

Sustainable tourism on Instagram: insights from Hispanic centennials

Turismo sustentável no Instagram: perspectivas dos centennials hispânicos

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ABSTRACT

This study examines sustainable tourism representation on Instagram through #turismosostenible and #turismosustentable, focusing on Spanish-speaking users and posts from 2023. Content analysis reveals a strong emphasis on environmental conservation and sustainable practices, predominantly showcased through natural landscapes and informational content. User-generated content, especially personal photos, dominates the narrative, highlighting the role of grassroots storytelling. However, cultural heritage, community engagement, and certified destinations are notably underrepresented, signalling opportunities to diversify sustainability narratives. Rural and peak-season tourism are the most prominent, while off-peak travel and urban green spaces receive less attention. The limited participation of official tourism boards and non-governmental organisations suggests the need for more robust institutional involvement. This research provides insights into leveraging social media to promote inclusive and impactful sustainability communication, offering practical recommendations to enhance digital strategies.

Keywords: SDG 12.2 - Responsible Consumption and Production. Instagram. Content analysis. Digital narratives. Spanish-speaking users.

RESUMO

Este estudo examina a representação do turismo sustentável no Instagram através das hashtags #turismosostenible e #turismosustentable, com foco em usuários de língua espanhola e publicações de 2023. A análise de conteúdo revela uma forte ênfase na conservação do meio ambiente e nas práticas sustentáveis, predominantemente mostradas por meio de paisagens naturais e conteúdo informativo. O conteúdo gerado pelo usuário, especialmente fotos pessoais, domina a narrativa, destacando o papel da narrativa de base. No entanto, o patrimônio cultural, a participação comunitária e os destinos certificados estão notavelmente sub-representados, o que aponta oportunidades para diversificar as narrativas de sustentabilidade. O turismo rural e de alta temporada são os mais proeminentes, enquanto as viagens fora da temporada e os espaços verdes urbanos recebem menos atenção. A participação limitada de órgãos oficiais de turismo e organizações não governamentais sugere a necessidade de uma participação institucional mais sólida. Esta pesquisa fornece informações sobre como aproveitar as redes sociais para promover uma comunicação de sustentabilidade inclusiva e impactante, oferecendo recomendações práticas para melhorar as estratégias digitais.

Palavras-chave: ODS 12.2 - Consumo e Produção Responsáveis. Instagram. Análise de conteúdo. Narrativas digitais. Usuários de língua espanhola.

1 INTRODUCTION

In the last decades, sustainable tourism has appeared as a fundamental concept for the tourism industry, with its emphasis on balancing environmental, social and economic factors to secure the long-term viability of tourism destinations (van der Bank; van der Bank, 2019). This perspective emerges in response to a growing concern about environmental issues and the impact of tourism on natural and cultural resources. Understanding the dynamics of sustainable tourism is therefore crucial for designing strategies that minimise adverse impacts and maximise positive benefits for both communities and ecosystems (Zhang; Ali, 2024).

At the same time, the increase in the use of social media has transformed the sharing and consumption of information, especially in the field of tourism. Instagram, a platform characterised by its visual content, has become a powerful tool for shaping tourism trends and influencing travellers' decisions (Firman *et al.*, 2023). Its popularity and global reach position it as a valuable source of data for analysing behaviours and preferences in this context (Li *et al.*, 2023). Specifically, Spanish-speaking content represents 4.9% of the world's content (González-Carrión; Aguaded, 2020); therefore, its interaction with sustainable tourism content deserves to be explored in greater depth.

This research addresses an important gap in the existing literature on sustainable tourism and social media. While numerous studies have examined how digital platforms influence perceptions of tourism—particularly through influencers and branded content (Kilipiri *et al.*, 2023; Palazzo *et al.*, 2021)—there remains a striking underrepresentation of studies that examine these dynamics in the Spanish-speaking context. Existing work tends to focus on destinations within English-speaking or European settings, often overlooking the nuances of content consumption and production in Latin American and Hispanic digital spheres. Notably, Breiby *et al.* (2023) have explored Instagram as a tool for alternative tourism narratives, yet their focus remains on Norway and other Western audiences. Similarly, Justianto and Morley (2020) underscore the influence of Instagram on shifting tourism behaviour, but again, without contextualising these shifts in terms of language or cultural frameworks. According to the Cervantes Institute (2021), Spanish-speaking populations constitute a significant share of global internet users, 7.9%, and are active participants in the tourism market. Despite this, few studies have interrogated how these users engage with sustainable tourism content, either as content creators or as consumers. This study addresses this overlooked intersection by focusing specifically on Spanish-language Instagram content related to sustainable tourism, thus offering novel insights into the representations, reactions, and communicative dynamics within this underexplored linguistic and cultural segment.

