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INNOVATION IN TOURISM
COMMUNICATION

Strategic Models
to Create Sustainable
Value for Destination

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ECONOMIA - *Ricerche*

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SUMMARY

INTRODUCTION

The overall Italian tourism market (online and offline) returned to pre-pandemic values in 2022. Let's consider only the eCommerce of Travel. In some cases, it has already surpassed 2019, even if the gap to be closed for the offline component is still significant (from -45% to -16% for the various sectors in 2019). In the hospitality industry, we went from 14.6 billion in 2019 to 16.4 billion in 2022 for online data. In addition, the travel agency sector has experienced exponential growth Recovery for 2021: +106% for tour operations and +189% for travel agencies. It was at 19% before the pandemic, and the tour operator market in 2022 is worth 70% of what it billed in 2019[1].

As stated by Filippo Renga, Director of the Observatory for Digital Innovation in Tourism:

Digital has been able to bring back some sectors of this industry to the values of pre-pandemic, confirming itself as a key axis and reminding us that the digitalization of the journey remains a priority across companies throughout the supply chain. In fact, in hospitality, eCommerce accounts for 51% of transactions, clearly exceeding 44% in 2019, but the most surprising figure concerns transport, where the incidence has risen to 68%, starting from 55% in 2019. In addition, travel agencies are investing in the digitalization of the relationship and accommodation facilities are also working in this direction.

The predominance of the online channel is manifested mainly in the inspiration phase, with 56% of travellers who claim to have used exclusively online channels, including search engines (in over 50% of cases), followed by review sites, aggregators and comparators of housing and transport, and finally the sites of accommodation providers. Also, in the booking phase, online booking prevails, with 59% for accommodation and 63% for

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1. *Il Travel Riprende Quota, Il Digitale Ai Comandi*, 2023.

transport, which uses only online channels. In addition, 22% of travellers turn to travel agencies or consultants for information or reservations. The number of travellers who buy products related to the location visited through eCommerce is growing, representing 33% of the total, compared to 12% in 2019 and 9% in 2018. The offer is also adapting to the growing demand for extended experiences in time and space, with 12% of accommodation facilities offering their customers the opportunity to purchase products from the destination through eCommerce. Eleonora Lorenzini, Director of the Observatory Digital Innovation in Tourism, points out that the activities and experiences in the destination are a growing market in which the online still has wide margins of penetration, with physical ticketing as the most used channel for tours, museums, monuments, exhibitions, and outdoor sports, followed by the sites or apps of the service provider. 2022 marks the unexpected return of business trips for Italian companies, with a recovery that exceeds expectations. The total volume of business trips, nationally and internationally, has increased by 70% compared to the previous year. Growth is driven mainly by the domestic market, which saw an increase of 72% compared to 2021, reducing the gap to -14% compared to the peak of 22 million trips in 2019. Even more significant is the surge in business travel spending, which in 2022 in Italy exceeded 17 billion euros, doubling the value of 2021 (+96%) and significantly approaching the pre-enlargement levels (-16% compared to 2019).

A great challenge for destinations that must be prepared for many changes, some accelerated by the pandemic, requires careful planning and an innovative approach. The challenges of this sector, driven by these global trends, therefore influence the state of strategic and operational planning, of which the keywords are mainly digitization, experience, sustainability and innovation, involvement of stakeholders and visitors and, for the most virtuous destinations, analysis, and interpretation of data. Digitalization has revolutionized tourism communication, as destinations are learning to use the potential of digital channels, including websites, social media, mobile apps, and online booking platforms. In some cases, the more virtuous ones, there is an integration of technology in tourist experiences, for example, using augmented reality, virtual reality, and artificial intelligence to create engaging and authentic experiences for visitors, as well as from a marketing perspective. Tourist destinations try to tell captivating stories that reflect local identity and culture and promote unique activities and attractions. It leads to the active involvement of visitors, which is a crucial aspect of enriching the tourist experience and creating a deeper bond between travellers and the destination. Adapting to new trends also influences the construction of the tourist product precisely because of an appreciation of the flexibility of the offer in the

search for authentic experiences and more aware and technology-oriented travellers. Strategic destination planning gradually involves stakeholders, including local community representatives, tourism businesses, government organizations and non-governmental organizations. Including different perspectives aims to ensure a more comprehensive and sustainable "bottom-up" inclusive planning. It is precisely the concept of all-around sustainability that has become a key element in the strategic planning of tourism. Tourist destinations are trying to balance tourism development with preserving the environment and cultural and community heritage. This includes initiatives to reduce environmental impact, involve local communities and promote responsible tourism. From this point of view, the recent global pandemic and the growing challenge of climate change are pushing resilience strategies to mitigate impacts and ensure sustainable crisis management, often also through the active participation of stakeholders and collaboration between destinations. Because experience is central to the image and reputation of the destination, measuring and analyzing the visitor's experience has become essential. Some virtuous tourist destinations use feedback, online reviews, and analysis tools to understand visitor expectations better and constantly improve their offerings. In summary, the current state of strategic planning and communication in tourism is characterized by a growing attention to the visitor experience, sustainability, technology, and collaboration between actors in the sector. Planning must be dynamic and adaptable to cope with an ever-changing context. Storytelling is becoming a key strategy to base communication of the destination.

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Innovation in Tourism

Innovation in the tourism industry plays a crucial role because it allows the industry to adapt to travellers' changing needs and develop solutions that enhance the entire tourist experience. At the technological level, implementing mobile applications, augmented reality, and artificial intelligence has radically transformed destinations, offering real-time information, immersive virtual experiences, and personalized assistance. At the same time, sustainable innovation has established itself as an imperative, adopting responsible practices that minimize environmental impact and promote sustainable development. Creating unique and authentic experiences, emphasising local gastronomy, and incorporating cultural elements in the tourist offer define experiential innovation. Collaboration is a key pillar, with the collaborative economy and crowdsourcing promoting the sharing of housing, transportation, and ideas. In marketing, the strategic use of social media and influencer marketing has transformed the promotion of destinations, reaching a wider audience. Logistically, big data and analytics improve resource management, while automation simplifies processes such as online check-in and booking management. Cultural innovation also emphasizes the importance of enhancing cultural heritage and promoting diversity among travellers. The tourism industry develops its innovation through interconnected and multifactorial approaches which continuously adapt to new challenges to create a dynamic sector. Overall, from a technological point of view, innovation in the tourism sector is helping to improve efficiency, personalization, sustainability, and engagement of the travel experience through the creative use of new technologies. This innovation is leading to significant changes in using travel experiences and managing activities related to the sector. Mobile apps have taken on a central role, giving travellers instant access to detailed destination information, interactive maps, booking services and digital tour guides. This has simplified travel planning and allowed users to customize their experiences in real-time.

People now use augmented reality (AR) and virtual reality (VR) to transform their pre-travel destination exploration. Some tourist destinations have distinguished themselves for the innovative use of these technologies. The Vatican Museums stand out as an example of destinations that used innovative technology to provide virtual tours and interactive videos which enhanced visitor experiences throughout the pandemic. The Sistine Chapel virtual tour accessible at this link[1] allows visitors to move freely while examining both the artwork details and the surrounding environments through high-definition reproduction. This renowned site also provides virtual reality tours to enhance the online experience, making it more engaging and immersive. Numerous examples include the Louvre Museum in Paris, which implemented the use of augmented reality to enhance onsite visits, and the Berlin Wall in Germany, where, through augmented reality apps, you can get a virtual view of the Wall before its fall in 1989. These initiatives were good alternatives during the pandemic and are now complementary to tourism in the future.

Virtual experiences allow potential travellers to explore places and attractions realistically, helping them make more informed decisions about the destination and itinerary. They are also experiences, which, in addition to being often used in an ethical way to visit distant places, represent an important innovative communication strategy. An example of this is Japan's "Where Tradition Meets the Future" incoming tourism promotional campaign[2]. The campaign, launched in 2016, included interactive content, a 360-degree VR video, and AR digital signage displays to engage audiences with Japanese traditions and promote the country's destinations[3].

An innovative augmented reality advertising approach can do more than entertain tourists on-site at the destination. It can also attract and engage potential tourists before they choose their travel destination. This creates a captivating experience both during the visit and in the decision-making phase.

In addition, Artificial Intelligence (AI) aims to enhance the traveller's experience by personalizing services. Artificial intelligence algorithms analyze travellers' data and recommend activities, restaurants, and accommodations according to each traveller's preferences. This allows the most virtuous destinations to create experiences tailored to the needs of all travellers. Sustainable technology is also becoming increasingly popular in

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1. *www.museivaticani.va/content/museivaticani/it/collezioni/musei/cappella-sistina/tour-virtuale.html*.
2. *www.youtube.com/watch?v=OR_Y7vj66PU*.
3. *www.businesswire.com/news/home/20180116005057/en/Japans-16-Most-Mesmerizing-Destinations-Introduced-in-a-New-Live-Action-360-Degree-Video*.

the tourism industry. Innovation in tourism includes adopting eco-friendly practices and initiatives to reduce the carbon footprint of tourism activities, such as using electric vehicles, installing sustainable energy management systems in hotels and using digital solutions to reduce paper and plastic.

2.1. Digital Product and Communication Innovation

Digital innovation in tourism refers to the set of innovations in services and processes that impact the activities of tourism operators at an organizational and financial level[4].

