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Instagram as a Co-Creation Space for Tourist Destination Image-Building: Algarve and Costa del Sol Case Studies

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Abstract: Instagram is a popular social media platform. Its ability to convey feelings through photographs has become a valuable communication tool for tourism destination branding. The cases of two destinations in Southern Europe provide an understanding of how Instagram can be used to promote a destination's image by Destination Management Organizations (DMOs). For this purpose, a content analysis is carried out, first of the official Instagram accounts of Algarve (Portugal) and Costa del Sol (Spain), and then of the most popular hashtags related to them, showing User-Generated Content (UGC) from the points of view of both destination managers and tourists. The results show that Instagram is a strategic social media platform for enhancing the brand image by engaging customers. Destinations seize content generated by tourists; therefore, the hermeneutic circle of representation is inverted, as photos taken by tourists aim to reproduce the perceived image of a destination and motivate tourists to capture their experiences with the best picture. Additionally, it is worth highlighting, as a main finding, the role of sustainability as a key factor in UGC for DMOs and for Instagram users. This research provides valuable information about designing promotion strategies for DMOs, in order to understand the potential of Instagram in building a destination's image and inspiring tourism through images.

Keywords: destination image; social media; User-Generated Content (UGC); Instagram; Destination Management Organisations (DMOs); tourism experience; co-creation

1. Introduction

Social media has radically changed the way that people travel [1]. Tourists are connected, informed, and interact with tourism companies, becoming potentially interested in destinations at a worldwide level. Therefore, User-Generated Content (UGC) has become a research focus in recent years [2,3]; however, knowledge of the impact of UGC on a destination's image is still limited and further exploration is needed [4]. Sharing experiences through photos on Instagram is now a usual practice; indeed, Instagram is the most popular type of social media used in tourism [5]. More than 500 million photographs are uploaded to social media daily [6]; in particular, 95 million photos are uploaded on Instagram daily, with a total of more than 40 billion photos shared since its launch [7]. Posting a photo, sharing an experience, and getting feedback via comments and discussion impact the creation of a destination's image. The pictures published on the Internet can influence how

destinations are seen, experienced, and remembered [8]. Thus, web 2.0 tools empower tourists, who play a leading role in image generation [9,10]. Destination manager organisations are aware when, in this new framework, their image has occurred. As a result of this, companies and destinations are facing new challenges [11,12]. Adapting their strategies and implementing new tools and techniques to engage with the current demanding tourism market is compulsory [1,13]. However, how and to what extent social media is used by destinations has not yet been thoroughly discussed [14,15]; even fewer studies have focused on the way in which DMOs use social media [11,14,16]. In general, studies on media in tourism have focused on tourists [17] or have stressed the value of Instagram for a destination's image in terms of tour operators and travel agents [10,18,19].

For the above reasons, this paper aims to analyse the impact Instagram has on destination branding; to do this, we will look at the cases of Algarve (Portugal) and Costa del Sol (Spain), combining the vision of DMOs and Instagram users who post about both destinations.

This paper is divided into five sections. After this introduction, we focus on the literature that has inspired the proposal of the research questions. Next, we explain the chosen qualitative techniques: analysis content of the official destination accounts and of the most popular hashtags used by tourists. The fourth section deals with the empirical component and determines the potential of Instagram for creating and promoting a destination image's, exploring how engagement with tourists enhances positive feelings and the wish to visit, explore more, and go back to the destination. It should be pointed out that, as highlighted by finding the hermeneutic circle [20], we can understand, from a new perspective, that tourists' photographs are an increasingly important source of a destination's image. Finally, we suggest practical implications for promoting destinations and engaging tourists through the use of Instagram.

2. Literature review

2.1. Destination Image and Instagram

The Internet and social media have revolutionised all dimensions of social life: relationships, consumption, communications, and economies. Their use remains a challenge for everybody; in particular, for companies and—in the area of tourism—for destinations [21]. The speed of technological changes and participation in the global network oblige destination management organisations (DMOs) to adopt and implement tools and techniques to improve the effectiveness and efficiency of destination marketing and to satisfy the current demanding tourism market [13]. What remains unknown is the type and extent of social media use by destination marketing organisations (DMOs) in general [14,16,22], how DMOs use social media to market in particular [11,14,15,23], and, finally, whether DMOs are taking sufficient advantage of social media's potential to boost their promotion and branding interests.

Until now, analyses of the use of social media and its influence on tourist behaviour have been most common [17]. It has been widely shown that travel decision-making has completely changed due to the Internet. These interactive and global technological tools provide a new means of travel information, in terms of searching, sharing, and enjoying trips [1,21]. In Hanan and Putit [18], it has already been pointed out that social media is a push factor to promote destinations and, in recent studies [19,21,24], its impact on destination creation branding has been highlighted. In this framework, individuals can freely produce content information about travelling by themselves that is available to everybody. This collaborative phenomenon is called User-Generated Content (UGC), which has an increasing influence on all stages of travel; that is, pre-, during-, and post-trip [25].

There are a wide range of available social media platforms, but Instagram has been gaining in position due to its special photo features. The relative newness of this tool makes it necessary for researchers to examine its potential, and it is expected that the number of studies carried out on it will continue to expand [10,19]. To date, studies in this area have mainly drawn on TripAdvisor. The work by Fatanti et al. [1] contended that the process of promotion through Instagram is complex and different from that of other social media. Thus, a study focused on Instagram with an integrative vision of DMO efforts and UGC from tourists contributes to this field. Each social media platform

has different contexts, structures, goals, actions, and reactions; these characteristics should be understood in order to design a successful strategy [26].

Traditionally, DMOs put effort into building and promoting their brand's image, in order to influence tourists and create the idea that their destination is the most attractive choice for travelling [26,27]; however, the popularisation of social media means that ideas, experiences, and impressions of destinations are shared through posts, images, and videos that are globally consumed. Thus, destination image-building depends on both traditional and modern methods. As Munar [28] pointed out, the marketing messages generated by organisations and users and the related content have a major impact on the perception, attractiveness, and image of tourist regions.