The study offers a two-fold benefit: first, it provides an up-to-date view of how sustainable tourism is represented and perceived on social media; and second, it provides valuable information for designing marketing and promotional strategies for sustainable practices tailored to this audience. By focusing on Instagram posts made in 2023, the analysis captures the most recent trends, reflecting behaviours and preferences in a constantly evolving digital landscape.

Furthermore, this work aims to contribute to the development of effective strategies for the promotion of sustainable tourism, offering recommendations based on empirical evidence. The results may be useful for tourism policy makers, marketers and sustainable tourism advocates, who will be able to leverage Instagram as a key tool to promote responsible practices among Spanish-speaking travellers. In this context, the question guiding this study is: How do Spanish-speaking citizens interact with sustainable tourism content on Instagram? Through a rigorous analysis, we seek to identify the predominant themes and messages in the posts, examine the visual and textual elements characteristic of such content, and evaluate the levels of interaction and reactions of Spanish-speaking users to these posts. In this way, the research aims to fill a gap in the field of study of sustainable tourism and social media, providing unique insights into the role of Instagram as a medium for promoting responsible tourism practices.

2 LITERATURE REVIEW

The conceptualisation of sustainable tourism represents a significant evolution in the understanding of the global tourism phenomenon. Since its inception in the 1980s, the concept has moved from a primarily environmental concern to a holistic approach that integrates social, cultural and economic dimensions. The Manila Declaration on World Tourism laid the foundation for this transformation. Still, it was the Rio Earth Summit in 1992 that consolidated the notion of sustainability in the tourism context, establishing fundamental principles that remain valid today (Roblek *et al.*, 2021).

The World Tourism Organisation (UNWTO, 2019) has had a key influence on the development of this concept, describing it as an activity that considers holistically the economic, social and environmental implications, both present and future, to meet the demands of tourists, the industry, the natural environment and local communities. This definition has subsequently been enriched by academic and practical contributions that have broadened its scope and depth.

Environmental sustainability in tourism goes beyond the mere conservation of natural resources. It involves a thorough understanding of ecosystems and their regenerative capacity, the implementation of adaptive management practices, and the consideration of long-term cumulative impacts (Paiano *et al.*, 2020). Sustainable tourism destinations have developed sophisticated systems to monitor and manage their ecological footprint, including energy consumption, water management, and preservation of local biodiversity.

At the socio-cultural level, sustainable tourism is based on the respect and preservation of local traditions, cultural heritage and existing social structures. This aspect has become particularly relevant in the era of globalisation, where cultural authenticity has become a differential value. Academic literature highlights the relevance of local community involvement in tourism management and planning, and the need for equitable sharing of the profits generated by tourism activity (Moric *et al.*, 2021; Zhang *et al.*, 2020).

The economic dimension of tourism sustainability encompasses aspects such as long-term financial viability, the creation of quality employment, and the development of local value chains. Novacka *et al.* (2019) emphasise the importance of diversifying local economies while maintaining competitiveness in the global market. Economic resilience has become a crucial factor, especially after recent global crises.

On the other hand, digitalisation has fundamentally revolutionised the tourism industry, altering traditional patterns of communication, promotion and consumption. Social media, in particular, has emerged as a catalyst for this transformation, creating new paradigms in the way tourism destinations are discovered, evaluated and experienced (Lojo *et al.*, 2020). It is also noted that this digitisation has democratized tourism information, allowing greater transparency and accessibility to content related to sustainable destinations (Ji *et al.*, 2023).

Instagram has established itself as a fundamental platform in tourism communication due to its inherently visual nature and its ability to generate immersive narratives. The platform has evolved from its beginnings as a simple photo-sharing application to become a complex ecosystem that significantly influences travel decisions and the perception of tourism destinations (Nukulkam; Theppituck, 2023). Visual communication theory in the context of Instagram suggests that images and videos shared on the platform not only document tourism experiences but also construct meanings and expectations about destinations (Kaiser & Kuhn, 2020). Also, visual content related to sustainable tourism on Instagram tends to focus on three main elements: the natural beauty of destinations, authentic cultural interactions, and sustainable practices applied (Trišić *et al.*, 2023).

Specific search, evaluation and decision-making patterns characterise consumer behaviour in the digital tourism environment. Afsahhosseini and Al-Mulla (2023) suggest that digital users go through multiple stages in their tourism planning process, from initial inspiration to final decision making, with social networks being influential in each of these stages. Furthermore, digital social influence theory postulates that tourism decisions are increasingly determined by user-generated content on platforms such as Instagram (Ibrahim, 2023).