New products and tools for promoting, communicating, and marketing tourism goods and services have been strongly encouraged by the spread of new technologies, particularly in the field of ICT, in the tourism sector in recent decades. Three major technological innovations have inspired these tools: the Global Distribution System (GDS) in the seventies and the Internet Revolution in the second half of the nineties (Cresta & Greco, 2019). Technologies that have enabled travel agencies to develop and disseminate tourist attractions worldwide through automated booking systems. Internet technology transformed the business models and created multiple new opportunities to market attractions thus enabling end consumers to access these opportunities.

In the dynamic contemporary tourist landscape, product and communication innovation proceeds in parallel, helping to redefine the overall traveller experience. On the one hand, product innovation is manifested through the introduction of immersive experiences, such as the use of virtual reality (VR) and augmented reality (AR), that allow visitors to explore cultural and historical places digitally (Koo *et al.*, 2021). The tourism industry places experiential travel as its leading priority by offering distinctive genuine encounters that foster emotional connections between visitors and their destinations. Moreover, sustainability drives product innovation with eco-friendly itineraries and eco-friendly structures. Intelligent technologies, such as tourist guide devices and voice assistants, enhance the tourist experience by providing contextual information and facilitating navigation.

On the other hand, communication innovation develops through the strategic use of social media and influencer marketing, facilitating the creation of authentic content that reaches a wide audience. Digital stories, immersive videos and interactive content emphasize the digital storytelling that inspires and informs potential visitors. Data-driven personalization

4. *blog.osservatori.net/it_it/turismo-significato-dati-trend*.

enhances communication by sending targeted offerings based on visitor preferences. Chatbots and virtual assistance simplify tourist communication during the planning phase of the trip from home and in real time, offering immediate answers and assistance before and during the trip. Content marketing strategies, including visitors' active participation through hashtags and photo contests, help build an active online community. In summary, this synergy of product and communication innovations outlines a complete transformation in the tourism industry, delivering richer and more engaging experiences for modern travellers. At this point, it is appropriate to ask what happens to the destination and to the companies in the supply chain that cannot keep up with innovation.

The lack of adoption of technological tools by tourist destinations can generate several significant challenges and consequences. First, limited online visibility can result in a poor ability to attract potential visitors, especially considering the importance of a robust digital presence, which includes informative websites, dedicated apps, and social media profiles. In addition, the lack of access to digital tools can compromise travel planning by visitors. The lack of up-to-date information, interactive maps and online booking services can make the planning process less efficient and free of facilities, negatively impacting the overall tourist experience.

Destinations that neglect to adopt technologies such as augmented reality, virtual reality, and artificial intelligence will likely offer less engaging tourist experiences. These technologies can enrich the visitor experience by providing interactive content, virtual tours and personalized services, elements that increasingly influence travel decisions. In a global environment increasingly sensitive to sustainability, the lack of sustainable tools and innovations and communication could lead to criticism from conscious travellers and damage the destination's reputation, considering the relevance and urgency of sustainability in the tourism industry. In a highly competitive tourism industry, the ability to offer unique and cutting-edge experiences becomes crucial to attracting and maintaining tourists, and destinations that overlook this aspect may be overtaken by competition[5]. The use of digital technologies is increasingly influencing the tourism sector's competitiveness, both in the management of services and in interactions with visitors. Destinations that do not adapt to innovation trends risk losing competitiveness.

However, it is not enough to propose products in line with visitors' needs; in planning, it is also important to structure communication, which is understood as a complex process in which several aspects come into play.

5. *blog.osservatori.net/it_it/turismo-significant-dati-trend#ecommerce.*

COMMUNICATION

3.1. Evolution of Main Theoretical Models

The proposal of products aligned with target needs is insufficient; in planning, it is crucial to structure communication as a carefully planned relational process, involving various aspects. Communication is humanity's primary relational tool for creating and maintaining interaction. The term "communication" stems from the Latin "communication" and the verb "communicate," meaning to share something, pass something from one to another, and unite in a community. It is a process through which individuals exchange information, ideas, and meanings using words, symbols, and other means of expression.

Communication is a complex process that fulfils specific needs, where the conveyed content (information) matters, and the value system, prejudices, individual experiences, and communication styles of interacting subjects are significant. It has been a multidisciplinary subject studied by linguists, sociologists, psychologists, and philosophers, witnessing the succession of various thoughts and schools. Over time, communication models evolved, starting from classical models like Shannon and Weaver's, developed in the late '40s, focusing on information transmission through a communication channel to enhance communication systems, especially telephony (Chew & Ng, 2021). Adapted over the years, including Schramm's variation, the model transitioned from a unidirectional physical concept to a relational function emphasizing the importance of feedback and understanding communication's cultural and social context. As time passed, the concept of communication refined, and effective communication models gained scholarly interest. In 1960, David Berlo's "S-M-C-R" model significantly contributed (Berlo, 1977), considering communication a complex process involving variables influenced by the receiver's perception, attitude, culture, and knowledge. The model emphasized the importance of feedback and the

communication context for efficacy. In the '70s and '80s, within the Cultural Studies school of thought at the Birmingham Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies in England, Stuart Hall focused on the dynamics of cultural communication, introducing a model where communication is not just information transmission but also a meaning-producing process influenced by both the sender and the receiver's cultural context and experiences (Chew & Ng, 2021). Hall highlighted the importance of power and politics in cultural communication, where power dynamics between sender and receiver can influence a message's meaning. While classical models like Shannon and Weaver and more contemporary ones like those by Hall, Berlo, and others have evolved from simple message transmission to evaluating feedback and the cultural background of involved subjects and context, their ideas remain valuable for understanding the current communication landscape and its complexity.

The evolution of technology and digital media has brought about new opportunities and challenges, which require constant adaptation and renewal of theoretical perspectives. Understanding these relevant theories can contribute to a more informed reflection on communication within a globalized and increasingly multicultural context in contemporary society. With the development of digital and social media, how people communicate has significantly changed. Instead of one-on-one communication, people can now communicate with many others simultaneously through social media platforms like Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram, reaching anywhere in the world and engaging with cultural diversity. This shift has led to new forms of communication, where interaction and information sharing with people of distinct cultures who share similar interests and goals are possible. This has given rise to participative communication models for disseminating user-generated content, videos, images, blogs, podcasts, and reels, serving as essential information channels and entertainment sources for individuals and businesses or destinations, as evident in this study.

Technological innovation plays a key role in communication, in the tourism sector, mobile devices, social media, virtual reality and artificial intelligence offer innovative communication models, and enable destinations and industry to reach consumers in different ways. New unconventional languages are paving the way for a new Through the Line (TTL) model, offering innovative communication forms integrating traditional Above the Line offline (ATL) and more modern Below the Line (BTL) communication, still guided by the digital realm. Technological innovation has allowed destinations and tourism operators to reach consumers more effectively and engagingly, enhancing the customer experience and increasing tourism demand.

3.2. Digital Communications in Tourism

Since announcing the objectives of the Digital Decade in 2021, the European Union has consistently placed people at the centre of digital transformation. The goal is to strengthen and digitally transform individuals and European businesses with clear objectives to be achieved by 2030. The support extends to multiphase projects and a combination of public and private investments for infrastructure development. The program focuses on four main areas (skills, governance, infrastructure, and e-business), serving as the digital compass for Europe.

In this context, gigabit connectivity and 5G coverage emerge as key themes in the strategies. Private investors are incentivized by EU funding to participate in complex, long-term projects that are impossible for a single nation to undertake. Fixed networks and FTTH (Fiber-to-the-Home) constitute the digital ecosystem managing most data traffic. Fibre optic coverage has increased to 55.6% of the European population, compared to 50% in 2021[1]. Europe has an advantage in FTTH availability compared to the United States, comparable to South Korea but still lagging behind. Technologies like FTTH are considered the best for gigabit access due to their high speed. However, mobile connections are also rapidly growing in Europe, as demonstrated by the swift expansion of 5G. This has transitioned from a low initial coverage of 7.3% of the population in 2021 to a projected penetration of 67% by 2025 compared to China[2].

The Internet, facilitating global connections, has played a key role in increasing business competitiveness, becoming a key element in responding to contemporary consumer demands in many industries.

Digital communication is increasingly a fundamental need for modern tourism, and companies in the sector are experiencing a profound change due to the growing digitalization worldwide (Cvetkovski & Cvetkovska-Tomanović, 2021). This digitisation process in the tourism sector has undergone three main phases (Xiang, Fesenmaie 2017). Initially, in 1999-2000, the technology was used for sales and marketing purposes, gradually replacing paper materials with websites and online booking systems. Later, between 2000 and 2010, a digital ecosystem developed, and the Internet became the main source of information for travellers. Not just information but also reservations, purchases, and commercial transactions. The third phase is the one that goes from 2010 to today and is characterized by the integration of digital systems, in which technologies such as mobile devices,

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1. *Report State of Digital Communications 2023 ETNO*, n.d.
2. *etno.eu/library/reports/112-the-state-of-digital-communications-2023.html*.

Location-based services, Artificial intelligence, and augmented and virtual reality are new tools that facilitate the rapprochement between the traditional and digital world for new development opportunities for tourist destinations and businesses (Xiang & Fesenmaier, 2017).