It is worth drawing attention to how generated content can place stress on the aspects that destinations would want to emphasise to differentiate themselves as a sustainable destination. Sustainable destinations are a priority in European policies, but to attract the attention of tourists they require a holistic management perspective, a long-term process, and stakeholders' involvement—these aspects seem to be equally fundamental in the case of destination branding. Sustainable tourism may be thought of as “tourism in a form which can maintain its viability in an area for an indefinite period of time” [29] (p. 29). Accordingly, destination branding can only be sustainable when hosts, policy objectives, and tourists' demands are in harmony [30]. A destination's image is a factor that influences, in a positive way, the destinations that tourists visit, and it is a direct antecedent of satisfaction [31–34], and as Narangajavana et al. [35] pointed out, environmental sustainability and customer experience can be demonstrated. Furthermore, sustainability is nowadays considered to be one of the most strategic elements in the differentiation between destinations; consequently, it is necessary to take it into account in building and promoting a destination's image [36]. This task is not only assigned to DMOs; currently, tourists play a key role because their perceptions and experiences also influence the destination's image. This is the reason why UGC, from both perspectives, should be analysed, because sustainability has been transforming and redefining tourism in recent years. Co-creation, through social media, can contribute to reinforcing the links between tourist regions and their positioning as sustainable destinations [37]. Hence, sustainability deserves special consideration in the analysis and image management projected by destinations, as underlined in previous research work by Font [36]. This author states that economic, social, and environmental dimensions are key tools for positioning, differentiating, and promoting a tourist destination. This study adds the novel analysis of this issue through Instagram.

At this point, it should be pointed out that photographs play a major role in tourism; in particular, they have been considered as the materialisation of tourist image. This phenomenon was called the “hermeneutic circle of representation” [20]. This happens “where images are tracked down and recaptured, and the resulting photographs displayed at home to show ‘their version’ of the images that they had seen originally before setting off” [38] (p. 140). This means that a tourist has reproduced the iconic images of destinations in their personal photographs, which allows for the analysis of the hermeneutic circle of representation in a digital context. The increase in Instagram users and its popularisation as a social media source has attracted a great deal of attention in tourism, and this study provides a new approach to circles of representation. Recent research works [3,10,20,39] have demonstrated the relationship between the perceived tourist image of a destination (or tourism company) and the photos taken by travellers.

As a result, social media should be considered not only as a communication tool, but also as an active component in the destination's image [1,4,14]. As Hanan and Putit [18] expressed, “Snapping a picture can create the certain kind of emotion and feeling toward the destination. The environment and ambiance of the destination will make the destination more attractive in the picture” (p. 472). The issue of destination imagery has been widely considered in the existing literature, but there is still a lack of studies focused on the impact of UGC on building and enhancing a destination's image [4,19] and very few that have focused on Instagram in particular. Consequently, this study makes a further exploration in this line.

Thus, we seek to investigate whether and how DMOs face this challenge, through the following research question:

RQ1. How is a tourist destination's image projected by DMOs through Instagram? This involves content (quality and volume), tone, emotions, and so on.

2.2. Co-Creation of a Destination's Image Through Instagram

The volume of information produced every day on the Internet is high. Lo and McKercher [6] reported that more than 500 million photographs are posted on social media every day, and the rise of Instagram in the years after their article was published would suggest an increase in this figure. It has been estimated that, each day, 95 million photos and videos are shared on Instagram [40]. Thus, the generation of content has become part of the tourist experience. All posts develop a system of information, suggestions, and inspiration for travelling. Users search for experiences and reviews uploaded by others. Written, visual, audiovisual, or mixed posts are in constant demand and, consequently, that content promotes tourism to certain destinations; however, it also generates expectations and forms an image of the destination in tourists' minds [19,21,41,42]. In this context, prosumption is a term closely bound up with the previous point, despite not specifically being coined for the tourism field. It involves both production and consumption, rather than focusing on one or the other [43]. A series of recent social changes, especially those associated with the Internet and Web 2.0 (briefly, the user-generated web, e.g. Facebook, YouTube, Twitter), have given it even greater centrality, making it a trend that is also discussed under the label of "value co-creation" [44]. Currently, all these issues have become important topics for researchers and practitioners; consequently, they require attention to be paid to strategy and the management of different agents. At present, DMOs and tourist companies are aware of the role played by travellers on the Internet. Their involvement poses many challenges in enhancing the destination's image and marketing interest, however. An understanding of how and why users feel motivated to generate content and, consequently, promote the attractiveness of destinations requires further exploration. In Seraj [45], the components that trigger activity in social media have been analysed. We highlight three of these: (1) intellectual value stemming from co-creation; (2) social value from social ties established in communities; and (3) cultural value, which justifies the image sharing in the decision-making process. The participation of tourists in building and enhancing a destination's image has been stated by several authors [36,46,47], both in a classical way and with the support of photos through social media [1,19,21,35,37,48,49]. However, there is a significant gap regarding the mechanisms proposed by DMOs, in order for them to become creators of and participants in a destination's image. Therefore, we pose the following research question.

RQ2. How are tourists involved in destination brand creation on Instagram?

Theoretical frameworks allow us to accept that different users take part in the processes of building, enhancing, and promoting a destination's image [9,24,44,50,51]. Recent studies have highlighted that tourists have a significant effect on destination brand and their contribution is developed consciously and voluntarily [1,19,35,48,49]. Customer empowerment and intensive use of social media encourage this involvement in the co-creation of a destination's image [52]. Given that co-creation is the practice of collaborative product development by firms and consumers [37,53], co-creation is the contribution to a destination's image of experiences, feelings, contents, reviews, etc. by actors associated with the region: tourists, companies, the local community, and so on [50]. Thus, "the experience is the brand. The brand is co-created and evolves with experiences" [44] (p. 13). In any event, we ask whether DMO- and tourist-initiated content is in the same line and, furthermore, whether the destination's image agrees with two points of view within the same platform (Instagram): the point of view of the destination's official account and the point of view of external users. In the past year, the potential of Instagram for tourism has been quite well discussed. It is a social media platform that is 10 years old, but has grown steadily up to the present day. It is mainly used via smartphones, such as iPhone and Android. Hanan and Putit [18] described this as follows: "one of the top most used picture-based social media applications in the world, Instagram is seen as a trendy tool in digital tourism where snapshots and comments can be shared all across one's social media channels within seconds and anybody could be <the tourism expert> in expressing their likes or dislikes towards a place of interests" (p. 471). Thus, Instagram has become a strategic support for

advertising, promotion, marketing, distribution ideas/goods, and providing information [54] and, consequently, DMOs should not miss the chance of utilising it themselves and, moreover, taking advantage of UGC from users. It has been pointed out that tourism is the most popular sector on Instagram and the current Instagram growth figures are maintaining this trend [5,29]. Evidence that Instagram's users are shaping tourism destination brands has been provided [1,4]. A set of photographs can be considered as the materialisation of tourist image. Thus, the brand is the result of the pictures, comments, and videos posted on Instagram from their experiences throughout their journeys [55]. Thanks to Instagram users, a destination can gather not only emotional content, but also useful information, such as correct longitude and latitude, the location of places that are less well known, and so on.

