers. For example, we see the emergence of restaurants that only buy from local producers, and the increasing habit of looking for the origin of the products before purchasing, or those who make an effort to shop close to

their homes, encouraging local trade.

There are some little-known phenomena, such as the term "Locavorism", which according to Santos and Marques (2021), was elected word of the year in 2007 by the New Oxford American Dictionary. Locavorism is defined as: "A person whose diet consists exclusively, or mainly, of locally grown or produced food".

The term locavorism was first used in 2005, by a group of four women in the San Francisco area of California, who launched a challenge in their city for people to only eat food produced within a 100-mile (or 160 km) radius of the central region (Santos & Marques, 2021). Here we see a similar vision to proximity tourism, in that the intention is valuing the local over what comes from outside; whether due to specific values, or by necessity, as in the case of the Covid-19 pandemic

To complete the construction of the concept of proximity tourism, another point that needs to be discussed when talking about this way of practicing tourism is the concept of mobility, since tourism, according to Allis, Moraes, and Sheller (2020) is indeed a form of mobility, and the different and multiple mobilities inform tourism, shape the places where tourism is carried out, and drive the construction and deconstruction of tourist destinations.

For Tim Cresswell, mobility was originally not common among most peoples. Those who were "mobile" were seen as untrustworthy, and were attributed the status of outsiders. However, this changed with the development of commercial activities and population growth (Cresswell, 2012). And tourism was undoubtedly one of these activities that made mobility much more common and frequent.

In this context, whether it takes place over longer or shorter distances, tourism assumes a role driven by the greater possibility of mobilities, and consequently, ends up generating greater flows of people flow between locations, making studies of mobility fundamental to understanding how people construct the world around them, displaying different types of movements and adding importance about both theoretical and empirical development (Rosu, 2020).

For Allis, Moraes, and Sheller (2020), on the other hand, places have multiple and contested meanings, which often produce disruptions and disjunctions that increasingly constitute global relationships - but with obvious local ramifications, which are not always recognized. This has been quite evident in the case of proximity tourism, where localities, in this case, local ramifications, have responded totally differently to encourage this activity, as compared to what is seen globally.

Furthermore, global cities are being reinvented as key locations from where the associated mobility of tourism is triggered. Thus, cities such as Hong Kong and Barcelona have undergone dramatic urban redesigns to present themselves as attractions on a highly competitive global stage of world-class destinations (Sum & So, 2004; Degen, 2004 apud Allis, Moraes & Sheller, 2020). And, in this context, one might ask, to what extent is all of this restructuring, standardization, or such a large volume of tourist flows necessary, if what tourists seek most of the time, is the different; something new?

Situations that have been known for some time, just before the pandemic, are not examples that should be pursued again, e.g., saturation of places, or so-called overtourism; which appears in the early 2000s, although it became widespread later, in 2017 and 2018 and is something that needs to be controlled, so that it does not continue or reoccur (García-Hernández, Ivars-Baidal & Mendoza de Miguel, 2019).

As a consequence of such factors, destinations have sought to change the way they work with the tourist industry, attempting to provide personalized experiences on a smaller scale that is more differentiated for their visitors, thereby creating a new market niche. As a result, experience comes into this context, and proximity tourism opens up new possibilities, with destinations becoming potentially appealing to those seeking more contact with nature, less crowds, and greater security. And once again, the issue of mobility in tourism is raised.

According to Allis, Moraes, and Sheller (2020), these new types of tourist places have also challenged the conventional boundaries of tourism studies, turning the attention of tourist mobilities to unexpected places: travel reports appear online for those who stayed at home, in blogs, websites, or social networks such as Facebook and Instagram; platforms, islands, and other artificial places; and places that have experienced nuclear disasters or places where there is risk, suffering, and death. Hence, the very meaning of place is at stake, on display or available in a world of risks, simulations, ever-changing diseases, and terrorism; thus, the issue of mobility is once again widely discussed.