Panzer (2022) suggests that specific cultural values significantly influence the perception of sustainable tourism among the Spanish-speaking community. The concept of ‘sustainability’ in the Hispanic context is often intertwined with notions of community responsibility and cultural preservation, beyond purely environmental considerations (Domínguez-Quintero *et al.*, 2019). Furthermore, these users tend to respond more positively to content that reflects a deep understanding of their cultural values and that presents sustainability as a natural extension of these values (Salazar-Chapa *et al.*, 2024). This connection between sustainability and cultural values manifests itself in specific engagement patterns and in the way content related to sustainable tourism is shared and discussed on social networks.

Semiotic theory (Ting *et al.*, 2020) applied to visual content in social networks provides a fundamental framework for understanding how meanings are constructed and conveyed through images related to sustainable tourism. Lojo *et al.* (2020) have identified recurring patterns in the visual representation of sustainability, including the use of certain colours, compositions, and symbolic elements that resonate especially with Spanish-speaking audiences. Social media engagement is based on theories of digital engagement that explain how and why users interact with particular types of content (Rubáček *et al.*, 2020).

In the context of sustainable tourism, these theories suggest that engagement is influenced by factors such as the perceived authenticity of the content, cultural relevance, and the ability to generate emotional connections with the audience. Digital storytelling theories provide a framework for understanding how sustainable tourism stories are constructed and conveyed on platforms such as Instagram. These narratives not only communicate information but also construct shared meanings and shape perceptions about sustainability in this context (Alieva; Usmonova, 2021). Recent studies further highlight how digital narratives—particularly those structured through story formats, carousels, and influencer commentary—serve as affective vessels for conveying sustainability practices. These narratives often combine local voices, ethical consumption, and immersive imagery to promote sustainable behaviours in emotionally resonant ways (Breiby *et al.*, 2023). Particularly in the Hispanic digital context, storytelling around sustainability tends to emphasise collective memory, land-rooted values, and the tension between modernity and conservation. This highlights not only what is communicated but how: the narrative form itself becomes a means of engaging users in sustainability discourses.

The intersection among sustainable tourism, digital communication and Hispanic culture has significant implications for the future development of the tourism sector. Domínguez-Quintero *et al.* (2019) suggest that the effectiveness of sustainable tourism initiatives will increasingly depend on their ability to integrate specific cultural considerations into their digital communication strategies. Durán-Muñoz and Jiménez-Navarro (2024) indicate that success in promoting sustainable tourism among the Spanish-speaking community requires an approach that combines cultural authenticity with sustainability principles, communicated through culturally relevant and meaningful visual narratives.

3 METHODOLOGICAL PROCEDURES

A content analysis was conducted focusing on the sustainability approach in tourism within the Instagram social network, specifically in Spanish-language posts. The study included a targeted search using the hashtags: #turismosostenible and #turismosustentable. The research period considered was the year 2023, as this marked the complete relaxation of Covid-19 biosecurity measures. Moreover, being the year closest to 2024, it provides a solid perspective for understanding the interaction dynamics.

Notably, since this study utilised public data, ethical approvals were not required; however, it strictly adhered to the best-practice recommendations established by Camprubí and Coromina (2016), which advocate for the transparent disclosure of sampling methods, the use of systematic coding procedures with explicit rules, the involvement of multiple coders to ensure reliability in content analysis. These procedures were complemented by the principles for disseminating qualitative research outlined by O'Brien *et al.* (2014), ensuring maximum transparency.

In the initial search conducted on July 26, 2024, it was identified that there were 386,613 and 91,178 information units for #turismosostenible and #turismosustentable, respectively. Following this recognition, a mechanised download was performed using Python. For the 2023 year, 40,886 and 22,832 information units were observed for #turismosostenible and #turismosustentable, respectively. Given the nature of the social network, it was deemed prudent to divide the content into visual and audiovisual categories, resulting in 39,005 and 1,881 for #turismosostenible and 21,532 and 1,300 for #turismosustentable, respectively. Considering the volume of information units, a sample was calculated with a 5% margin of error and a 95% confidence level, yielding 381, 320, 378, and 298 units. These were then randomly selected.

A coding framework was built through an iterative process and a project-specific ontology, as suggested by researchers such as Camprubi and Coromina (2016). This framework includes a set of well-defined categories to classify and analyse content related to sustainable tourism on Instagram. These categories encompass various dimensions, such as content themes, visual and textual elements, user-generated content, travel motivations, destination types, seasonality, sustainability certifications, and content sources.

The development process for the coding framework involved several stages. First, a comprehensive literature review identified common themes and elements in social media content analyses, particularly those related to tourism and sustainability. This review formed the basis for the initial set of categories. Subsequently, an iterative process refined the framework through multiple rounds of testing and feedback. Sample data from Instagram posts were coded and analysed to ensure the categories' comprehensiveness and applicability (Fileri *et al.*, 2021). Adjustments addressed any gaps or ambiguities, resulting in a robust ontology tailored to sustainable tourism content analysis.