Given the above, a comparison between the destination image built by Instagram users and DMOs is needed. Further research may determine whether there are overlaps between them. Consequently, we propose the third research question for this study.

RQ3. To what extent do the images projected by DMOs correspond to UGC by Instagram users?

3. Materials and Methods

3.1. Measures and Instrument

The research methods for this study are based on the observation on Instagram through content analysis and comparative metrics between the official accounts of two tourist destinations: Algarve (@algarvetourism) and Costa del Sol (@visitacostadelsol). Additionally, the most popular hashtags related to both destinations were analysed. This decision is supported by Park and Oh [56], who suggested it as being particularly suited to studying cases. Moreover, according to Weber [57], content analysis is especially useful for evaluating social media postings, as it allows researchers to draw inferences from text and/or visual information through a set of procedures. Content analysis is often used for photographs, as it makes it possible to simultaneously study manifest content through the observable features of the images and latent content, examining additional items embedded in the message [58]. Analysing content generation by Instagram users provides a better understanding of this research area. The combination of points of view of the DMO community managers and Instagram users in this qualitative method offers a global overview.

According to the proposed research questions, the destinations' images are analysed from two points of view: the DMO's generated content and UGC on Instagram. It should be emphasised that Instagram users have been classified into the following categories: tourist, tourism companies, local community, and other agents. The design of the evaluation sheet for content analysis was based on work by several authors [19,21,26]. Instagram analysis requires a distinct approach to measurement, analysis, and (subsequently) management, due to its interactivity and the experience of taking photos using a mobile phone. The proposal by Peters et al. [26] is the main basis for the evaluation sheet, due to its relevance. The studies based on its social media metrics are widely referenced in research and professional fields. This research work [26] proposed four blocks: content, motives, social roles and interactions, and network structure. However, it should be pointed out that a measurement of interactivity was made, adding the proposal of Hays et al. [11]. This means that an entry related to the photograph is only validated if it poses a question or some challenge to travellers and gets responses, or if the photograph elicits questions from Instagram users that generate interactions. This is a dichotomous variable—0 means noninteractivity and 1 means that interaction. In Table 1, the items that are linked to each evaluation category are shown. The classification of images was done following Ozdemir and Celebi [21] and, finally, categories of content were added based on Nixon et al. [19]. It is worth mentioning that this qualitative analysis uses variables and indicators that have been validated in previous studies, but the contribution is precisely their combination in the evaluation sheet, which provides a holistic vision of generated content from two main actors in tourism.

Table 1. Evaluation sheet based on validated previous research works.

Classification of images (Ozdemir and Celebi [21])	Landscape: Coast		
	Landscape: Countryside		
	Cities and Attractions		
	Culinary		
	Events		
	Videos		
Categories of content (Nixon et al. [19])	Nature		
	Culture		
	Food and Drink		
	Various		
Content (Peters et al. [26], Nixon et al. [19])	Content Quality	Characteristics	Vividness
		Domain	Interactivity (Hays et al. [11])
			Information
	Entertainment		
	Style	Education	
		Narrative	
		Descriptive	
	Content Value	Emotions	Persuasive
			Joy/Happiness
			Anger
		Tone	Sadness/Nostalgia
			Surprise
Calm/Serenity			
Volume	Likes		
	Comments		
Motives	Social		
	Cultural		
	Intellectual		
Social Roles and Interactions (Peters et al. [26])	Experiencing		
	Sharing		
	Networks		
	Showing		
	Gaming		
Network Structure (Peters et al. [26])	DMOs		
	Tourists		
	Tourism companies		
	Local community		
	Other		

After a detailed analysis of each post in @algarvetourism and @visitacostadelsol, general metrics were developed. Quantitative information was included to offer a holistic vision of content generation management for a destination's image by DMOs and by Instagram users. Official Instagram accounts were monitored by Socialbakers. In brief, we sought a particular management pattern on Instagram for both destinations. The user activity traffic in these accounts, such as posting

photos, likes, comments, and hashtags, was observed according to the classification and categories established in the previous literature. In this step, we recorded, observed, and sometimes discussed photos using the comment facility on Instagram.

Regarding Instagram users' photos, the most popular hashtag was used to identify them, due to the volume of entries. In Table 2, the monitored hashtags are shown. The chosen tags corresponded to the name of the destination's official account and hashtags that were composed of several words but included Algarve and Costa del Sol. The "hashttracking" tool was used to identify the most popular options.

Table 2. Hashtags monitored.

ALGARVE	Instances of Use	COSTA DEL SOL	Instances of Use
#algarvetourism	22,000	#visitacostadelsol	1,959,000
#algarve	3,000,000	#costadelsol	1,000,000
#algarveportugal	160,000	#costadelsol 	15,100
#featuremealgarve	27,200	#costadelsollife	12,600
#algarvelovers	65,100	#malagalabella	53,100
#visitalgarve	91,000	#malagaturismo	18,500

Following the same practice as for the official destination accounts, an IT tool (Tweebinder) was used to analyse the main metrics of each hashtag.

3.2. Data Collection

The analysis of Instagram in the tourism and hospitality industries has only just begun to proliferate, due to the youthfulness of the platform. Thus, this study is part of a novel field. The cases of Spain and Portugal are justified by the representativeness of this sector in terms of global economic activity. Both are among the European countries that are most dependent on tourism; in both cases, the contribution of tourist economic activity to their GDP exceeds 15% and represents 15.2% and 18.4% of national employment, respectively [59,60]. In a disaggregated way, Algarve in Portugal and Costa del Sol in Spain are areas of great affluence and tourism impact on the whole of their respective countries. Algarve is the second most popular destination by number of tourists and economic activity generated [61]. The southern part of Spain comes second in the ranking; specifically, the Costa del Sol is the region of the Andalusian autonomous community, which contributes the most to tourism, in terms of both number of travellers and turnover [62]. Consequently, it is worth mentioning the contribution of this study in relation to the multicountry approach. In Park and Oh [56], it was stated that the analysis of more than one case in the same study might yield more accurate results. Therefore, considering the same phenomenon in two different countries not only allows for a comparison that adds value to our research, but also tracks the practical implications for DMOs in the management of Instagram. To date, the percentage of multicountry investigations remains comparatively low.