It is a kind of communication revolution that increasingly concerns the combination of the real world with digital content designed to improve the consumer and visitor experience. Therefore, digital education for tourism stakeholders is necessary for sustainable destination development. According to the Aalborg University report, the innovation and competitiveness of European target systems can be facilitated by digitisation, thanks to the tools it offers that give value to the products and provide value to the tourist experiences. The report points out that these advances can only be successful if they are built on a solid tourism sector structure, including a closely linked industry with common strategic values. An industry that can share information creates and maintains opportunities for mentoring and support and promotes opportunities for learning, reflection and growth. Since the tourism system consists mainly of SMEs, the challenge is undoubtedly ambitious (Final Report, Digitalisation in Tourism, 2018, Aalborg University)[3].

Much has been discussed in the literature about the value of digital communication and the use of social media to promote travel destinations. To communicate effectively with customers, tourism organizations must adopt a customer-centric strategy. This involves understanding the wishes and needs of the target audience and customizing offers and communication tactics appropriately. Competitiveness and innovation go hand in hand; businesses and destinations can reach them by focusing on producing value for consumers, embracing new technologies and business models, and adopting a customer-centric strategy. Innovation in communication is essential for tourism businesses to remain competitive in a rapidly changing industry. By embracing new technologies and communication strategies, tourism companies can improve customer engagement, build brand awareness, and provide customers with a more personalized and engaging experience (Antonioli Corigliano & Baggio, 2014).

Destinations must adopt unique digital destination branding strategies to differentiate themselves in the highly competitive tourism industry, be innovative and use new technologies and digital tools. This means engaging guests, adapting to changing trends and technological advances and offering them an exceptional experience. Information and communication technologies (ICT) significantly influence all sectors, including the travel and tourism

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3. *vbn.aau.dk/ws/files/296441087/REPORT_TourismDigitalisation_131118_REV_KB_EM_4_.pdf.*

industry. On a global level, there has been a change in the tourism industry due to the introduction of new and creative technological tools, which have growth potential for tourism businesses. The tourism industry has transformed in the last decade due to several digital innovations, such as online applications, digital maps, widgets, multimedia content, virtual approaches, and mobile and wearable tech gadgets. This change is further highlighted by the rise of Internet travel sites and Internet Delivery Systems (IDS), which provide potential visitors better access to communication and information. The Internet, a rapidly growing global media, is essential for the growth of the travel and tourism industry. It facilitates communication and enables active participation in the holiday planning process (Nikoli *et al*., n.d.).

3.3. Relationship Between Governance and Institutional Communication of the Destination

It remains to be questioned what weight destination governance and its institutional communication carry in influencing the activities of stakeholders and operators within the destination's supply chain. It is necessary to assert that poor destination governance or ineffective institutional communication could negatively impact the communication of operators and stakeholders.

For example, a lack of coordination among stakeholders could lead to confusion in the communication of tourist destinations, while inadequate governance could restrict access to resources and opportunities for innovation. Conversely, good governance of tourist destinations can create an environment conducive to innovation and competitiveness, providing support and resources for developing new products and tourist services. Additionally, clear, consistent institutional communication can contribute to creating a shared vision of the tourist destination and promoting stakeholder collaboration. It can be hypothesized that effective institutional communication and good destination governance may positively influence the communication of operators and stakeholders.

Tourism heavily relies on communication to convey its offerings and facilitate communication among businesses and other factors. In technological and media terms, tourist communication takes various forms: print, television, radio, and the Internet. By leveraging different communication channels and technological devices, destinations/attractions can be presented to multiple visitors/tourists (Santos & Silva, 2020).

The web is increasingly central to tourism promotion, with tourists seeking information relevant to destination and tourism product selection online (Buhalis, 2000). This implies that destination tourism portals are no

longer the sole source of information but a part of the vast online information universe. For this reason, they must overcome the approach that exclusively ties them to the information search phase and maximize every potential related to creating value and enhancing the tourist's experience. Tourism portals must become more interactive and engaging to truly become a direct promotion tool for the region, capable of generating positive word of mouth and increasing the destination's visibility and attractiveness. They should allow travellers to connect with the region and tourism operators and share their experiences with other online users (Pencarelli *et al*., 2015).

In the tourism sector and the service economy, the active involvement of the customer in co-design, co-production, and value-sharing activities is a long-established process. Network technologies, widely accessible today, significantly accelerate this process, benefiting from the fact that communication between producers and consumers in the tourism sector is facilitated by their relative proximity regarding technologies, language, strategies, and culture (Pencarelli *et al*., 2015). The tourism sector is evolving with the development and dissemination of web 2.0 technologies. For this reason, it is helpful to understand how social networks (that permit sharing, planning and customers and stakeholders' participation in value creation) are changing the marketing processes of small businesses. This article investigates the adoption and utilization of Web 2.0 in small hotels in an Italian seaside destination. The research was conducted through a qualitative analysis of 8 case studies selected according to their on-line reputation defined by a specific indicator (INOH). The multicase study analysis allows us to investigate the impact of Web 2.0 on the marketing processes of small business hotels, with particular attention to the role played by the entrepreneur. He adopts an entrepreneurial marketing approach that involves the use of social media, even in cases when he does not master the technology. Entrepreneurs' instinct, intuition and social skills allow them to use Web 2.0 to manage marketing processes according to a strategic and holistic perspective, although often non-systematic and unprofessional. Therefore, it could be argued that there are many opportunities for improvement in the use of web 2.0 in the marketing processes of small hotels (Pencarelli *et al*., 2015).

3.4. Key Elements in Destination Communication Analysis

To thoroughly analyze communication effectiveness across various tourist destinations, it is crucial to adopt a model that integrates both digital and traditional dimensions, referred to as Through the Line (TTL). Within this framework, several key aspects can be explored.

The first crucial aspect is Digital Communication, which includes the evaluation of the online presence through official websites, social media, apps and other digital channels. Analyzing content quality, user interaction, and information updates is crucial to ensure an effective online presence. At the same time, traditional communication through channels such as print, television and radio can be examined by evaluating traditional advertising strategies, press articles and promotional campaigns, focusing on the impact and effectiveness of these channels in tourism promotion. Additional aspects include storytelling used in both digital and traditional media, local stakeholder engagement through both modes of communication, sustainability and social responsibility communicated through both channels, both digital and traditional partnerships and collaborations, the use of innovative technologies in both contexts, online and offline visitor feedback, enhancement of cultural heritage, and multicultural representation in both digital and traditional media, and, finally, practical information and available services evaluated in both communicative contexts. An integrated approach that considers both digital and traditional communication certainly provides a more complete and synergistic view of the communication strategies adopted by tourist destinations.

In any case, it is worth considering that global digitalization has also included significant changes in traditional marketing activities for tourist destinations. Sending advertising material by post, direct mail, TV commercials, and spaces in magazines and newspapers gives way to e-mails, newsletters, viral videos, and online advertisements. Thus, the online communication medium offers new opportunities for more dynamic user engagement, where the interaction and contribution of the user through the content he creates are fundamental for constructing an effective communication model. This new model shows that travellers perceive user-generated content (UGC) as more reliable than information provided by traditional marketers, indicating that user-generated content plays an increasingly important role in shaping travel decisions (Elliot, 2012).

Many DMOs have incorporated eCommerce on their website. They sell products and services related to the destination, from tickets for tours hotel reservations, to gadgets and merchandise that contribute to brand awareness. On the other hand, some destinations show a particular interest in virtual reality and its possible implications in the context of marketing by exploring virtual 3D technologies and their impact on visitor behaviour towards a destination before, during and after the trip.

The profound transformation of the tourism industry driven by new technologies is reshaping traditional communication, which is being compelled to reconsider its language, narrative, and channel strategies. Even

more significantly, it revolutionises unconventional communication, where the web emerges as the true protagonist.

In the context of global digitalization, the creation and offer of new products and the way of promoting them are changing, but the visitor experience is also changing. Tourism destinations must be ready to embrace a change that was already announced at the dawn of the growth of web 2.0 and social media a few decades ago.

The increasing adoption of 5G technology globally is driving the growth of the social media industry, and destinations will need to continually change their methods to keep up with social media platforms and make the most of this growth rate. Note that 77% of companies use social media to reach customers; it is clear how new technologies are preparing for an increasingly digital business landscape.

For marketers, it is important to recognize the impact of these tools and the peculiarities that come with this critical and constant growth, using them as an effective tool to engage the target audience.

In 2022, the social media app market is estimated at $49.09 billion, which is expected to grow tremendously. According to Forbes, there are 4.9 billion social media users worldwide; this number is expected to increase and reach around 5.85 billion users by 2027[4].

According to social media use statistics, the average person spends about 145 minutes on the internet daily, while Americans spend an average of 2 hours and 7 minutes daily. As a result, language also changes; Short videos are the most popular type of content on social media. Short videos (usually less than a minute) and authenticity triumph on social media, attracting the attention of 66% of consumers. These short-form videos are 2.5 times more engaging than longer ones, so they are engaging and allow for viral spread. In addition, 34% of customers believe the shorter video is more authentic. 50% of Millennials generally rely on product recommendations on social media, while 38% rely on their favourite celebrities precisely because, as stated by 88%, they communicate sincerity and authenticity[5]. 99% of people access social media via tablet or smartphone, and 78% only use phones. Only 1.32% of desktop social media users show how important it is to focus on mobile strategies. The use of social media shows a variety of age ranges. 81% of people between the ages of 30 and 49 are actively engaged in social media, while 84% of people between the ages of 18 and 29 use at least one platform. Surprisingly, this trend continues in older age

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4. *www.forbes.com/advisor/business/social-media-statistics/#source*.
5. Morning Consult, elaboration, *www.forbes.com/advisor/business/social-media-statistics/#source*.

groups as well. It is present for 73% of people between 50 and 64 and 45% of people over 65.