It is precisely this new mobility that has been passing information about the place being visited, to those who are traveling virtually, via a cell phone or social media. We have seen an increase in the number of places and companies using Instagram to publicize their potential and become more competitive in the tourism market, for example, through posts, hashtags indexing, and comments.

The tourist experience and the use of social networks

Currently, the perception of the value of the consumers' experience is becoming more real and present in several areas, representing a way of acting in the market, where the most important thing is to provide the consumer not only with the opportunity to purchase products or services, but to have a differentiated and quality experience. This has been the case in the field of

tourism and hospitality for some time. Pizam (2010) states that tourist experiences are a central aspect of tourism, with consumer profiles changing in terms of the choice of destinations, based on the experiences for which they are willing to pay.

With changes in consumer behavior, most of travelers are now better informed and connected, and more adept at using social networks, almost like a logbook, where everything they experience is posted and commented on; we see the importance of the presence of localities in these networks, posting, disseminating, and generating information for potential tourists.

Thus, localities can find important support in these networks for spreading and strengthening the dissemination of a place; posted images, in particular, can stimulate people's interest in visiting these places (Alves, Costa & Perinotto, 2017). Thus, social networks can influence the tourist experience by generating a large volume of information about the locations, and receiving numerous comments from those who have already visited the place, providing information for future tourists.

To give an idea of how popular these social media platforms are, consider Instagram, which was founded by Kevin Systrom and Brazilian Mike Krieger in 2010. After just one year, Instagram had ten million users. It was purchased by Facebook for around $1 billion in 2012. According to the company, around 800 million people use social media platforms today. In Brazil, Instagram is one of the most popular social media platforms and since 2015, Brazilians have occupied a prominent place in the app's statistics. Furthermore, Brazilians outnumber the global average in terms of Instagram participation (CANALTECH, 2022).

These figures demonstrate the power and reach that online posts can have on this social media platform, if they are shared correctly. To reach more people, particularly those interested in a particular subjects, these networks use indexers, such as hashtags, which serve to group similar information and reveal specific subjects that are marked by the hashtags.

Araújo (2017) states that the hashtag serves as metadata, which users can use to make contente traceable and to link it to other similar content. Thus, it is possible to appear in Instagram's search results using a particular hashtag, for example, whenever someone searches for the indexed word.

One of the main factors that explains the importance of social networks, and more precisely in this case, Instagram, as a means of publicizing the destination, is given by the authors Albach, Edling, and Moreira (2021), who state that the study of these hashtags needs to be expanded to provide a better understanding of current phenomena, such as the repercussions of the content shared on virtual social networks, and their subsequent sociability.

Interaction with these networks, and with technology, occurs not only when searching and purchasing directly, such as through the websites of online travel agencies (OTAs), but also during or after the stay in the locations, through posts and comments about their experiences. According to Kar, Kumar, and Ilavarasan (2021), in this digital age, most consumers use social media to share their ideas, access information, find out about the experiences of other tourists, and make decisions about whether to purchase a product or service. This is known as Electronic Word of Mouth (e-WOM).
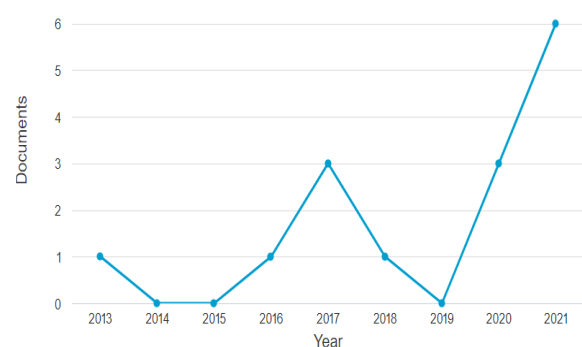
According to Zhang, Sotiriadis, and Shen (2022) with the explosive growth of mobile internet users and increased access to smart devices, technology is no longer simply a supplementary tool; its use has become indispensable for development. Therefore, constant monitoring of social networks is required, and destinations must be aware of what is being posted and the comments left by tourists. In particular, they must use this channel to promote tourism, informing and disseminating all of its potential, in order to become more competitive in the market.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