In the case of @algarvetourism and @visitacostadelsol, all images posted with their written content and the linked comments were analysed. The total sample was 143 posts: 92 from Algarve and 51 from Costa del Sol. It should be emphasised that the photos in the official account belonging to users deserved special attention.

Regarding the content generated by users, a sample of photos published on Instagram proportional to the volume of entries in each hashtag was used, as well as a representative number of pictures (90% confidence and 10% error). One of each of the five latest entries with more than 10 comments was chosen. Finally, a sample of 232 photographs of each destination composed the random sample.

Both analyses were carried out from 15 June to 15 September 2019, coinciding in both destinations with the high season: summer. The main reason for the chosen period for monitoring Instagram is the increase in tourists at Algarve and Costa del Sol, and consequently, the growth of the activity in social media.

3.3. Validity and Reliability

Despite the qualitative approach, it is important to highlight the soundness of a methodological design with two cases. Both were similar in their offerings and their economic impact on global tourism in their countries. Their distribution was not similar in terms of number of entries: there were noticeable differences between each group, due to content management by DMOs and the use of hashtags related with each destination. This research work only accepted results that were consistent in both groups and were high enough to base conclusions on them as reliable evidence. In this sense, the robustness and explanatory power are shown.

4. Results

In Table 3, the main figures concerning generation content by the official accounts of both destinations are shown. The difference between number of posts published during the analysed period (peak season of summer 2019) is noticeable (92 for @AlgarveTourism vs. 51 for @VisitaCostadelSol), but the comparison of received interactions is especially noteworthy: @AlgarveTourism had 110,798 likes and 1770 comments, while @VisitaCostadelSol had 5582 likes and 80 comments. Additionally, there was a notable difference between the total number of followers of these Instagram accounts (61,400 for @AlgarveTourism vs. 4452 for @VisitCostadelSol). The data seem to indicate that the volume and intensity of publishing on Instagram has a direct effect on the main metrics. Moreover, the engagement and the sentiment of the posted content was different, as will be discussed later; one thing that may explain this behaviour is the name of the official account. Both destinations consist of a number of villages that, together, represent an administrative unit. However, Algarve is well known and coincides with the usual search engine term, while there are some cities (e.g., Marbella) in Costa del Sol that are better known than the administrative designation. Additionally, the word “visita” in the beginning of the Instagram account is in Spanish and, so, does not attract non-Spanish-speaking tourists to follow it.

The categories of the images used to promote these destinations were quite similar. Landscape with coast dominated the content, followed by cities, attractions, and culinary/food and drinks. In any event, @AlgarveTourism also used photos that were defined as “experiences,” in which one person or a group of people was shown enjoying an attraction at the destination. Likewise, @VisitaCostadelSol preferred the “events” category. In some cases, people were in the image, but the event typically had the main role in the post. Given that “coast” is the most frequent content for both regions, which are traditionally linked to sun-and-beach destinations, this visual resource is used to highlight sustainability. “Coast” images are presented, pointing out the “calm and serenity.” There are no photos with crowds on the beach. This could be an indicator of the relationship between the environment, sustainability, and customer experience. Despite less representative numbers for “landscape,” the images used have similar compositions. They are focused on the environment, and contact with and respect for “nature” are implicit. Furthermore, “events” and “cities and attractions” project a balance between tourism and population; consequently, the content generated by DMOs aims to reflect the three fundamental pillars of sustainability: economic, social, and environmental.

Table 3. General stats of the management of content by @AlgarveTourism and @VisitaCostadelSol. (June–September 2019).

ALGARVE													
	P os t	Day averag e	Total commen ts	Avera ge of com ment s	Total likes	Ave rage of like s	Co ast	Landscape: Countryside	Cities and attract ions	culi nary	Experi ences	Ev ent	Vid eos
Jun *	16	1	180	12	11,247	749	11		3		1		
Jul	30	1	466	15	28,512	920	9	1	4	5	11	0	1

Au	31	1	756	24	43,66	1,40	16		9	3	3		
g					8	9							
Se													
pt	15	1	368	24	27,37	1,82	8		5		1	1	
**					1	5							
Σ	92	4	1770	75	11,07	4,90	44		21	8	16	0	2
					98	3							
COSTA DEL SOL													
Jun	2	0.1	1	0.5	130	65	1		1				
Jul	16	0.5	35	1	2,138	69	7		7	1	1	0	1
Au	22	0.7	32	1.45	2,240	102	2		11	2		7	
g													
Se													
pt	11	0.7	12	1	1,074	97	3	1	5			2	1
Σ	51	0	80	2	5,582	333	13	1	24	3	1	9	2

Source: Own elaboration.

Qualitative analysis allowed us to determine the content generation focus of these official tourism accounts. First, the language: the DMO of Algarve chose English for their posts, while Costa del Sol managed their content in Spanish and English at the same time. Curiously, the comments on the posts of the official account of Algarve were made in several languages, despite the dominance of English. Almost all comments on the posts of @VisitaCostadelSol were in Spanish. Both official accounts encouraged tourists to use hashtags with a mention of their destinations. However, they did not obtain the same results. @AlgarveTourism proposed the hashtag #featuremealgarve for their followers, while @VisitaCostadelSol chose #VisitaCostadelSol*. The problems related to the symbol in the hashtag will be commented on below. The most popular hashtags related to both destinations are shown in Table 4. As explained above, the hashtags were chosen according to their popularity and coinciding with the name of the official account of each destination.

Table 4. The most popular hashtags related to the Algarve and Costa del Sol destinations (June–September 2019).