The coding process involved three trained male researchers. Visual and audiovisual content that could fit into multiple categories was considered accordingly. However, descriptions, comments, or reactions were excluded from the coding. Only the first image was analysed in carousel posts, following the approach of Hoare *et al.* (2022) and Jebeile *et al.* (2021). To ensure coding reliability,

inter-coder agreement percentages and Cohen’s Kappa were calculated. Each researcher coded every unit of measurement. Regarding duplicate content, it was marked as such but was not excluded from the analysis, as it represents what is displayed under the hashtags. Finally, descriptive statistics were employed to synthesise the information using Numbers software.

4 RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This section presents the findings from the content analysis conducted on Instagram posts related to sustainable tourism, published in 2023 and tagged with #turismosostenible and #turismosustentable. The results are organised into three tables.

Table 1 – Summary of Content Theme, Visual and Textual Elements of #turismosostenible and #turismosustentable

Content Theme	#turismosostenible				#turismosustentable			
	Post		Reel		Post		Reel	
	n = 381	n (%)	n = 320	n (%)	n = 378	n (%)	n = 298	n (%)
Environmental Conservation (ENV)	245	64.30%	227	70.94%	253	66.93%	134	44.97%
Cultural Heritage (CUL)	31	8.14%	34	10.63%	4	1.06%	18	6.04%
Sustainable Practices (SUS)	92	24.15%	63	19.69%	78	20.63%	95	31.88%
Adventure and Nature Tourism (ANT)	96	25.20%	87	27.19%	62	16.40%	98	32.89%
Community Engagement (COM)	14	3.67%	29	9.06%	12	3.17%	37	12.42%
Educational Content (EDU)	14	3.67%	37	11.56%	4	1.06%	25	8.39%
Total	492	129.13%	477	149.06%	413	109.26%	407	136.58%

Visual Elements	#turismosostenible				#turismosustentable			
	Post		Reel		Post		Reel	
	n = 381	n (%)	n = 320	n (%)	n = 378	n (%)	n = 298	n (%)
Natural Landscapes (NAT)	213	55.91%	193	60.31%	285	75.40%	154	51.68%
Wildlife (WLD)	12	3.15%	34	10.63%	30	7.94%	24	8.05%
Cultural Icons (CIC)	4	1.05%	19	5.94%	2	0.53%	4	1.34%
Local Communities (LOC)	11	2.89%	29	9.06%	0	0.00%	16	5.37%
Eco-friendly Practices (EFP)	214	56.17%	126	39.38%	109	28.84%	136	45.64%
Adventure Activities (ADV)	0	0.00%	19	5.94%	0	0.00%	21	7.05%
Total	454	119.16%	420	131.25%	426	112.70%	355	119.13%

Textual Elements	#turismosostenible				#turismosustentable			
	Post		Reel		Post		Reel	
	n = 381	n (%)	n = 320	n (%)	n = 378	n (%)	n = 298	n (%)
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Total	454	119.16%	420	131.25%	426	112.70%	355	119.13%

Source: Prepared by the authors, 2025

The findings from Table 1 reveal that Spanish-speaking Instagram users predominantly associate sustainable tourism with environmental conservation, natural landscapes, and eco-friendly practices. These themes significantly outpace cultural heritage or community engagement, suggesting a strong environmental bias in digital sustainability narratives. Notably, audiovisual formats such as reels demonstrate a greater tendency to highlight adventure tourism and educational content, which may reflect the platform's affordances for dynamic storytelling. The underrepresentation of cultural icons and local communities within both visual and textual content points to a critical gap in holistic sustainability communication. This imbalance underlines the necessity of integrating more culturally grounded and socially inclusive content to achieve a more comprehensive portrayal of sustainable tourism within digital ecosystems.

4.1 CONTENT THEME

As set out in Table 1, ENV emerges as the dominant theme in posts and reels tagged with #turismosostenible and #turismosustentable, representing 64.30% of posts and 70.94% of reels for the former hashtag and 66.93% of posts and 44.97% of reels for the latter. This substantial focus reflects the alignment of Instagram content with global priorities for ecological preservation and pro-environmental behaviours. Zhang *et al.* (2020) identified community participation as a key driver for conservation efforts in protected areas, a sentiment echoed by the content's emphasis on environmental themes. Furthermore, Rosenberg *et al.* (2021) highlighted the appeal of nature-based tourism that integrates sustainability, resonating with the high prevalence of conservation-focused narratives. These findings underscore the strategic use of digital platforms to engage diverse audiences with ecological concerns, leveraging visual and textual content to amplify sustainability goals.