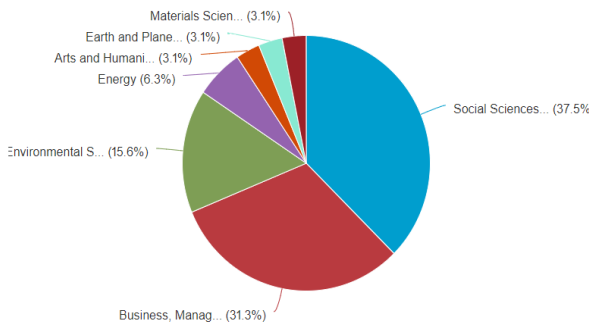### Analysis of the Systematized Literature Review on Proximity Tourism

The total number of articles found in the search of the selected database - Scopus(15) and the year of the oldest document found in this base – 2013, indicate that proximity tourism is a recent and little researched theme. In terms of publications over time, there was a significant increase after 2020 (Figure 1), indicating a greater interest in outreach tourism, particularly after the emergence of the Covid-19 pandemic. In terms of area of research of articles in this area (Figure 2), social sciences have the highest proportion (37.5%), followed by business (31.3%) and environmental sustainability (15.6%).

Figure 1 – Number of articles per year
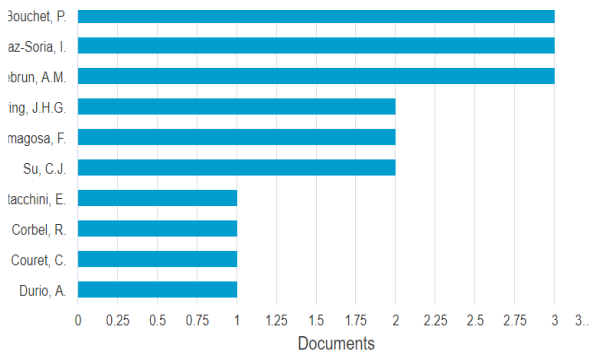

Source: Scopus/ Elsevier (2021)

Cesário M. F. P. (2023). Proximity tourism: An observational analysis of the use of instagram to promote the northeast of Brazil. *Applied Tourism*, 8(1), 1-14.
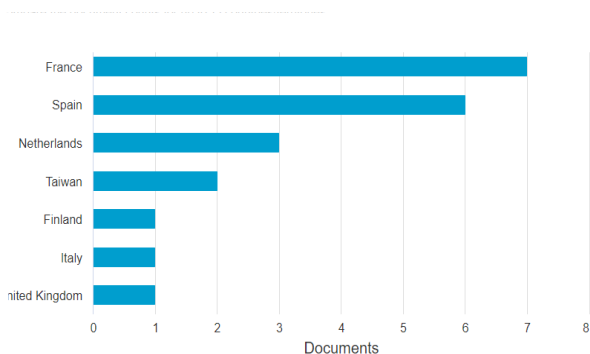
Figure 2 – Articles by area

When comparing the authors who have published the most on the subject (Figure 3), three authors, Bouchet, Diaz-Soria, and Lebrun, tie for the first place, with three articles each, and it was even identified that they have published some studies together. In terms of the countries with the most publications (Figure 4), France is first with seven publications, and Spain is in second with six.

Figure 3 – Studies on proximity tourism by author

Figure 4 – Studies on proximity tourism by country of publication

In the third stage of this systematic review, we sought to identify the objectives addressed in the studies (Chart 2), and found that for most of the studies, the objective was to understand the tourists' experience when engaging in proximity tourism.

Chart 2: Objectives of the articles about proximity tourism and tourist experience.