STATS	ALGARVE					COSTA DEL SOL				
	#algarve tourism	#algarve	#algarveportugal	#featuremealgarve	Σ	#visita costa delsol	#costa delsol*	#costadelsol	#malaga labella	Σ
Posts	1,934	30,688	9,439	1,091	43,152	68	3,044	17,479	1,433	22,024
Users	768	16,292	4,533	280	21,873	21	936	6,930	596	8,483
Locations	370	2,712	1,138	229	4,449	15	490	2,448	261	3,214
Engagement	2.52	1.88	2.08	3.9	10.38	3.24	3.25	2.52	2.4	11.41
Images	2,775	47,854	14,549	1,277	66,455	93	5,276	27,919	2,034	35,322
Videos	92	2,236	569	37	2,934	1	260	1,417	101	1,779
Likes	95,697	187,961	772,067	254,193	1,309,918	6,044	116,372	304,037	83,401	509,854
Comments	4,325	8,434	29,598	8,604	50,961	96	4,540	14,008	5,565	24,209
Impact	1,137,739	31,242,753	7,736,565	15,351	40,132,408	0	2,537,879	9,443,435	1,256,271	13,237,585
Reach	861,119	23,105,381	4,051,999	5,117	28,023,616	0	528,383	5,686,844	478,311	6,693,538
Followers	112,125	14,182	89,389	1,827	34,51,61	0	56,451	82,061	80,254	218,766
Post value mean	2.12	3.41	3.05	0.06	8.64	0	2.81	1.98	3.46	8.25
Contributor value mean	3.15	3.65	2.61	0.06	9.47	0	1.64	2.34	2.4	6.38

Source: Own elaboration.

The information provided in Table 4 allows for attention to be paid to the following issues. It seems that when the hashtags are different from the name of the destination's official account on Instagram, users are less motivated to generate content. In the same way, hashtags that are specifically proposed by DMOs have less impact on Instagram (#featuremealgarve and #costadelSol). The variable reach has special interest in this table because it is an indicator of the number of users who have seen each publication with these hashtags. The reach is greater for "nonofficial" hashtags. In contrast, engagement does not behave in the same way. This indicator combines various metrics: followers, likes, comments, and number of views for each post. In this case, the highest engagement corresponds to a hashtag that is identical to the name of the official account in both destinations. As will be discussed later, the types of content are as follows: videos and images; even locations used in generated content with these hashtags provides interesting information for the strategy design of DMOs (Table 12).

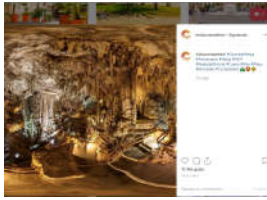
@AlgarveTourism concentrated their efforts on tourist involvement, through their chosen hashtag and the generation of content based on photos taken by Instagram users. This DMO did not spend money on their own photos of the destination, preferring instead to identify amazing photos from tourists posting to their own Instagram accounts. They credited the original author and concentrated on writing an attractive post related to the image. In this way, they got more engagement and reach through their content management strategy; especially through the owner of the image, as @AlgarveTourism had used their photo and those of other Instagram users, offering their collection of photos for them. The destination in the south of Andalusia, Costa del Sol, proposed a hashtag with a word in Spanish, coinciding with the name of the official account. This DMO published its own photos, highlighting 360° images of beaches, attractions, and picturesque towns. The comparison between using their own photos and photos by Instagram users posted by DMOs (Table 5) is worth mentioning, as they are two very different content strategies. Furthermore, a significant correlation was seen between interaction and image ownership. The total number of comments on own pictures was lower in both accounts: 129/1770 for @AlgarveTourism and 41/80 for @CostadelSol. In the second case, the number does not seem significant, but the number of total interactions in this account was very low. However, when compared with the proportion of total comments generated by Instagram user photos posted in @CostadelSol, the results are clearer. There were only 10 photos by Instagram users in the analysed period, in which 39 comments were concentrated; this was only two less than the 41 comments provided by the 32 own pictures of the destination.

Table 5. Ownership of posted photos.

	Own pictures	Photos by Instagram users
@AlgarveTourism	7%	93%
@VisitaCostadelSol	63%	37%

Source: Own elaboration.

The copy associated with the photos shows two different content generation strategies adopted by DMOs. On the one hand, @AlgarveTourism used more questions in an attempt to stimulate tourist involvement as a consequence of the photos. On the other hand, @VisitaCostadelSol simply described the photo; there were very few posts with questions or invitations to share opinions, places, or experiences in their posts. Some outstanding examples are shown below (Table 6). In the case of Algarve, the most common are posts that feature written content that invites Instagram users to participate. Curiously, @AlgarveTourism had a great deal more interaction not in posts with questions, but in posts that detailed some cultural characteristics or less well-known tourist sites. It should be emphasised that numerous remarks are made concerning sustainability in the written content. While the word "sustainability" is not explicitly included in any post, allusions to issues related to it are presented in several posts: untouched beaches, lesser-known tourist places, out-of-



#CuevadeNerja#Aniversario #Nerja
 #360°#RealidadVirtual #Cueva
 #Mar #Playa#Montaña
 #CostadelSol 🏠🌞⚙️

[ES] Quien dijo que protegerse del Sol no podía hacerse con tanto estilo. Disfruta de Torrox bajo su marea de paraguas coloridos.



☂️⚙️🌈

[EN] Who said that you couldn't protect from the Sun without style. Enjoy Torrox under their colorful umbrellas— ellas— ellas.

📷: @donmeier

#torrox #costadelsol

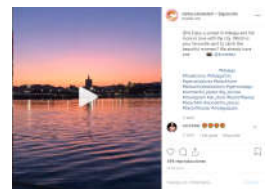
#torroxpueblo

#descubrelanuevacostadelsol#vivetorrox

#beautifuldestinations#igersmalaga #wonderful_places

#ig_europe #travelgram #all_shots#bestoftheday

[ES] Vivir un atardecer en Málaga hace que te enamores aún más de ella. ¿Cuál es tu rincón favorito para disfrutar de este bonito momento? Nosotros ya lo tenemos claro 🏠🌞🌊



[EN] Enjoy a sunset in Málaga and fall more in

love with the city. Which is your favourite spot to catch this beautiful moment? We already have one 📷: @kvreeken

#Malaga#MuelleUno #MalagaCity

#igersandalucia #beachlover

#beautifuldestinations #igersmalaga

#wonderful_places #ig_europe#travelgram #all_shots

#bestoftheday#beachlife #wonderful_places

#bestoftheday #malagaspain

Source: Own elaboration.

Interaction was low or nonexistent. The style of generated content in both accounts is disaggregated in Table 7. Accordingly, the domain of the published content was consistent with the chosen style of each destination: the Algarve Instagram account had more posts focused on entertainment, while information content predominated in the Costa del Sol Instagram account.

Table 7. Quality of content.