In contrast, CUL is significantly underrepresented, comprising only 8.14% of #turismosostenible posts and 10.63% of reels, and dropping to 1.06% of #turismosustentable posts and 6.04% of reels. This lack of emphasis highlights a potential gap in digital tourism campaigns, particularly given Domínguez-Quintero *et al.*'s (2019) findings on the pivotal role of authenticity and cultural experiences in enhancing tourist satisfaction. The limited focus on cultural heritage suggests an untapped opportunity to enrich sustainable tourism narratives by celebrating the uniqueness of local traditions and historical landmarks. Such integration could enhance audience engagement and foster a deeper appreciation for cultural sustainability, complementing the environmental focus prevalent in the analysed content.

SUS, representing 24.15% of #turismosostenible posts and 19.69% of reels, and ANT, featured in 25.20% of posts and 27.19% of reels under the same hashtag, further illustrate the dual focus on actionable sustainability and experiential engagement. These themes align with findings by Paiano *et al.* (2019), who highlighted the role of sustainable practices in fostering long-term tourism viability. Adventure tourism, particularly, is emphasised in reels tagged with #turismosustentable (32.89%), reflecting the appeal of dynamic, visually engaging content to convey immersive and adventurous experiences. Taken together, as detailed in Table 1, this data highlights the importance of integrating diverse themes, such as cultural heritage and community engagement, to create a comprehensive and impactful narrative for the promotion of sustainable tourism.

4.2 VISUAL ELEMENTS

The discussion of visual elements in sustainable tourism posts and reels can be significantly enriched by engaging with recent academic perspectives. NAT emerge as the most dominant visual feature, evident in 55.91% of #turismosostenible posts and 75.40% of #turismosustentable posts (Table 1). This prominence aligns with findings in Trišić *et al.*'s (2023) study on sustainable tourism in protected areas, where the visual appeal of landscapes was pivotal in enhancing visitor satisfaction and ecological awareness. The heavy emphasis on NAT in sustainable tourism content underscores its role as a tool for promoting environmental conservation and sustainability goals.

Additionally, EFP, featured in 56.17% of #turismosostenible posts and 45.64% of #turismosustentable reels, reflect a growing trend toward showcasing actionable sustainability measures. Meyer *et al.* (2019) observed that visual content emphasising sustainability practices, such as reduced ecological footprints, resonates well with audiences seeking environmentally responsible travel options. The preference for reels in this category may suggest that dynamic video content is better suited for demonstrating sustainable practices compared to static images.

Interestingly, as detailed in Table 1, although CIC and LOC are less represented (1.05% and 2.89% respectively for #turismosostenible posts), their potential cannot be overlooked. As Mansilla and Milano (2019) note, integrating cultural and community-focused visuals into tourism narratives can enrich the symbolic value of tourism destinations, fostering a deeper connection between tourists and local identities. This gap in representation points to an opportunity for future campaigns to balance ecological and cultural dimensions, thereby creating more holistic and inclusive visual storytelling in sustainable tourism content.

4.3 TEXTUAL ELEMENTS

The dominance of INF in posts and reels tagged with #turismosostenible and #turismosustentable underscores the critical role of knowledge dissemination. With 32.28% and 28.86% of posts and reels, respectively, emphasising INF, this finding aligns with Lojo *et al.* (2020), who argue that cognitive components, including factual and descriptive knowledge, significantly influence destination image and tourists' perceptions. These results highlight that clear, educational content plays a pivotal role in shaping public understanding of sustainability practices and their benefits in tourism.

Furthermore, the minimal representation of PER elements, with a maximum presence of 0.34% in reels, illustrates a gap in user-generated narrative storytelling. This observation echoes with Ting *et al.* (2020), who emphasise integrating personalised and emotional narratives to foster responsible tourism practices. The low engagement with PER suggests a missed opportunity to humanise sustainable tourism efforts, potentially enhancing audience connection and empathy through real-life experiences.

Finally, the modest presence of CTA and AWA elements, particularly notable in reels (1.88% and 3.02%, respectively), underscores the limited direct mobilisation of audiences toward proactive sustainable tourism behaviours. This aligns with findings by Lojo *et al.* (2020), who recommend that a blend of appraisive and prescriptive image components can inspire stronger emotional and behavioural responses in tourism audiences. The data detailed in Table 1 highlights that integrating these elements more prominently could amplify promotional efforts and encourage active participation in sustainability initiatives within the tourism sector.