	Title/Author(s)	Objectives
01	Domestic tourists' experience of protected natural parks: A new trend during the pandemic crisis? (LEBRUN; SU; BOUCHET, 2021)	To better understand the experiences of domestic tourists when visiting protected natural parks in their countries.
02	A More Sustainable Management of Domestic Tourists in Protected Natural Parks: A New Trend in Sports Tourism after the Covid-19 Pandemic? (LEBRUN; SU; BOUCHET, 2021)	To better understand the experiences of domestic tourists when visiting nature parks with specific experiential contexts (extraordinary versus ordinary) providing different experiences.
03	Impacts of Covid-19 on intention to travel, in summer 2020: a trend in proximity tourism mediated by an attitude towards Covid-19 (LEBRUN, CORBEL & BOUCHET, 2021)	An exploratory study that examines the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on the intention to travel of French people (n=655), for the summer 2020 vacation.
04	Perspectives on proximity tourism planning in peri-urban areas. (SÁNCHEZ; GÓMEZ DEL PULGAR; CABRERA, 2021)	To conceptualize proximity tourism and justify the need to address it in post-coronavirus space planning, especially peri-urban areas of medium and large cities, intermediate spaces in the contemporary urban model that are rarely considered tourism spaces.
05	Pluralizing touristic production and consumption roles of residents? A perspective of small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) on proximity tourism. (JEURING, 2018)	To explore the relationships between small and medium-sized enterprises in the Dutch province of Friesland, examining how tourism SMEs assign tourism production and consumption roles to the residents of this province.

06	Introduction: proximity and intraregional aspects of tourism (JEURING; DIAZ-SORIA, 2017).	To focus on the intra-regional scale and the concept of proximity, studying the meanings and practices of tourism close to home, and attempting to strengthen research momentum in this area of tourism.
07	Being a tourist as a chosen experience in a proximity destination. (DIAZ-SORIA, 2017)	To examine the subjective construction of otherness, as this process determines what is left to be discovered. This study addresses the concepts of usual environment, proximity and tourist.
08	The challenge of proximity: the (un)attractiveness of close-to-home tourism destinations. (JEURING; HAARTSEN, 2017).	To examine the subjective understanding of distance and proximity in relation to the perceived attractiveness of tourist behavior in places close to home.

Source: research data (2021)

Half of the selected studies were written after the Covid-19 pandemic, indicating that this model of tourism may indeed be a trend in the coming years, even as the situation improves. This is because economic and social issues will take time to recover. Thus, tourism activity close to home will continue to become more viable and feasible.

Furthermore, as demonstrated by the study of Lebrun, Corbel, and Bouchet (2021), it is possible to innovate and customize, highlighting the pandemic as a factor that has generated proximity tourism, and suggesting local strategies with more original stays, allowing domestic tourists to (re)discover the richness of local territories and have more authentic experiences.

On the other hand, for Jeuring (2018), the concept of proximity tourism revolves around the notion that in the hyper-mobile world, everyone has become a tourist, and every place has become a new destination thus, tourist experiences of engagement and interaction with the "other" pervade between the familiar and the non-familiar, becoming incorporated into everyday life and dissociated from long-distance travel. All of this supports the new mobility practices mentioned by Allis, Moraes, and Sheller (2020).

Another important point raised by the research studies and mentioned in this paper is the need to better understand the experiences of domestic tourists when visiting areas with specific experiential contexts (extraordinary versus ordinary) that provide different experiences, as proposed by Lebrun, Su, and Bouchet (2021). This shows that indeed, the tourists' experience is something that destinations should work on more, as tourists are looking for something different than what was previously offered.

Also, in the current context of sustainable tourism, moral issues (such as a lower carbon footprint) and behavioral changes (looking more local) open up more possibilities to travel close to home. In this context, distance can become a disadvantage, and proximity a new commodity (Jeuring & Haartsen, 2017). A comparison can be made here with the previously mentioned practice of locavorism, in which the importance of place is increased by encouraging and prioritizing production and marketing closer to where the visitor lives.