Not only has tourism gone digital, but, of course, tourists have, too. For them, travel has become even more digital after the advent of the pandemic thanks to the acceleration in the adoption of further innovative solutions, as we have just seen in step with global digitalization. It can be said that the journey is also increasingly digital in all its phases:

- Inspiring: by searching for information on search engines.
- In the pre-trip phase: i.e. through booking and purchase accommodation and transportation services.
- Activities and services available during the trip: experiences, mobility.
- Post-trip in which experience and sharing are essential to prolong the memory.

The digital tourist experience, therefore, encompasses a variety of channels, including online and physical ones, but the use of the Internet is the most important element at all stages, from the moment of inspiration to the return home.

4

Research Project

This first part of the research project will focus on analysing the digital communication of the main Sardinian cities with a tourist vocation to understand the models adopted and identify the most effective communication trends and patterns and, at the same time, any element of innovation. This analysis will be carried out through a benchmarking process with national and international tourist destinations that look towards enhancing culture and sustainability. In addition, we will examine the possible integration of technological elements in communication promotion that allow destinations to present themselves as innovative and cutting-edge. Destinations with dedicated tourism channels will be considered, not those that integrate tourist communications into municipal communications activities. The cities considered at national and international levels are cities that, since 2022, have distinguished themselves for virtuous projects in the fields of accessibility, digitalization, sustainability, and creative activities in cultural heritage.

The combined analysis will provide an overview of the effectiveness of digital communication of tourist destinations and their level of involvement with their target audience, allowing them to identify areas for improvement and develop more targeted strategies to engage the online audience. The following research aims to observe the context from the point of view of the cutting-edge analysis of digital communication models applied by destinations through the following Main dimensions and indicators (Table 1).

Table 1. Dimension & Indicators. Author's elaboration

Contest	Dimensions	Indicators
Digital communication in Sardinia's tourist destinations and Benchmark with international destinations	Website	• Design • Images • Video • Informations • Sustainability • Link Social Network • Link App • Link Other Services • AV/VR/AR • Interactive Chatbox
	Social Media Networks	• Followers • Images • Texts • Video • Reels • UGC • Sustainability • Link App • Link Other Services • Post Frequency (week) • Engagement Rate

1. *Official Destination website analysis*
   ◦ *Design and usability*: visual appearance and usability of the site. Attractive design and intuitive navigation are key to a positive user experience.
   ◦ *Informative content:* completeness and relevance of the information provided. The presence of details on attractions, events, tourist services, and information and communication activities on practices and aspects of sustainability. Presence of multimedia content, virtual tours and/or other interactive tools.
   ◦ *Integration*: with social media profiles, booking channels of tourist services, chatbox.
   ◦ *Mobile version*: quality navigation of the website from mobile devices, considering the increasing importance of access from smartphones and tablets.
2. *Analysis of presence and communication on social media*
   ◦ *Activity and frequency:* frequency of publications and activity on social media through a sample period of one week. Active presence contributes to public engagement.
   ◦ *Informative-visual content*: typology of the shared content, giving particular attention to the presence and quality of texts, photos, videos and other visual elements that capture attention. Presence and quality of photo galleries and videos that show the destination captivatingly.

- *User engagement and UGC*: user engagement through likes, comments and sharing of a sample week. And the use of user-generated content (UGC). Online interaction reflects the effectiveness of communication.
- *Links to tourist services*: integration in the site or social profiles of direct links to booking services for accommodation, tours, restaurants, or other tourist services.
- *Communication on sustainability*: content relating to the commitment or willingness to raise sustainability awareness.
- *Communication of the official app*: verification of the presence of communication-related to the app (where present).

4.1. Research Objectives and Methodology

- *Objectives*. The research project aims to explore the elements of innovation and digitalization in the communication models of tourist destinations, mainly in Sardinia, focusing on digital communication. In particular, the focus is on analysing the official website and the presence on social media of tourist destinations to identify best practices and areas for improvement for effective and sustainable digital communication with national and international benchmarking.
- *Methodology.* The methodological approach adopted in the first phase, the mapping and sampling of Sardinian tourist destinations on the one hand and national and international on the other, to analyse in the second phase, the state-of-the-art communication models in Sardinia and then through a benchmark activity transfer in a third phase the elements that characterize the good practices for the development of effective communication models in Sardinian destinations.

At the regional level, the first three selected destinations (Cagliari, Budoni, Arzachena) are in the DMO Italiane section of the Enit Italia website. The others were chosen for the completeness of geographical coverage of the island (Olbia, Sant'Antioco, Villasimius). Nationally and internationally, the destinations considered among the "best practices destinations" of the competition "European Capital of Smart Tourism" of 2022 and 2023 and "The European Green Pioneer of Smart Tourism" have been selected for 2024 launched by the European Commission. The candidate cities are rewarded in four categories that assess their commitment and achievements in the specific field: accessibility, sustainability, digitalization, cultural heritage, and creativity. For consistency with the research focus, we decided

to focus mainly on virtuous destinations in projects concerning sustainability and cultural heritage and creativity (second, third and fourth category) a priori, assuming that accessibility is already part of a sustainable model of destinations on which innovation trends are based.

To study the digital communication models of each destination, we have identified two main dimensions: Communication on the destination's official website and communication transmitted through the destination's official social networks. For each of these two variables, we have selected indicators that observe the presence and quality of content (focusing on sustainability and digitalization), can tell the destination and involve the target audience.

4.2. Data Collection

To analyze the digital communication models of some tourist destinations in Sardinia and implement a benchmark activity with other national and international destinations, the first step of the research has included the collection of two samples as follows.

Table 2. Sample I Regional Destinations. Author's elaboration

Sardinian Destinations	Regional geographical coverage
Cagliari	South
Arzachena	North-East
Budoni	North-East
Olbia	North-East
Sant'Antioco	South-East
Villasimius	South-West

The first sample selects Sardinia's tourist towns based on their presence on the site Enit. In the section DMO Italiane (Cagliari, Arzachena, Budoni) and for completion according to a logic of geographical coverage.

The second sample, which is fundamental for the benchmark, was selected based on the good practices that destinations have implemented since 2022. Destinations that have stood out for their projects in the broader field of sustainability, as documented in the 2022 and 2023 reports of the European "European Capital of Smart Tourism" competition, within the macro-categories of Accessibility, Sustainability, Digitalization, Cultural Heritage, and Creativity.

Table 3. Sample II. National and International Destinations. Author's Elaboration

Italian & International Destinations	Nation	Best Practices Categories (2022)	Best Practices Category (2023)
Florence: Feel Florence	Italy	Accessibility, Sustainability, Digitalization, Cultural Heritage & Creativity	–
Florence: Destination Florence	Italy		
Padua	Italy	Accessibility, Digitalization	Accessibility, Sustainability, Digitalization, Cultural Heritage & Creativity
Ravenna	Italy	Accessibility, Digitalization	–
Palermo	Italy	–	Accessibility, Sustainability, Digitalization, Cultural Heritage & Creativity
Copenaghen	Denmark	Sustainability, Digitalization, Cultural Heritage & Creativity	–
Bordeaux	France	Accessibility, Sustainability, Digitalization, Cultural Heritage & Creativity	Accessibility, Sustainability, Digitalization, Cultural Heritage & Creativity
Valencia	Spain	Accessibility, Sustainability, Digitalization, Cultural Heritage & Creativity	–
Dublin	Ireland	Accessibility, Sustainability, Digitalization, Cultural Heritage & Creativity	–
Karlsrhue	Germany	Accessibility, Sustainability, Digitalization, Cultural Heritage & Creativity	–
Alba Iulia	Romania	Sustainability, Digitalization, Cultural Heritage & Creativity	–
Dubrovnik	Croatia	Sustainability, Digitalization, Cultural Heritage & Creativity	–
Lubljana	Slovenia	Accessibility, Digitalization, Cultural Heritage & Creativity	–

Once we have outlined the context of the research, we analyze the indicators of two macro-dimensions of digital communication of the destination: analysis of communication on the website and analysis of communication on social networks.

The indicators selected reflect different aspects of the complexity of digital communication, from the quality of the content conveyed to the involvement of users and the presence of innovative content, institutional channels for tourism use only.

4.3. Dimensions and Indicators

The *websites dimensions* of the destinations were reached through the Google search engine through these keywords:

- City name/destination + tourism.
- City name + official tourism website.
- In some cases: Visit + city name (often the acronym "Visit" is relative to unofficial websites but managed by private individuals/stakeholders, however complementary to the primary communication activity).

As for the analysis of the website, it is a descriptive analysis of quality origin that starts from a diagram and a list of elements (indicators) thought it appropriate to collect for a more reliable image.

Table 4. Indicators used in Website analysis. Author's elaboration

Destinations Name	Design	Pictures	Video	Informations	Sustainabilty	Link Social Network	Link App	Link to Other Services	AI/VR/AR	Interactive Chatbox

These indicators will help describe the complexity of communication implemented by destinations in the website's size. The quality of the design, the published contents, the integration with other services in an integrated communication perspective, the use of new technologies for promotion. For each indicator, a value (index) will be established describing the existence or absence of that concept, a low level, a medium level, or an excellent level.