		DOMAIN			STYLE		
		Entertainment	Information	Persuasive	Informative	Narrative	Descriptive
ALG	%	76	23	83	0	7	11
CS	%	53	47	0	4	4	90

Source: Own elaboration.

In light of the work by Peters et al. [26], content value (Table 8), motives (Table 9), and social roles and interactions (Table 10) were analysed. Considering these, we could determine a certain similarity between the domain and style of content in each destination's Instagram account, as well as the emotions and tone. Therefore, @AlgarveTourism publishes content that evokes the image and the emotions of joy/happiness and calm/serenity. This strategy is consistent with the destination's image. Curiously, sustainability messages seem to be a common way of promoting awareness of the destination. To a certain extent, it becomes an argument to persuade tourists and to differentiate

destinations that are traditionally recognised as sun and sand regions. Likewise, @VisitaCostadelSol mainly chose contemplation; that is, images and captions that show places, events, or attractions. Consequently, the official account generally made posts with a neutral tone. By contrast, Algarve DMO always posted with a clear positive tone.

Table 8. Content value.

		EMOTIONS				TONE		
		Joy/Happiness	Calm/serenity	Surprise	Contemplation	Positive	Neutral	Negative
ALG	%	50	46	4	0	100	0	0
CS	%	12	6	0	82	73	27	0

Source: Own elaboration.

The main motivation for posting content was also analysed (Table 9). Naturally, both DMOs promoted their own destination. Algarve generated content associated with social motivation, while cultural aspects were predominant in the Costa del Sol Instagram.

Table 9. Motives.

	Social	Cultural	Intellectual
ALG	74	25	1
CSO	37	61	2

Source: Own elaboration.

Finally, social roles and interactions were analysed, as shown in Table 10. The intended effect of the Instagram posts by the two DMOs seems to be completely different. @AlgarveTourism hoped that their followers would feel encouraged to have their own experiences in the destination, always based on a “call to action” linked with the post—for example, through challenges such as enjoying attractive beaches or rocky cliffs with more difficult access, or to walk the streets in a certain Algarve village and discover charming places. Sharing was the second-most desired action intended by Algarve. In this line, posts that formulate questions to understand how tourists have enjoyed a location, what their preferences are (e.g., in terms of villages or beaches), or even with whom they would share a sunset were common. In line with emotions in the Instagram posts (Table 8), showing was the expected interaction in @VisitaCostadelSol. Experiencing and sharing were also expected interactions, but in much smaller proportions. Gaming was the least used, but it is noted as it shows the concern of DMOs about getting engagement on Instagram. In any event, quizzes did not seem to motivate interaction with destinations on Instagram.

Table 10. Social roles and interactions.

	Sharing	Experiencing	Showing	Gaming
ALG	20	75	0	5
CS	8	10	80	2

Source: Own elaboration.

The people who interact with posts differed, as well. The official account of Algarve attracted tourists, tourism companies, and local citizens, as well as those who do not live there but follow the Instagram account to maintain a link with the place. Likewise, potential tourists were detected through comments written in the posts. By contrast, @VisitaCostadelSol had a great deal of followers directly linked with the DMO, such as attractions and institutions. There was less representation of tourists and potential tourists, although some local citizens who lived at the destination or abroad were identified. Table 11 shows which networks interacted with the content of each destination. In any event, involvement with the official Instagram account sends out a clear message about the awareness of sustainability at the destination and attempts are made to integrate all stakeholders.

Table 11. Network structures.

	DMO	Tourists	Tourism companies	Local Community	Tourists and community	All
Algarve	4	33	2	0	45	16
CSO	65	22	4	2	8	0

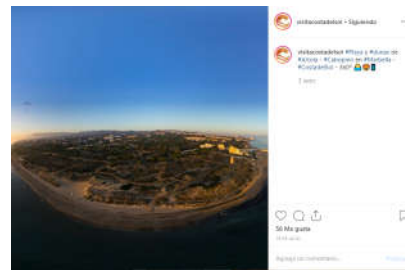
Source: Own elaboration.

The hashtag strategies of the two Instagram accounts were completely different. While Algarve used a small and repeated number of hashtags, Costa del Sol preferred to include a large number of hashtags in their posts. Their own hashtag or ones linked with the destination predominated in the Algarve Instagram; by contrast, @VisitaCostadelSol drew on popular social media and tourism hashtags not always related to the photo, such as #backpackers and #backpacking, or very general hashtags such as #travelgrams, #allshots, or #beautifuldestinations. The post was sometimes full of hashtags and there was no description apart from that. Two examples are presented below (Figure 1).



#Cabopino - #Dunas- #SendaLitoral –
 #CostadelSol_#descubrelanuevacostadelSol
 🌟🌟🌟
 #travel #viajar_#alldaytravel #amoviajar
 #aroundtheworldpix
 #awesome_earth#awesome_earthpix_#awesome_globepix
 #awomeearth_#backpackers #backpacking
 #beautifuldestinations #doyoutravel

(a)



#Playa y #dunas de #Artola - #Cabopino en
 #Marbella - #CostadelSol - 360° 🌅🌇📷

(b)

Figure 1. Examples of content only based on hashtags and emojis by @VisitaCostadelSol. (a) a large number of hastags. (b) a small and repeated number of hastags.

Concerning this point, it can be stressed that @VisitaCostadelSol included more symbols and emojis than @AlgarveTourism. This seemed to elicit more engagement from Instagram users, but the analysed posts did not prove this point. Curiously, some photos published from the two locations had a similar aesthetic. Furthermore, @AlgarveTourism’s posts were based on those of Instagram users, while @VisitaCostadelSol took the photos themselves, as mentioned above. An example is shown in Figure 2.