Instagram as a tool for tourism promotion and competitiveness - an observational analysis

Here, we consider the wide reach of the social network platform Instagram, both in terms of the relationship between its users, and the way other profiles, many of them official, have taken advantage of the good engagement of this network to disseminate and share information for consumers. Thus, we sought to analyze the studied term, indexed by the hashtag #turismodeproximidade (proximity tourism, in Portuguese), to understand how Brazil, and more specifically, the Northeast region, reacted to the use of this indexer to promote the dissemination of their cities and enterprises, before and during the pandemic.

Analyzing the frequency of this hashtag, it was noticed that the same term is also used in other languages, so we attempted to identify the reach of the term in other languages too, conducting a more robust comparative analysis with other countries. Thus, we also performed searches on the term in English and Spanish. In searches conducted on the social network Instagram between July 23 and 30, 2022, with the hashtag #turismodeproximity, 826 posts were found (Figure 5) and using the hashtag #proximitytourism, 103 posts were found (Figure 6).

Figure 5 – Number of posts in Portuguese #proximitytourism
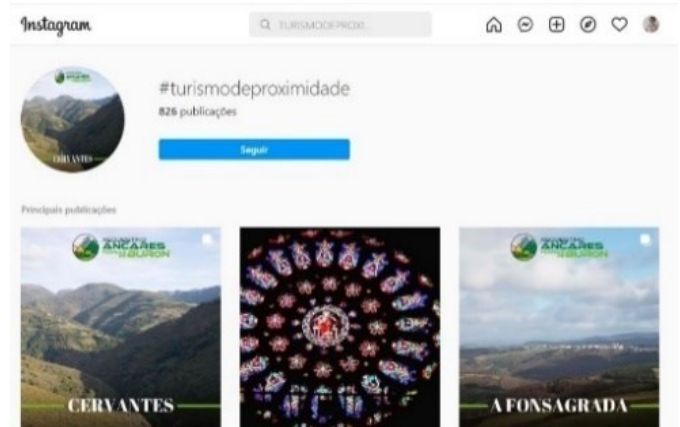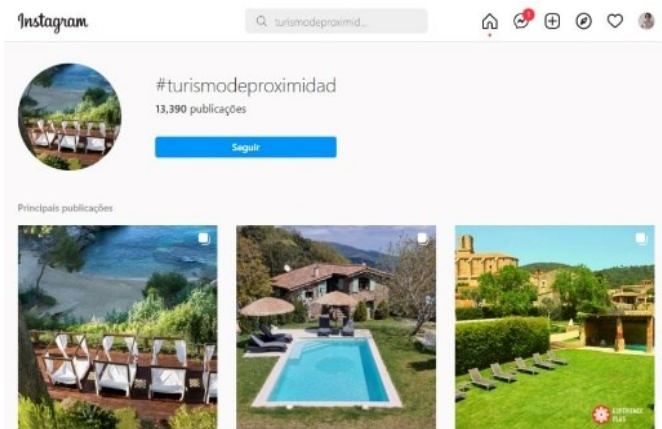