For the size of the *social network dimension*, the data collection has been implemented as follows: Most of the pages of social networks have been reached through the link on the destination's website. In some cases, and for a more accurate search, through the Google search engine with the following sequences:

- Destination name + tourism + social network name.
- Destination name + tourism + official + social network name.
- Visit + destination name + social network name.

The following table summarizes the qualitative and quantum analysis of digital communication models based on the observation of social media through specific indicators, three quantitative indicators (Followers, Post frequency, ER) and eight qualitative indicators (Image, Text, Video, Reels, UGC, Sustainability, App, Link to other services).

Table 5. Indicators used in Social Media Networks analysis. Author's elaboration

Social Media dimensions	Followers	Image	Text	Video	Reels	UGC	Sustainability	App	Link other services	Posts per week	ER % sample week
FB											
Instagram											
Twitter											
YouTube											
LinkedIn											
TikTok											
Pinterest											
Vimeo											

The dimensions represent the digital channels that destinations could use. So, the most common digital communication channels, especially Facebook and Instagram, represent the social networks on which we will focus as we will see are more used.

The indicators analyzed are 11, which investigate how active destinations are in communication and how they communicate with the target. These are essential variables that emphasize the quality level of digital communication and any innovative elements in the sector. The first 9 collect the following data: total number of followers of the page (Followers), presence and quality of visual content, texts, videos and images, presence of videos and reels (interactive videos), the use by the destination of user-generated content (User Generated Content). Communication content regarding sustainability, related to the destination app, and the link (or sometimes tag) to other tourist services is also observed. The last two variables (Average frequency) indicate the commitment of the destination's communication and its ability to involve and analyze the frequency of publication in a sample week ranging from 21 to 27 August 2023. The average engagement rate is given by the ratio between the number of interactions and the number of followers, and it will then be calculated manually for each social network through the

formula listed below (manually calculated for Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter):

$$ER = [(Likes + Comments) / Posts] / Followers \cdot 100\%[1]$$

4.4. Assessment Levels

Assigning assessment levels provides a precise scale for interpreting the quality of digital communication at each destination for each indicator inserted in the website size (Design, Image, Video, Information, Sustainability; Social Network Links, Link Destination App, Links to other services, presence of AV, VR, AR, Interactive Chatbox) and for the 9 Social Media Network size indicators. In both cases, each of the specific characteristics of the indicator is analysed as they may influence how destinations communicate. The value "total score" represents the sum of all indicators that are measured through a numerical scale ranging from zero to 3 as follows:

Table 6. The scale of values and assessment. Author's elaboration

Description	Value
Absent or non interpretable	0
Low level of presence/visibility/quality	1
Medium level of presence/visibility/quality	2
High level of presence/visibility/quality	3

The last two indicators of the Level of Social Media communication dimension are Post Frequency (Posts per week) and Engagement rate. They are measured as follows:

The analysis on the frequency of publication and involvement (% ER) is carried out through the observation of a sample period of one week from 21 August 2023 to 27 August 2023. Engagement rate benchmarks for different social media provide a framework for evaluating destination performance against industry standards.

According to an August 2022 guide published by Adobe Express regarding social media engagement rates. According to industry experts, a reasonable engagement rate for big brands like Coca-Cola on social media on Facebook can be as little as 1% or 2%. Small businesses should aim for a 5% engagement rate to maximise social media and create strong brand

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1. *blog.hootsuite.com/calculate-engagement-rate/*.

awareness. On Instagram, engagement rates are higher than on Twitter (X), Facebook, and LinkedIn because of the nature of content and publishable format (images). About 2% is considered a reasonable 3% involvement rate, which is excellent. For Twitter, however, rates tend to be lower than 0.5%, which is a good engagement rate for X, while anything over 1% is great. Small businesses with a committed track record should aim for a consistently higher involvement rate than 1%. LinkedIn can engage and increase awareness more than anything else at the corporate level and less for destinations. A reasonable LinkedIn engagement rate is about 2%. However, this can go up to 5 or 6%, depending on the type of content and consistency between the subject and channel[2].

However, the benchmarks proposed by the Social Media Industry Benchmark Report, published on February 21, 2023, will be used for a more targeted analysis of the industry references. The analysed travel industry companies had an active presence on Facebook, Instagram, TikTok, and Twitter in January 2022. Facebook fans count between 25,000 and 1,000,000, and a minimum of Instagram, TikTok, and Twitter followers 5,000 to the same date. The median performance of the selected companies was used to collect the data[3].

Table 7. Evaluation of engagement in the travel industry. Elaboration of the author from 2023 Social Media Industry Benchmark Report, Rival IQ

Facebook		Instagram		Twitter		Tik Tok	
Post per Week	ER%	Post per Week	ER%	Post per Week	ER%	Post per Week	ER%
3.36	0.088%	3.44	0.465%	1.82	0.032%	1.5	7.43%

4.5. Expected Results

The methodological approach and detailed analysis of digital communications through the two main dimensions of websites and social networks aim to provide a comprehensive overview of the communication strategies of tourist destinations. On the other hand, the relative indicators aim to discover which levers make the muffled communication model the most effective and replicable one. The results of this analysis will help identify best practices and outline ways to improve the effectiveness and sustainability of digital communication in tourist destinations.

2. *www.adobe.com/express/learn//blog/what-is-good-social-media-engagement-rate*.
3. Rival IQ, 2023.

ANALYSIS

5.1. Sardinian Destinations Analysis

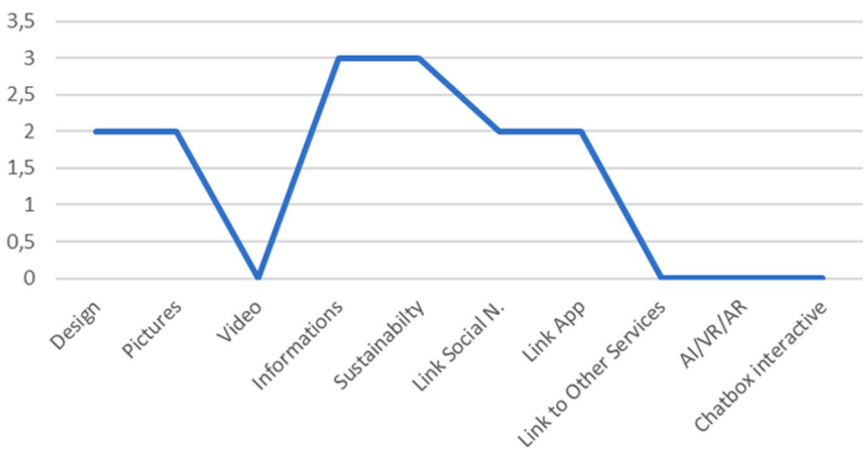### 5.1.1. Cagliari

Cagliari, with its 147,576 inhabitants (given Istat 2023), is the capital of Sardinia, which in 2022 recorded several arrivals of 322,837 and tourist presences of 771,330, with a variation of 10.54% and 4.42% respectively in 2019. The city is in the middle of the Mediterranean, overlooking the Gulf of Angels. The district of Castello, with its imposing Cathedral of Santa Maria and the Elephant Tower, recalls the thousand-year history of the destination. With narrow streets and historic squares alternating with lively cafes, restaurants and shops, the city offers a fascinating blend of ancient and modern. Sandy beaches, such as Poetto, provide spectacular sea views and are easily accessible from the city. Cagliari is known for its lively culture and its Mediterranean cuisine. It is one of the three Sardinian cities that Enit (Ente Nazionale Turismo Italiano) inserts as DMO within its website *www.enit.it*.

Official Website Analysis. The tourist portal of the destination: *cagliariturismo. comune.cagliari.it/*. At first impact gives the perception of a municipal site, given the colours and the structure of the graphical interface that strongly recall an institutional communication. The navigation is intuitive and allows you to get full information content about attractions and services easily.

Visible content in the foreground is the communication about its commitment to sustainability, mobility and awareness-raising activities during an ethical and respectful visit to the city. There are maps, multimedia guides and city routes. The icons connecting to the destination's official social networks and the download link to the Cagliari Turismo App are visible. The mobile site's navigation is high-quality, and an interactive popup call for the app download.

Figure 1. Cagliari Website Analysis. Author's elaboration

Social Media Analysis. On social networks, the destination is frequently found on Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter. The destination is present on YouTube, but the last post dates to 7 years ago.

The Facebook page of "Cagliari" has 41,879 followers. The overall visual appearance is rated as high, while text and video content are average. The presence of reels is low, but there are short videos that present a great number of views. UGC (User Generated Content) is good on the public page for several user-generated content. Unlike the website, sustainability and the city's commitment to this theme are not communication subjects. There is also no communication about the target app. The frequency of publication is six posts per week (0.86%), and the average involvement rate is 0.6%.

The Instagram profile of "Cagliari" has 30,600 followers. The visual appearance is rated as high, with text and video content at a good level. The presence of reels is excellent as well, and UGC is high. Communication of the sustainability of the app is non-existent.

The frequency of publication is moderate, with four posts per week, and the profile presents an excellent average rate of involvement of 3.6%.