(a)



(b)

Figure 2. Promotion of two different cities (a) Olhao and (b) Torrox with similar photos (umbrellas in colour) by the two official accounts of DMOs

Regarding content generation by Instagram users, it should be highlighted that the posts that generated more engagement belonged to private persons, not to the official accounts of the tourist companies. In general, it was observed that a higher ratio of likes and comments was associated with eye-catching images, in which there was a location with people enjoying themselves, but in which, it should be stressed, the people did not look at the camera directly. The locations most displayed were beaches, cities, and attractions in the image: beaches predominated in @AlgarveTourism, while cities and attractions were the most representative in @VisitaCostadelSol. It should be noted that some of the photos that generated more reactions (comments and likes) served as inspiration for other Instagram users and, finally, were published on the DMO's Instagram (Figure 3). However, even the most influential Instagram users who have posted with a hashtag with the name of the official account were not used for either of the two destinations. We checked, in both destinations, the first 25 Instagram users in each hashtag without a successful repost. In any event, it should be mentioned that Algarve avoided sharing in their own account posts from public Instagram accounts that specialised in travel, instead preferring to use content generated by particular Instagram users. Likewise, there were some pictures that had a high level of reaction on Instagram, but the main role was played by a person—generally the Instagram user—enjoying beaches or other places in the destinations; they were not focused on the environment and needed to be considered personal enough to be used by the DMOs. The image and style of writing in Instagram users' posts also draw on resources related to sustainability, especially regarding environmental and social dimensions. Sustainability does not appear explicitly in the written content, but Instagram users' posts show that aspects related to sustainability make destinations more attractive, and, consequently, add value to the tourist experience.

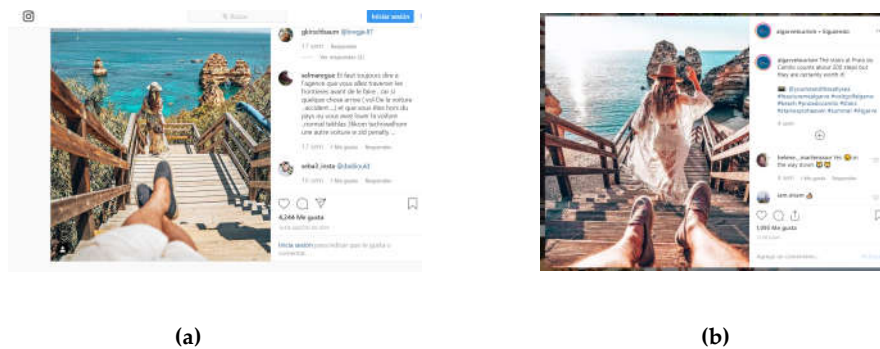

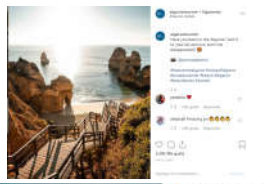




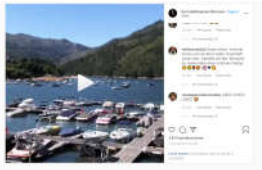









Figure 3. Comparison between photos posted by Instagram users. (a) personal account. (b) algarvetourism official account.




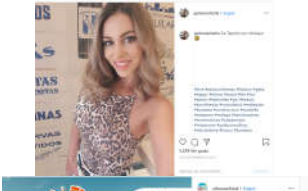

The volume of reactions derived from the photos posted by Instagram users was significantly higher than the most popular posts on Instagram by the Algarve account. In contrast, the Spanish destination got more reactions than Instagram users using the hashtag #VisitaCostadelSol. The remaining hashtags behaved in the same way in both cases: there was a wide gap between the reactions of Instagram user accounts and those of the official account of the destinations. However, the total number of reactions was significantly lower for this DMO and for Instagram users than for Algarve. Furthermore, the photos were compared and, in this sense, they were quite similar. We chose the three most relevant posts for each hashtag and the three posts that provoked the most reactions in both destinations (Table 12).

Table 12. Images posted with more reactions.

ALGARVE				
Hashtag	Instagram users		Official account	
#algarvetourism		4245		3282
		4131		3245
#algarve		3903		2917
		1116		2713
#algarve		1115		2676
		1024		2532
#algarveportugal		36,843		2246

#featuremealgarve	14,436		2211	
	14,367			
	7520			
	6200			
	5172			

COSTA DEL SOL

Hashtag	Instagram users	Official account
#visitacostadelsol	1465	
	241	
	210	
#costadelsol	5859	
	3097	
		518
		344
		313
		248
		241



Source: Own elaboration.

5. Discussion and conclusions

Collaborative platforms have become widespread on the Internet; their establishment has appeared to change tourist consumption patterns and decision-making. The active role of social media users should be taken into account by tourism agents, and especially by DMOs, as demonstrated by the results of this study. Instagram is an attractive social media platform for sharing experiences, and may influence destination branding through the sharing of evocative pictures. These results show that visual content displays on Instagram contribute to creating a destination brand and highlight the attractiveness of tourist regions, consequently increasing interest in them, in accordance with Hanan and Putit [18]. On this basis, the further analysis of how DMOs and Instagram users/tourists project a brand's image forms the main contribution of this research.

Regarding DMOs, it can be noted that a thorough content management strategy on Instagram provides better outcomes, as measured by the followers, engagement, impact, and reach of posts. According to Peters et al. [26], "in marketing research the content of communication is at least as important as its frequency" (p. 10). However, the tone and emotions described in the posts may be a leading cause of this effect. In the work by Benítez et al. [63], it was pointed out that destinations do

not upload enough or sufficiently manage their official account, despite an increase in the participation of tourists in social media. Likewise, and consistent with the conclusions drawn by recent studies [21,63], further uploading leads to further participation. However, it is not only the total posts, but also the quality, the tone, and the emotions linked with the content generated by DMOs that matter. The comparison of photos and posts made by each destination carried out in this study demonstrated that the most influential photos were often those from Instagram users, shared by DMOs in their Instagram account with a mention, as well as users' posts via a destination's official channels. In this framework, the emphasis should be placed on emotional or evocative copy linked with the pictures. For example, posing questions and calls to share experiences should generate participation and positive reactions. By contrast, very technical photos, such as aerial photos or 360° pictures, did not attract as much attention. These results corroborate those of the authors of [64], who discussed how the content created drives social media action. Vividness and interactivity of posts are crucial for engagement with users and increasing the subsequent reach.

The study also showed how sustainability is used indirectly in generated content, as a differentiation factor in analysed destinations. This agrees with the findings of Revilla et al. [37] and Font [36] regarding the projection of destinations that are focused on environmental, economic, and social development issues in social media in order to create and promote the brand and to attract tourists.