Source: Instagram, 2022

Figure 6 – Number of posts in English #proximitytourism
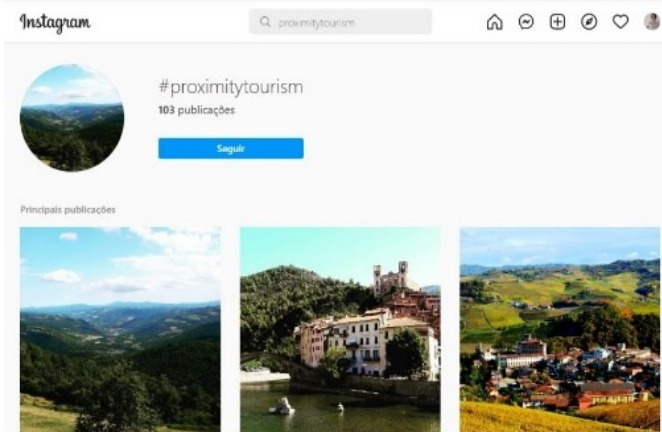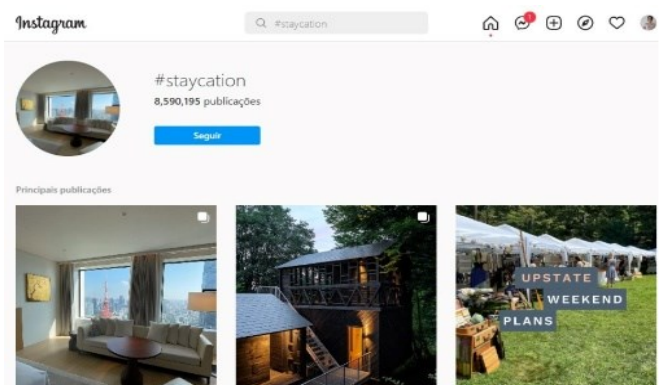

Source: Instagram, 2022

Thus, using the term in Spanish #turismodeproximidad, a far higher number of posts that mentioned this hashtag appeared, with a total of 13,390 thousand, as shown in figure 7 below. Also, when searching on another term that has been used in proximity tourism, the previously mentioned staycation, the number of hashtags used was much higher than the one found in Spanish, with a total of 8,590,195 mentions with this indexer (Figure 8). These high numbers were due to the greater coverage of these two languages, globally.

Figure 7 – Number of posts in Spanish#turismodeproximidad

Source: Instagram, 2022

Figure 8 – Number of posts in English #staycation

Source: Instagram, 2022

Next, to analyze whether the Northeast of Brazil has taken advantage of this trend, and whether there were any indexed publications about this region, the 826 publications with the hashtag #turismodeproximidade were examined in detail, to identify whether any mentioned the Northeast in particular, and if so, how many, and when they were posted. A survey was conducted of the main places that used these terms, and the number of posts related to the Northeast of Brazil. After all, as previously stated, the proximity of the cities and capitals of this region makes the type of tourism studied here quite feasible.

We looked for the first post since the start of the pandemic, as well as the most recent one. The first indexed post with this hashtag was posted on October 24, 2019, well before the Covid-19 pandemic. The fact this post was made before the pandemic confirms the findings of the publications in Scopus, as the first study using this term was also found before the Covid-19 pandemic – in 2013. This demonstrates that not only was the term studied, but its practice, albeit incipient, was already known in the market.

However, this first publication is not from Brazil or Portugal, two countries that speak Portuguese, but from Spain. The post is from a tourism guide, indexed along with other hashtags to discuss the importance of proximity tourism (also known as village-to-village tourism) for the city of Lugo, a municipality in Galicia - Spain.

It is worth noting that the post is written in Galician, which is considered a sister language of Portuguese (Folha, 2022), hence it uses the same expression, written in the same way, for proximity tourism (Figure 9). The next post found is from March 21, 2020, after the start of the Pandemic. This post mentions the importance of staying home, and of the need for social isolation so that the pandemic will go away as quickly as possible and activities return to normal. The most recent post was made on July 26, by a profile called Ancares Terras de Buron, from Spain, also using the Galician language.

Figure 9: 1st post before the Pandemic

Source: Instagram, 2022

Figure 10: 1st post after the Pandemic

Source: Instagram, 2022

Figure 11: Most recent post

Source: Instagram, 2022

In general, the two profiles that posted the most publications with the hashtag #turismodeproximidade publications were: Monte da Estrela - Country House and SPA, a hotel in Alentejo (Portugal), and Solar Maria Carolina, an establishment in Mário Campos (state of Minas Gerais), Brazil.

The purpose of analyzing the posts with this hashtag on Instagram was not only to know how it was used in general, but also to determine whether some cities in the Northeast of Brazil used this resource to increase their visibility during this pandemic period. This is in light of the fact that proximity tourism has been promoted by the Ministry of Tourism, with localities also playing an important role in planning and dissemination.