The Twitter profile of "Cagliari" has 11,450 followers. The visual aspect is at a medium level with video presence, while the text is at a low level. The presence of reels is low but in line with the channel type. The use of UGC (User Generated Content) is at a good level for the channel type. Notification on app and sustainability not received. The frequency of publication is high (0.86), with six posts per weekdays, and the low average involvement rate is 0.1%. The YouTube channel of "Cagliari" has been inactive for 7 years.

In general, the presence of Cagliari on social media, with particular

emphasis on Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter, reflects a good visual strategy and a moderate involvement of users. The lack of activity on YouTube could represent an opportunity for expansion.

*Figure 2. Cagliari Social Media Analysis. Author's elaboration*
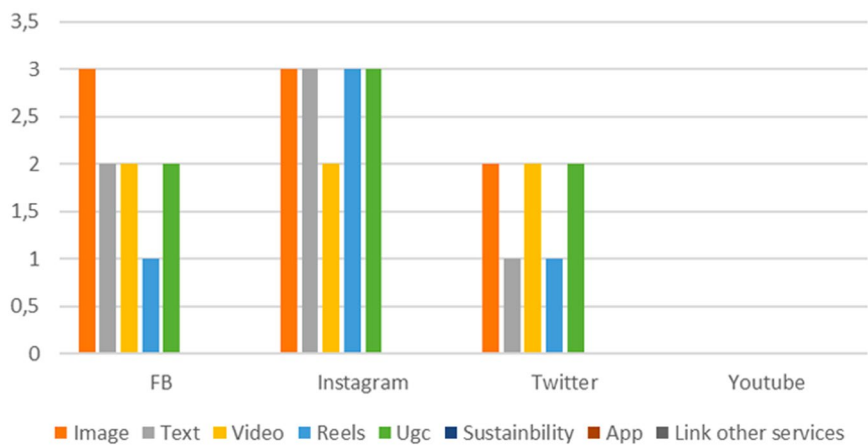
5.1.2. Arzachena

Arzachena is a small town in the northern part of Sardinia. Its 13,362 inhabitants (01/01/2023 – Istat) includes a vast territory, including the Costa Smeralda, known worldwide as a holiday destination for mountain tourists, especially foreigners. In 2022, it was ranked second among the Sardinian municipalities regarding tourist flows, registering 231,770 arrivals and 1,202,744 presences, embracing the numbers of 2019. It is also a city included in the DMO Italiane section of ENIT's website, *www.enit.it*.

Official Website Analysis. The website of the destination (*www.arzachenaturismo.com*) has a good visual appearance thanks to the presence of quality images, it appears complete for general and specific information, with direct links to external services related to museums, sites, overnight tourism services, and catering.

At the top of the page are visible and functional links to the social channels of the destination at the same time, you need to scroll to the end of the site for communication about the presence of the app My Arzachena Turismo, downloadable on both Google Play and App Store good and intuitive navigation from mobile.

*Figure 3. Arzachena Website Analysis. Author's elaboration*
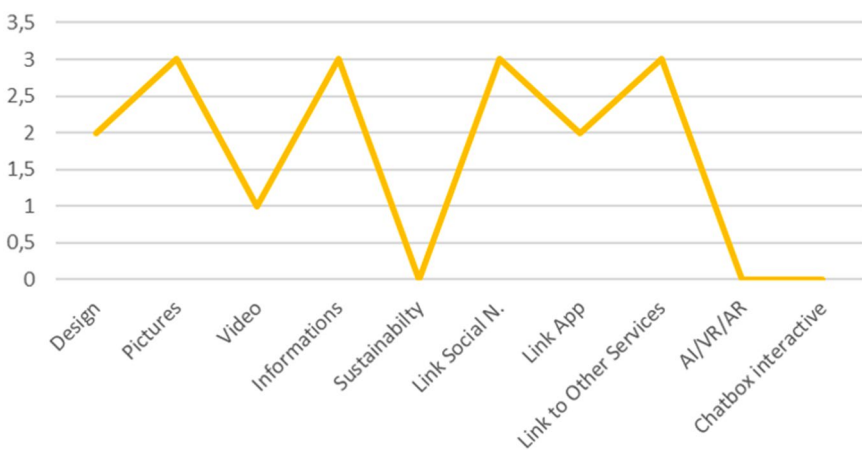
Social Media Analysis. The analysis of the presence and communication on social media is represented as follows: The Facebook page of "Arzachena Turismo" counts 7,540 followers. The visual appearance is rated at an average level – low, as well as textual content and the presence and quality of video; users' participation in the generation of content is low, while communication about the possible app and the commitment to the sustainability of the destination are absent. The frequency of publication is moderate for the sector, with an average of 3 posts per week (of the sample) and an average rate of engagement is 0.2%. The Instagram profile of "Arzachena Turismo" has 3,190 followers.

The visual appearance is rated reasonably, and the gallery presents beautiful images with appropriate text. The presence of video is medium, but the quality is medium-low. User-generated content is often posted. Sustainability is absent, as is communication concerning the app. The frequency of publication is high, with one post every 1 day, and the average involvement rate is 0.4%. The destination is not present on Twitter or LinkedIn. On YouTube, instead, it presents a profile with 301 inscribed "Municipality of Arzachena", where the contents are mainly for tourist purposes and institutional use.

Arzachena has a basic digital presence, with an informative website, good activity on Instagram, and a little bit lower on Facebook. However, there are opportunities for improvement, such as increased evidence for app promotion on the official website and increased activity and engagement on the Facebook page. Absence on Twitter and LinkedIn could be evaluated for wider coverage. Moreover, introducing sustainability communications could enrich the perception of the destination.

*Figure 4. Arzachena Social Media Analysis. Author's elaboration*
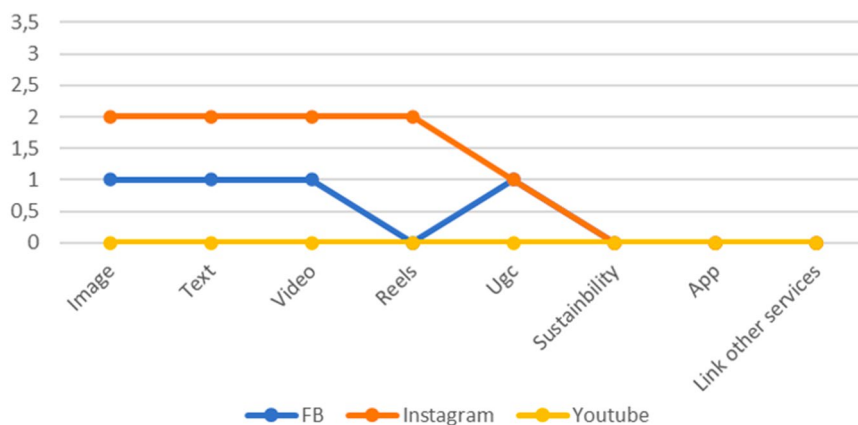
5.1.3. Budoni

Budoni is a town of 5,438 inhabitants (Istat, 2023) located on the north-eastern coast of Sardinia, about 30 km south of Olbia, which in 2022 recorded 93,168 arrivals and 664,236, unfortunately failing to reach the tourist flows of 2019. Until a few decades ago, it had a prevailing economy for agriculture and breeding. However, thanks to its location and appreciated 13 Kilometers from the coast, it has developed a valid tourist offer. It is one of the Sardinian cities included in the Italian DMO section of Enit with the following link to the website.

Official Website Analysis. "Budoni Welcome" is the name of the destination, whose site Budoni *www.guestnet.info/home* has a not very recent design for graphics and navigation of the site. However, there is a good density of information: how to do garbage collection, where to find essential services, and information about events, tours, hotels, and restaurants, as well as related custom images. There are no links to the destination's digital social channels and other sites, and it is unclear who runs the site. There is another portal from the most commercial cut, *www.mybudoni.it*, which has a more modern cut in graphics and design. Also, it is not clear who is managed.

Facebook and Instagram are the only two digital profiles found through the Google search engine and related keywords and respond by name and graphics to the first analyzed website.

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*Figure 5. Budoni Website Analysis. Author's elaboration*
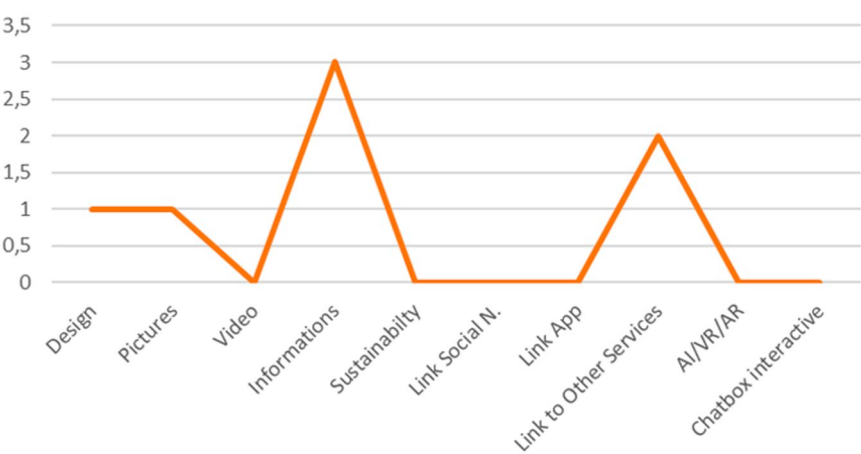
Social Media Analysis. The Facebook page has 24,513 followers. The presence of images is rated at an average level, while text and video content are rated at a low level. Sustainability is absent while the application communication is present, indicating a good level of integration or better communication of external services.