Table 2 – Summary of User-Generated Content, Travel Motivations and Destination Type of #turismosostenible and #turismosustentable

User-Generated Content	#turismosostenible				#turismosustentable			
	Post		Reel		Post		Reel	
	n = 381	n (%)	n = 320	n (%)	n = 378	n (%)	n = 298	n (%)
Personal Photos (PHP)	344	90.29%	289	90.31%	351	92.86%	221	74.16%
User Reviews (URV)	0	0.00%	13	4.06%	0	0.00%	22	7.38%
Eco-Challenges (ECH)	0	0.00%	3	0.94%	1	0.26%	7	2.35%
Collaborative Projects (COL)	37	9.71%	21	6.56%	26	6.88%	53	17.79%
Total	381	100.00%	326	101.88%	378	100.00%	303	101.68%

Travel Motivations	#turismosostenible				#turismosustentable			
	Post		Reel		Post		Reel	
	n = 381	n (%)	n = 320	n (%)	n = 378	n (%)	n = 298	n (%)
Relaxation and Wellness (REL)	159	41.73%	135	42.19%	150	39.68%	110	36.91%
Adventure and Exploration (ADV)	139	36.48%	99	30.94%	197	52.12%	136	45.64%
Cultural Exploration (CUL)	100	26.25%	119	37.19%	21	5.56%	44	14.77%
Volunteer Tourism (VOT)	8	2.10%	2	0.63%	16	4.23%	10	3.36%
Total	406	106.56%	355	110.94%	384	101.59%	300	100.67%

Destination Type	#turismosostenible				#turismosustentable			
	Post		Reel		Post		Reel	
	n = 381	n (%)	n = 320	n (%)	n = 378	n (%)	n = 298	n (%)
Urban Destinations (URB)	130	34.12%	90	28.13%	70	18.52%	94	31.54%
Rural Destinations (RUR)	181	47.51%	174	54.38%	239	63.23%	163	54.70%
Coastal Destinations (COA)	41	10.76%	49	15.31%	37	9.79%	12	4.03%
Protected Areas (PRO)	1	0.26%	1	0.31%	3	0.79%	2	0.67%
Urban Green Spaces (UGS)	28	7.35%	10	3.13%	19	5.03%	27	9.06%
Total	381	100.00%	324	101.25%	368	97.35%	298	100.00%

Source: Prepared by the authors, 2025

Table 2 provides further evidence of the dominance of individual expression in sustainable tourism discourse, with personal photographs being the principal form of user-generated content. This emphasis reinforces the notion of Instagram as a platform for identity construction and experiential sharing. The minimal presence of collaborative or review-based content suggests limited interaction with participatory tourism models. In terms of motivations, the data demonstrate that while relaxation and adventure remain core drivers, cultural exploration is largely neglected, particularly under #turismosustentable. Destination-wise, rural areas emerge as the preferred setting, followed by urban locations, whereas protected areas and urban green spaces receive less attention. These patterns indicate a need for strategic redirection towards more diverse motivations and destination types in order to align digital representations with the multidimensional ethos of sustainable tourism.

4.4 USER-GENERATED CONTENT

The predominance of PHP, representing over 90% of posts and reels, aligns with Nukulkam and Theppituck's (2023) observations that personal representation in travel photography satisfies intrapersonal needs, including self-expression and social validation. This highlights a shared motivation for tourists and content creators to document and showcase their individual travel experiences. Furthermore, the significant presence of PHP resonates with the natural aspects and relaxation dimension exposed by Nukulkam and Theppituck's research, which is foundational in influencing travel decisions and tourism marketing. The minimal representation of URV and ECH suggests a gap in promoting collaborative or participatory tourism experiences, which the CAR-Tourist framework attempts to bridge by facilitating real-time, collaborative engagement between tourists and guides through augmented reality.

COL, though lesser in volume (6.56%-17.79%), reflects the emerging importance of community-driven initiatives in sustainable tourism. The CAR-Tourist framework demonstrates potential in amplifying such content by fostering collaborative interactions in real time, thereby enabling tourists to contribute actively to local initiatives or cultural preservation efforts. This integration of augmented reality with blockchain, based on the information in Table 2, not only ensures secure interactions but also allows tourists to engage deeply with destinations, transforming passive photo sharing into active participation.

4.5 TRAVEL MOTIVATIONS

REL and ADV motivations dominate posts and reels tagged with #turismosostenible and #turismosustentable. REL appears in 41.73% of #turismosostenible posts and 39.68% of #turismosustentable posts, while ADV is notably prevalent in 52.12% of #turismosustentable posts. The emphasis on relaxation aligns with findings by Hu and Chen (2023), who highlighted a growing interest in leisure and niche destinations offering serene environments post-pandemic. Such destinations, chosen for their natural and cultural attributes, cater to tourists seeking physical and mental rejuvenation while maintaining safe social distances. This parallels the preference for destinations that offer relaxation and adventure without overcrowding.

VOT, while less frequently represented, highlights a niche interest in altruistic travel. According to Han *et al.* (2019), volunteer tourism significantly appeals to younger travellers, as it combines personal development with community engagement, fostering a sense of responsibility and connection. The relatively low representation of VOT in this dataset may indicate a need for greater advocacy and visibility for such programs within the broader discourse of sustainable tourism. Furthermore, as provided in Table 2, the aspect of cultural exploration (26.25% in #turismosostenible posts) resonates with the intrinsic motivations of niche tourists who value deep cultural engagements as emphasised by Hu and Chen (2023). Together, these insights suggest that promoting a diverse range of sustainable travel experiences can better address various tourist motivations and broaden the appeal of sustainable tourism narratives.