However, despite the enormous potential of these destinations, and their proximity, the results showed that there were very few posts on Instagram by cities in the Northeast of Brazil. Analyzing all 826 posts with the hashtag #turismodeproximidade, we found that approximately 600 were from Brazilian locations, but only 83 posts referred to some city in the Northeast of Brazil. This is a very small number, representing only 10% of the total posts with this hashtag.

Analyzing these posts, we found that the first one, from a city in the Northeast of Brazil, was on October 28, 2020, seven months after the pandemic began. This one is from a hostel-hostel called Zili Pernambuco, located in Recife, the Capital of the State of Pernambuco. This establishment was also the source of the second post with this hashtag, on October 31, 2020, publicizing a Halloween party at the establishment. The third post, on November 26, 2020, is from a travel profile called Clube do Mundo Turismo, publicizing the beauty and potential of the city of Caraíva, in Bahia.

Figure 12: First post with #turismodeproximidade in the Northeast of Brazil

Source: Instagram, 2022

Figure 13: Second post with #turismodeproximidade in the Northeast of Brazil

Source: Instagram, 2022

Figure 14: Third post with #turismodeproximidade in the Northeast of Brazil

Source: Instagram, 2022

We found that despite the potential for tourism of the cities of the Northeast, publications using this index to publicize, promote or encourage this type of activity are rare. However, some of them stand out for their informative purpose, their knowledge of this modality, or the frequency with which they appear. Of the 83 posts made by some cities in the Northeast, most of them were about destinations in the state of Bahia.

The profile Casa do Recôncavo (Figure 15), an accommodation establishment in the quilombola community of São Braz, in Santo Amaro, Bahia, attracted the most attention due to the high number of publications with the indexer #turismodeproximidade. Others, such as a post from a travel agency in São Luís, Maranhão (Figure 16), give information or tips, and promote proximity tourism. There is also a post from Sebrae in Ceará (Figure 17) that encourages ecotourism as a business opportunity, mentioning proximity tourism and valuing aspects of the locality. These posts are interesting as they explain or directly encourage proximity travel.

Figure 15: Northeast profile with the highest number of posts

Source: Instagram, 2022

Figure 16: Promoting proximity tourism

Source: Instagram, 2022

Figure 17: Sebrae – CE, about business opportunities

Source: Instagram, 2022

Although indexers are used by some private enterprises, few mentions of this type of tourism were found in the managerial profiles of localities, despite the fact it has great potential for leveraging local enterprises and destinations. It would only be necessary, to add the term "proximity tourism" indexed by the hashtag when posting about the locality, and tourists looking for attractions close to their homes would be able to find them easily.

On the other hand, some profiles were found during the research that refer to the use of the Ministry of Tourism guidelines on the tourism resumption plan, including a large number of posts, 21.4 thousand, with the hashtag #retomadadoturismo (Figure 18), indicating that there is plenty of intention to publicize and attract tourists after the worst period of the pandemic, but there are no direct references to proximity tourism, which greatly reduces the possibility of destinations informing tourists that they are attractive sites suitable for shorter trips.

Figure 18: Number of posts with #retomadadoturismo

Source: Instagram, 2022

As a result, it is believed that Brazil still does not make sufficient use of the hashtag to promote its potential, even more so in the Northeast of Brazil, given that there were far more posts in other languages, including those before the pandemic.

Such is the case of the Spanish hashtag #turismodeproximidad, which had 284 indexed posts even before the pandemic, reaffirming there was already a concern to value and encourage nearby or local places, to the detriment of places further away. With the hashtag #turismodeproximidade appearing in only one publication before the pandemic, this demonstrates that although the concept did exist before the pandemic, it was not properly explored through this tool, and there was little dissemination of destinations and tourist potentialities of places closer to travelers' homes.