The analysis of content generated by users allows us to ensure activity and be well-disposed to co-create in the brand experience in tourism destinations. This finding is in line with the work by Prahalad and Ramaswamy [44], but it also highlights that tourist participation carries great weight in the editorial line of DMOs in their official account; so much so that the hermeneutic circle of representation [20] can be considered to be inverted. First, the photos posted on Instagram by the official accounts @AlgarveTourism and @VisitaCostadelSol replicate the collective image traditionally projected by destinations. Thus, Instagram is a new channel to promote the destination brand. According to Urry [38], tourists search for photos that match the most well-known sites of the destination. Likewise, Gunn [65] classified a destination's image as either organic, in situ, or modified. The first is provided by knowledge from tour operators, references from family and friends, books, films, and so on. The second is directly created during the experience of the trip. The last one is a combination of both. According to Galí and Donaire [66], own memories and audiovisual material generated by operators and by others interact to give rise to a destination's brand. This framework ensures that their pictures capture what they have in their mind; therefore, the brand creation starts with a communication campaign by DMOs, while UGC by Instagram users enhances the brand and reinforces, through specific experiences at the destinations, their motivation to travel there. This means that tourist attractions are similarly captured, although tourists introduce themselves and their vision of the experience as part of the history. This conclusion coincides with Hernández et al. [10], as well as with the previous research work of Jenkins [20], in which Instagram photos taken by tourists at a destination were analysed as a support tool. The authors agree with Narangajavana et al. [35] UGC with regards to Instagram users being able to create more trust, which has a strong effect on expectations about destinations and could explain how their posts have comparatively more reach and engagement than posts by DMOs.

Secondly, and this is exactly where the main contribution of this investigation comes in, we observed a reversal of the hermeneutic circle. Currently, destinations benefit from tourists' photos to project their brand image. Moreover, that content is more trustworthy and, generally, more inspiring for tourists. The opportunity for DMOs to create closer connections with their stakeholders has also been pointed out by Agrawal et al. [50]. They state that it increases their involvement and achieves greater value for both. In the work by Park and Oh [56], it was stated that social media enhances brand image by engaging customers, but this study specifically included the potential of Instagram in this mission. Thus, destinations including generated content by Instagram users in their own official account enhance their level of engagement and increase their reach and number of followers. At the same time, this strategy allows them to promote their destination with less expenditure. This advantage was also pointed out in the work by Camprubí et al. [9]. This practice is particularly

representative in the case of Algarve, and our results have demonstrated that photos posted by tourists provide an effective resource for building and promoting a destination's image. This form of tourism promotion by DMOs in social media was identified, but they only focused on content generated by travel bloggers [4]. However, their results revealed the particular contribution of microbloggers to their promotion campaign. Their content was more credible, trustworthy, and even inspiring than that generated by professional bloggers, as the latter seek something in return with their posts.

Referring to tourists' involvement in destination branding, our study shows that the cost incurred in creating and promoting images could be minimised. A well-managed Instagram channel by a DMO contributes to better connection with tourists, stimulates interest, and increases the motivation to visit (or come back to) a region. Therefore, tourist involvement in UGC is an effective strategy for destination promotion and for the creation and reinforcing of the brand [51]. The same conclusion was drawn by Özdemir and Çelebi [21]. Based on content analysis, we found that the most effective mechanism to increase participation is focusing on experiences and feelings, and giving the centre stage to tourists, in order to achieve the co-creation of the brand image that destinations hope to promote. It should be highlighted that concentrating efforts only on single characteristics of the destinations is becoming less effective, while demonstrating the range of experiences had at the destinations connects better with travellers. Likewise, tourist involvement via reposting their photos with credits in the official account of the destinations has been shown to achieve more engagement and reach, so a positive effect can be confirmed. Our study proposes that DMOs are able to point out tourist attractions and sites by starting from the stories that arise from tourists' journeys. The results of Fatanti and Suyadnya [1] agree with ours in that the tourism experience is the most valuable aspect that encourages users to promote destinations. Moreover, Özdemir and Çelebi [21] also concluded that content that evokes emotions and is able to tell stories will have better performance. Curiously, Baloglu and McClealy [46], who did not consider social media, highlighted that emotional components have a greater influence than cognitive factors when linking tourist destinations with image creation. In summary, new tools have appeared, but the process of image formation in tourists' minds follows the same pattern. The value of emotions in UGC on Instagram should be understood holistically, as they not only have an effect on decision-making about the trip, but also influence during- and post-trip experiences [25]. Some posts even promote a feeling of belonging to a region, thus going beyond tourism and appealing to the local community. Although examples of such were identified in @AlgarveTourism and @VisitaCostadelSol, it was more prominent in the former. Tourists who express their desire to come back soon and local citizens who participate in sharing their pride in their origins were seen in the content analysis; both became promoters of the destination. It is possible to take a similar approach, as discerned by Shuqair and Cragg [4], who also recommend that DMOs support potential visitors, tourists, and residents to generate UGC through Instagram, in order to build a positive and coherent image.

5.1. Limitations and Future Research Directions

It is important to note that this study is exploratory in nature, as it addresses an area of research that has not been well developed. Studies focusing on the influence of social media (and, specifically, of Instagram) on brand image are scarce, even more so if they are developed from a tourism/destination point of view. It is necessary to carry out similar studies with a larger sample size of destinations. Progress in this direction will allow us to gain insight into complex social media marketing practices and the management of DMOs.

Another limitation could be that Instagram is a social media platform that is primarily used for sharing positive content supported by pictures, thus reinforcing the positive effect of UGC on a destination's image formation. Future studies could contrast Instagram content with other collaborative platforms, such as TripAdvisor, where users tend to express both positive and negative comments about businesses and tourism destinations. This issue has already been pointed out by Shuqair and Cragg [4], who warned of the overly positive content on Instagram, which aligns with DMOs' objectives to project an attractive image of the destinations.

5.2. Practical Implications

This research work provides a main practical implication for DMOs. A content generation strategy on Instagram that involves tourists encourages destination promotion. Brand value and engagement further benefit from content management based on the posts of individual Instagram users. DMOs should search for ways to include the content generated by users in their own content, demonstrating the role that tourists play in the destinations. Furthermore, this practice contributes to an increase in trust by potential tourists and allows the DMO to pay attention to experiences and preferences in order to focus destination promotion. This formula of Instagram management can achieve good reach and, indeed, can positively influence the brand image. Moreover, this participatory strategy obtains better engagement and international reach with less investment.

From the point of view of management, this study offers a general framework and guidelines, based on the proposal by Peters et al. [26], for constructing metrics and dashboards for DMOs. In this sense, the results are useful in making DMOs aware that social media presence is not enough to create and enhance a destination brand; destinations need a data-driven process with metrics and a thorough strategy for stakeholder involvement in UGC on Instagram in order to achieve successful brand promotion and management.

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