The frequency of publication is low; however, despite the frequency of publication, the average rate of involvement is remarkably high, recording 28,3%, suggesting significant community involvement. The Instagram profile of "Budoni Welcome" has 5,661 followers. Visual appearance is rated at an average level, while textual content is at a low level. The presence of videos is good, but there is a lack of information on sustainability actions and possible apps. The frequency of publication is low, with two posts per week, but the average involvement rate is very high, at 45.8%. The only two posts published on both social networks have a high engagement rate. They are related to an event of national scope and beyond, and usually, when a low frequency of publication matches such high interactions, it is sponsored communications. We do not consider the result reliable because the organic interaction was presumably altered. Twitter, which presented its last activity in 2017, does not consider the variables. YouTube, with 48 subscribers, has little content and is more focused on the pandemic period, but these are also not considered.

Budoni's digital presence shows potential but requires improvement. The clarity in the management of official sites, integrated online communication, and information activities (links to profiles, sites, attractions), the emphasis on sustainability and greater communication coherence could further enhance

the online attractiveness of the destination to broaden the knowledge and reputation of the destination.

*Figure 6. Budoni Social Media Analysis. Author's elaboration*
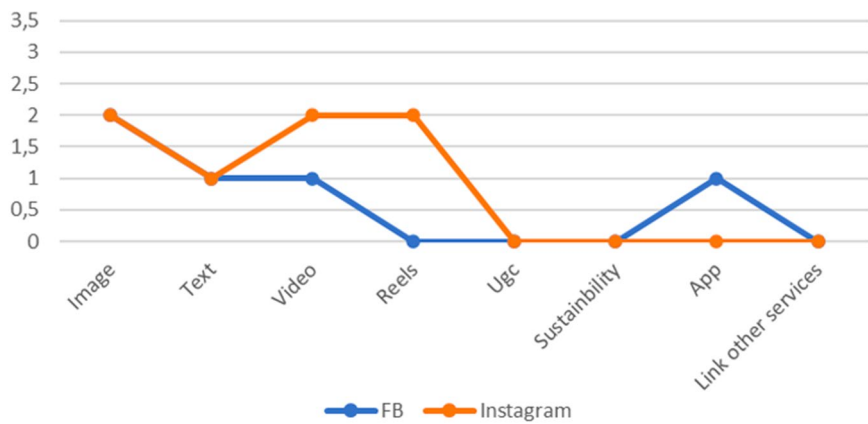
5.1.4. Olbia

Hello Olbia is the name of a tourist destination, a city of 61,032 residents that represents the gateway to Costa Smeralda, with its port and airport experiencing an essential economic and demographic development. The destination has 254,676 arrivals and 822,274 presences, still marking a negative sign of -6.47% and -7.67% of the % change in 2019.

Official Website Analysis. The website *www.helloolbia.com/*, available in five different languages (Italian, English, Spanish, German, and French), has a simple design, intuitive navigation, and good navigation from mobile, except for the display of some images.

There is a good amount of information about sites to visit, events, and transport, and there are mostly external links to the proposed activities. At the bottom of the site (from the laptop), clearly visible on the first screen (from a smartphone), there are links to social networks that represent the destination on digital channels as follows.
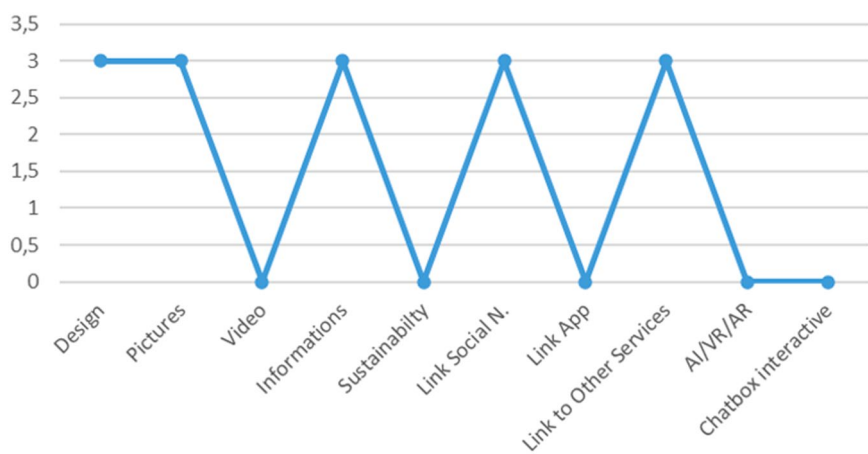
Social Media Analysis. The Facebook page of "Hello Olbia" has 24,943 followers. Visual appearance and textual content are evaluated at a low-level item. The presence of video and reels is at a medium level. The management is probably occasional, and without rules, there seems to be no editorial plan. No user-generated content (UGC) is used. The publication frequency is low, about 1 post per week. And the engagement rate is very low at 0.02%.

Figure 8. Olbia Social Media Analysis. Author's elaboration
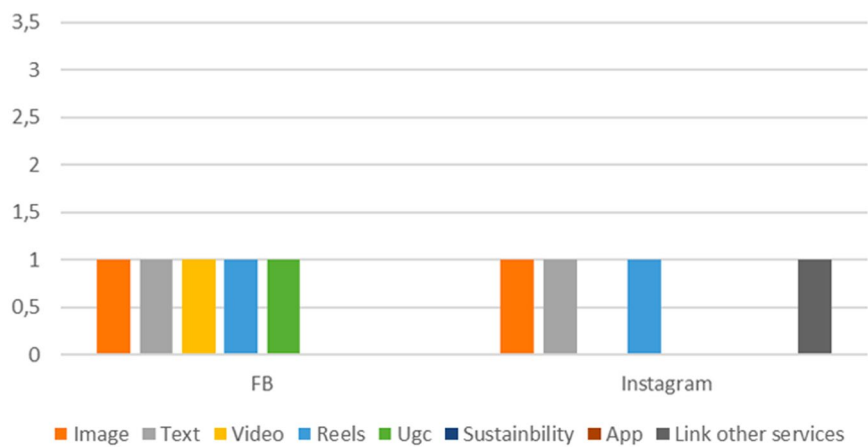
The Instagram profile (not communicated from the leading website but searched from Google) of "Hello Olbia" has 4,771 followers. The visual aspect and the textual contents are evaluated at a minimum level; some images are of quality, and there is likely no consistency in communication or professional management of profiles. There are reels, while few are the UGC. Communication linked to sustainability factors is absent, as is the case with Instagram publication frequency and low engagement rate. The destination does not have LinkedIn and YouTube profiles. The app is not communicated because it is not present for the destination.

Olbia's digital presence shows some disadvantages, such as a lack of consistency in managing social media and low community participation. Improving the quality of the content, implementing an editorial strategy, and communicating more effectively could enhance the online attractiveness of the destination, which already has a tourist portal, which is a good starting point.

5.1.5. Sant'Antioco

The destination, inhabited by 10 573 people, located in southern Sardinia on the homonymous island of Sant'antioco, rises on the ruins of Sulki, one of the oldest cities in the western Mediterranean.

Official Website Analysis. The tourist portal *www.visitsantantioco.info/* has a modern design, which immediately involves a full-screen video of excellent quality.

Figure 9. Sant'Antioco Website Analysis. Author's elaboration
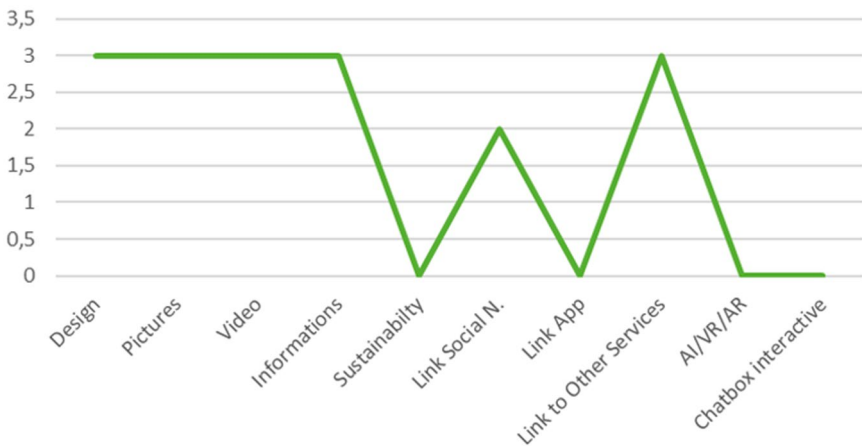
It is a site full of various information, including several proposals guaranteed relative to catering services and hotels, complete with images and contacts in the section quality network. At the bottom of the site are external links to the Social Pages, Facebook, Instagram, Twitter and YouTube, of which active (updated and with frequent activity) only the first two, as we can observe in the following analysis.

Social Media Analysis. The Facebook page of "Visit Sant'Antioco" has 20,008 followers. Visual appearance is rated at an average level, while textual content is at a lower level. There is low presence of videos and reels, but there is user-generated content. Communication about sustainability is absent.