With these findings, it is necessary to draw attention to the gap in the market in terms of more targeted disclosure of the potential of these cities and capitals of the Northeast of Brazil. Also, there is still much work to be done on the theme in terms of academic studies. For examples, studies on users' profiles on Instagram, through the engagement or comments generated by them, can be requested by the localities to better map these tourists, whether real or potential, in order to better understand, communicate, and publicize their potential and increase their competitiveness.

FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

The Covid-19 pandemic has already had a significant impact on tourism, triggering significant changes in mobility, social behavior, consumption patterns, and leisure activities (Romagosa, 2020). To stimulate debate and conceptualization of the subject, in addition to a literature search on the Scopus database, this study also conducted a systematized review, in order to understand the main objectives of studies on the theme of proximity tourism and tourism experiences, published before or after the outbreak of the pandemic.

The main focus of this study, however, was an observational analysis of Instagram posts indexed with the hashtag #turismodeproximity, seeking to identify whether cities in the Northeast of Brazil have used this tool to publicize their potential for this type of tourism.

This research found that studies on the subject have increased, although its conceptualization is still much debated among authors. This increase in the number of studies on the subject is most likely a reflection of the pandemic, and its effects on the tourism market, and it is believed that the way people experience tourism has also changed, with people becoming more cautious, seeking places with less crowds, and to places closer to home.

Following some periods of improvement in pandemic

rates as a result of the protocols adopted by most countries and the vaccination of a portion of the population, some activities were able to return, and tourism began to see better times, with more travel and economic movement. All of this has occurred as a result of an improvement in the pandemic, as well as government incentive policies, such as the Tourism Resumption Plan in Brazil.

These changes were also seen in Instagram posts, which began to become more frequent in the second half of 2020, encouraging people that the pandemic would soon be over, and giving information about traveling safely closer to home, notably, with the use of hashtags linked to the tourism resumption plan, such as #retomadadoturismo, which was used in thousands of posts.

However, it is believed that tourism will not immediately return to its previous state, when tourist saturation was wreaking havoc and localities were being damaged by unchecked commercialism. Other aspects have also contributed to proximity tourism, as evidenced by some articles that discuss issues such as the economic crisis in some countries, reduced vacations, and changes in consumer behavior (with the appreciation of what is local).

Through this observational analysis of Instagram to understand whether, and how cities in the Northeast of Brazil are using the such tool to promote proximity tourism, it was fund that despite the significant number of posts with this hashtag (826), only 83 were specific to locations in the Northeast of Brazil, indicating that there is good scope for the Northeast to invest more in proximity tourism. Proximity tourism is also influenced by the short distances between cities and capitals, and the good road network in the region.

The importance of this research is primarily to encourage the debate on proximity tourism, with greater stimulation and dissemination of this tourism modality by localities in the Northeast of Brazil. As a suggestion for further research, studies could be carried out to analyze the possibility of joint actions between the closest destinations, with the creation of tourism clusters, in which publicity and promotion is shared between two or more destinations.

With the changes in tourist mobilities referred to in the work of Allis, Moraes, and Sheller (2020), and the concept of tourist proximity revolving around the notion that in a hyper-mobile world, everyone is a tourist and every place is a destination, tourist experiences may be incorporated into everyday life, becoming separated from physical travel across large distances. All these conceptual issues can spark a much wider debate, with important questions, such as the definition of what constitutes tourist activity, providing interesting points for future studies.

A limitation of this study is that the systematic review was conducted in only one database, which, despite being one of the largest database, does not include all studies conducted. Also, the observational analysis was conducted in only one social network – Instagram. Future research could, therefore, be expanded to other social media platforms.

Finally, it is considered that the previous transformations, combined with the needs imposed by the pandemic, may generate more changes to tourist activity and the way it is experienced by consumers. Therefore, those in charge of managing locations must anticipate these changes and the needs of the new tourist. Currently, social networks, particularly Instagram, should be used to learn about visitor perceptions, through comments and posts. Social media should also be used more to publicize destinations, especially those in the Northeast region.

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