4.6 DESTINATION TYPE

The findings, as detailed in Table 2, underline the predominance of RUR in both hashtags. These destinations account for 47.51% and 54.38% of posts and reels under #turismosostenible and 63.23% and 54.70% for #turismosustentable. This aligns with the increasing focus on rural tourism as a sustainable alternative, as highlighted by Daskin *et al.* (2020), who found that rural areas offer sociocultural and economic benefits while minimising environmental degradation.

URB also play a significant role, especially under #turismosostenible, where posts constitute 34.12%. UGS, however, remain less prominent, yet their inclusion in reels for #turismosustentable (9.06%) reflects a growing recognition of their importance in promoting sustainable urban tourism. This trend corresponds to findings by Ley Bosch *et al.* (2024), who emphasised the need for integrating green infrastructure into urban tourism to enhance resilience against climate change.

COA are underrepresented compared to its rural and urban counterparts. This could reflect concerns about the environmental risks associated with coastal tourism, such as pollution and habitat loss, as noted in studies on coastal tourism development (Daskin *et al.*, 2020). Additionally, the minimal representation of protected areas PRO in both hashtags suggests a potential gap in promoting these critical conservation zones, calling for strategic communication efforts to boost their visibility.

Table 3 – Summary of Seasonality, Sustainability Certifications and Content Source of #turismosostenible and #turismosustentable

Seasonality	#turismosostenible				#turismosustentable			
	Post		Reel		Post		Reel	
	n = 381	n (%)	n = 320	n (%)	n = 378	n (%)	n = 298	n (%)
Peak Season (PEAK)	269	70.60%	263	82.19%	329	87.04%	210	70.47%
Off-Peak Season (OFFP)	112	29.40%	57	17.81%	50	13.23%	87	29.19%
Total	381	100.00%	320	100.00%	379	100.26%	297	99.66%

Sustainability Certifications	#turismosostenible				#turismosustentable			
	Post		Reel		Post		Reel	
	n = 381	n (%)	n = 320	n (%)	n = 378	n (%)	n = 298	n (%)
Certified Locations (CERT)	1	0.26%	2	0.63%	2	0.53%	1	0.34%
Non-Certified Locations (NCERT)	380	99.74%	318	99.38%	376	99.47%	297	99.66%
Total	381	100.00%	320	100.00%	378	100.00%	298	100.00%

Content Source	#turismosostenible				#turismosustentable			
	Post		Reel		Post		Reel	
	n = 381	n (%)	n = 320	n (%)	n = 378	n (%)	n = 298	n (%)
Official Tourism Boards (OTB)	15	3.94%	10	3.13%	18	4.76%	18	6.04%
Non-Governmental Organisations (NGO)	2	0.52%	0	0.00%	0	0.00%	0	0.00%
Individual Travellers (IT)	322	84.51%	273	85.31%	328	86.77%	249	83.56%
Tourism and Travel Agencies (TTA)	42	11.02%	37	11.56%	32	8.47%	31	10.40%
Total	381	100.00%	320	100.00%	378	100.00%	298	100.00%

Source: Prepared by the authors, 2025

The data in Table 3 underscore a reliance on peak-season content and a concerning absence of references to sustainability certifications. This skew not only limits the visibility of certified practices but also risks reinforcing unsustainable patterns of tourist behaviour. Moreover, while the dominance of individual travellers as content sources promotes authenticity and relatability, the almost negligible contribution from NGOs and modest representation of tourism boards suggest a significant institutional disengagement. This disparity highlights an untapped opportunity for official entities to enhance their digital communication strategies. Overall, these trends signal a pressing need to diversify seasonal representations, elevate the visibility of certified destinations, and amplify institutional voices to foster a more balanced and credible digital discourse on sustainable tourism.

4.7 SEASONALITY

The analysis of Table 3 highlights the dominance of PEAK content, with 70.60% of #turismosostenible posts and 87.04% of #turismosustentable posts focusing on this period, aligning with the findings of Rodas *et al.* (2024), who emphasize the economic and cultural significance of peak seasons, particularly for gastronomic and cultural tourism in Latacunga, Ecuador. These periods represent opportunities for destinations to engage tourists in sustainable practices through local festivals and community-led initiatives, as mentioned by Rodas *et al.* (2024). However, the limited representation of OFFP content, such as 29.19% in #turismosustentable reels, underscores an underutilised avenue for promoting sustainable tourism during less busy periods. This resonates with Lukoseviciute and Pereira (2021), who identify the need to balance tourism management strategies across seasons to mitigate environmental and social pressures experienced during peak times while sustaining economic benefits year-round. These findings suggest that leveraging off-peak seasons through targeted campaigns could diversify tourist flows and enhance the overall sustainability of destinations.

4.8 SUSTAINABILITY CERTIFICATIONS

The overwhelming dominance of NCERT in the content tagged with #turismosostenible and #turismosustentable raises important questions about the promotion and perception of sustainability certifications. As evidenced by Table 3, less than 1% of posts and reels highlight certified sustainable destinations. This aligns with findings in Novacka *et al.* (2019) that highlight barriers such as a lack of knowledge, high costs, and limited government support in implementing certification systems in Central and Eastern Europe. Similarly, Rajić *et al.* (2023) emphasise the role of systemic planning and integration in enhancing sustainability practices in the hospitality sector. The lack of representation

of certified destinations on social media may reflect broader challenges, including limited consumer awareness or insufficient incentives for destinations to pursue certifications. To address this gap, strategies to integrate certifications into promotional content and increase awareness of their importance could bridge the disparity, ultimately fostering a stronger alignment between sustainable practices and market visibility.

4.9 CONTENT SOURCE

It is highlighted that IT dominates the source of content, representing 84.51% of posts and 85.31% of reels for #turismosostenible and 86.77% of posts and 83.56% of reels for #turismosustentable. This prevalence underscores the authenticity and relatability of user-generated content providers in promoting sustainable tourism. Rubáček *et al.* (2020) emphasise the importance of accessible and user-centric platforms for disseminating tourism-related information, and mention that while the study on European national tourism boards demonstrates high accessibility of official platforms, it also highlights gaps in inclusivity, which could explain why individual travellers' content prevails over institutional sources. Furthermore, the near absence of NGOs, with less than 1% contribution, aligns with Ivanova and Khalifa's (2019) findings on the limited operational scope of NGOs in tourism promotion due to structural and regulatory challenges.

TTA contribute moderately to the content (11.02% in #turismosostenible posts and 10.40% in #turismosustentable reels), reflecting their efforts to engage audiences through dynamic and visually appealing campaigns (Table 3). This role aligns with studies emphasising the need for professional tourism bodies to harness digital platforms effectively for destination promotion. However, the low representation of OTB, contributing under 6.04% in all categories, suggests an opportunity for these entities to enhance their digital presence. Improved web accessibility and targeted content creation, as suggested by Rubáček *et al.* (2020), could enable OTBs to reclaim influence in shaping sustainable tourism narratives, ensuring more diverse and equitable promotional strategies.

5 FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

This research highlights the multifaceted relationship between sustainable tourism and digital engagement on Instagram, with a focus on Spanish-speaking users and content published in 2023 under the hashtags #turismosostenible and #turismosustentable. The findings demonstrate that environmental conservation themes, visual representations of natural landscapes, and informational content dominate the narrative, underscoring a strong alignment with global sustainability priorities. However, the underrepresentation of cultural heritage, local communities, and certified sustainable destinations reveals gaps in content diversity and emphasis, indicating opportunities to enrich the digital discourse on sustainability.

The analysis underscores the significant role of individual travellers as primary content creators, reflecting the democratisation of tourism narratives through user-generated content. This trend resonates with the growing influence of personal experiences and grassroots storytelling in shaping perceptions and behaviours related to sustainable tourism. Conversely, the limited presence of non-governmental organisations and official tourism boards highlights a need for institutional actors to strengthen their digital strategies, ensuring a balanced representation of professional and community-driven perspectives.

This research provides insights into how sustainable tourism is communicated in digital spaces. Some limitations should be acknowledged. First, the sample was limited to Instagram posts in Spanish, which, while thematically appropriate, may not fully capture the broader discourse of sustainable tourism among Spanish-speaking users on Instagram. Second, while a rigorous content analysis was applied, the

interpretive nature of visual semiotics means that subjectivity cannot be entirely eliminated, even with inter-coder checks. Third, the dynamic nature of Instagram content implies that temporal variations may have influenced the dataset, and future studies may benefit from longitudinal approaches.

Theoretically, this study contributes to the intersection of sustainability communication and digital media within the tourism field, especially by highlighting narrative patterns among Hispanic centennials. Practically, the findings can support tourism marketers and policymakers in designing culturally resonant and visually effective sustainable tourism campaigns targeting younger audiences.

Future research should aim to incorporate multimodal data, including user comments and story-based formats, to capture audience engagement better. Additionally, comparative cross-cultural studies involving other linguistic groups (e.g., Portuguese, English, or Indigenous languages) could illuminate broader narrative divergences and convergences. Finally, future work might adopt mixed-method approaches, integrating content analysis with in-depth interviews or ethnographic methods to further uncover the intentions and interpretations of both content producers and consumers.

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