Figure 10. Sant'Antioco Social Media Analysis. Author's elaboration
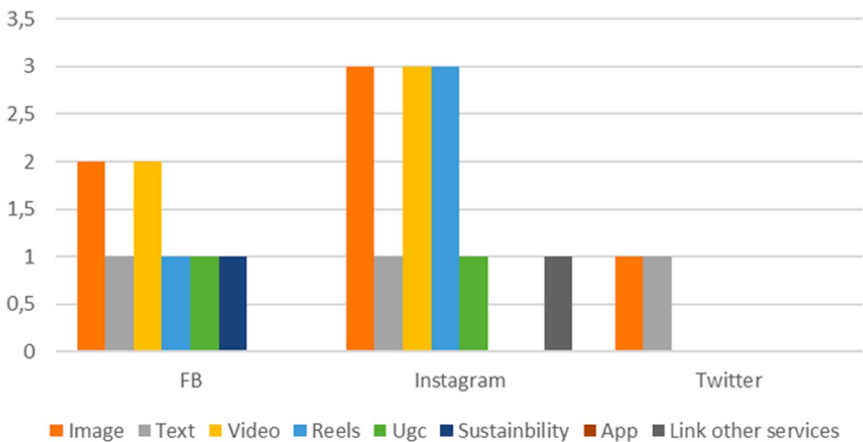
The frequency of publication is quite high, with one post every 1.43 days, but corresponds to an average rate of involvement low (0.2%). The Instagram profile of "Visit Sant'Antioco" has 4,862 followers. The visual aspect is evaluated highly, except for the textual content. The presence of videos and reels is high, and the use of UGC is good. The frequency of publication is high, with a post every 0,57 days, with the risk of compromising the taxed engagements that instead is remarkably high (3,6%). The destination and presence on Twitter and YouTube profiles do not have a publication activity that allows for an appropriate analysis.

Sant'Antioco's digital presence shows strengths, such as the modern design of the site and the effective use of Instagram to engage the community. However, improving the quality of content on Facebook, increasing

communication on sustainability, and enabling a more consistent presence on Twitter and YouTube could further enhance the potential of the online attractiveness of the destination through greater involvement of potential visitors.

5.1.6. Villasimius

Villasimius is a resort located on the southern coast of Sardinia, Italy, With 3674[1] inhabitants (2023). It is the sixth city in Sardinia regarding the number of visitors. In 2022, it recorded 137,926 arrivals and 753,210 presences, registering a positive trend of 13.08% (arrivals) and 10.94% (presences) compared to 2019. It is a popular tourist destination because it offers a combination of natural beauty, relaxation opportunities for sporting activities, and nightlife, making it a popular destination for those looking to go on a beach holiday in a picturesque setting.

Official Website Analysis. Villasimius's tourist portal presents a striking and engaging design.

*Figure 11. Villasimius Website Analysis. Author's elaboration*
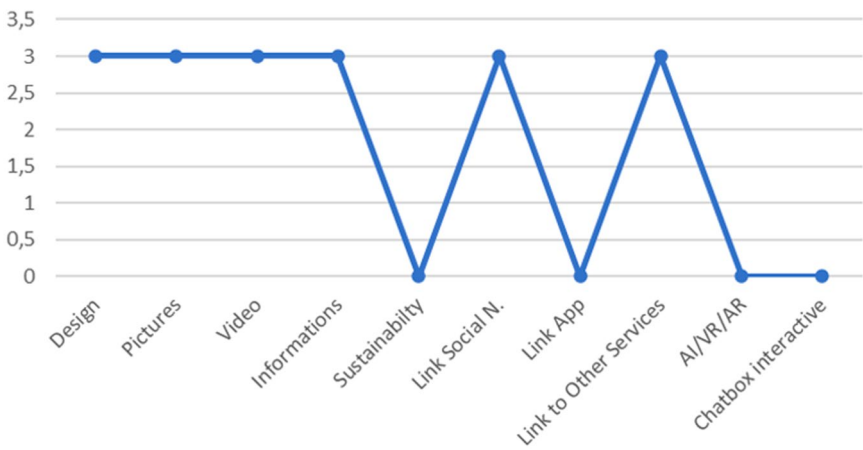
The navigation is dynamic and interactive with different stimuli in motion, the images are of good quality, and it is a site full of information on places to visit, experiences, accommodation and catering with related links.

1. *www.demo.istat.it/app/?i=D7B*, *Provisional Data*, 2023.

There seems to be no communication on sustainability or awareness-raising and no interactive chat box for immediate communication. The destination does not have a touristic app.

Social Media Analysis. The Villasimius Turismo page on Facebook has 11,970 followers. The presence of images, text, video, reels and UGC is evaluated at a low level, indicating essential digital communication. If the application is absent, some communications are related to the town's environmental sustainability. The frequency of publication is low, with two posts per week. However, the average engagement rate is remarkable, recording 0.9% and suggesting good community involvement.

Figure 12. Villasimius Social Media Analysis. Author's elaboration
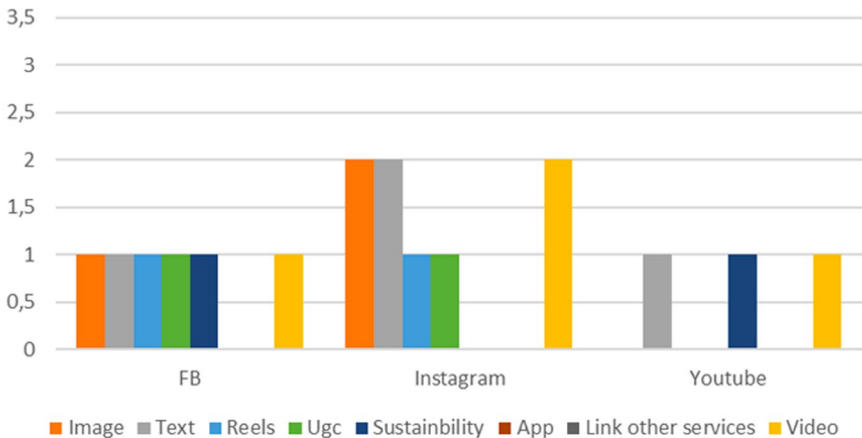
Villasimius Turismo's profile on Instagram has 6,658 followers. Visual appearance and textual content are evaluated at an average level. The presence of video and reels is at a medium level; present in the section, reels advert content that, by length and type, appears to have more video. The frequency of publication is moderate, with one post every 1.14 days. The average rate of involvement is 0.2%, indicating relatively low involvement. The destination is not present on Twitter and LinkedIn; while the YouTube channel has 306 followers, the frequency of publication is sporadic, with the last date being three years ago.

Villasimius' digital presence reflects a remarkable interaction on the Facebook platform and a moderate presence on Instagram. The official website, with intuitive navigation, attractive design, and rich information, shows some shortcomings in communication on sustainability and the

absence of an interactive chat box for immediate communication. The analysis shows that the absence of Twitter and LinkedIn could represent an opportunity for expansion to reach and engage a wider audience. In addition, the lack of activity on YouTube over the past three years indicates an area that could be re-evaluated to exploit the potential of video platforms. However, improvements in sustainability communication could further enrich the overall digital experience and underline the local efforts to promote responsible tourism.

5.2. Italians and International Destinations Analysis

5.2.1. Florence

In the post-pandemic period, in the spring of 2021, the Creative Tourism Network awarded Florence as the best creative destination in Italy, with a new vision of tourism and an approach oriented towards the traveller, showing special attention to sustainable and accessible tourism, enhancing the material and intangible cultural heritage, therefore also artisans, arts and knowledge, at the heart of this model of creative development.

Florence is a destination with a strong positioning of cities of art and culture; in 2022, it registered about 7.4 million visitors +7%, while remaining below the 2019 figure, ranking as the fourth most visited national city after Rome, Venice and Milan.

Florence presents two online destination identities: an official of the City of Florence identified with the name "Feel Florence", whose Facebook profile has a creation date that dates to 2010, and another Destination Florence managed by Destination Florence Convention & Visitors Bureau, with Facebook profile creation date in 2016 identified as Digital Hub, and present on the Enit Italia Website as official DMO.

5.2.1.1. Feel Florence

Official Website Analysis. The destination presents the website feel Florence. It represents the official channel of the destination in terms of communication, bringing back to a broad concept of living the city declined in a density of detailed information on accessibility to sites of interest for people with disabilities, through an attractive and intuitive design.

The information is, therefore, complete, and the site is perfectly usable from mobile. There is a perfect integration with the app, so much so that while browsing, a popup offers the download with a clear call to action:

"Organize your trip" and then "Florence always with you" that exposes the possibility of using the app, to customize your experience already at home but especially with the second sentence, also use onsite. Through precise and careful profiling, the app offers itineraries and experiences based on age, tastes and interests, and type of travel. Multimedia content, digital brochures, videos, catalogues and guides allow you to enter (forecast) and stay (post-trip) in contact with the destination through visitor involvement.

Figure 13. Feel Florence Website Analysis. Author's elaboration

Social Media Analysis. The destination is present on Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, and YouTube. The activity and frequency of publication are constant, with a maximum frequency of publication on the Twitter channel. The images published are high-quality texts well written, with professional and sophisticated language and a tone of voice that recalls the action. There are videos with added text, good quality and involvement.

The Facebook page of "Feel Florence" boasts 24,368 followers. The visual appearance and textual content are evaluated at a high level. Communication on sustainability-related actions seems to be lacking, as does user-generated content. The reels have low content, replaced by less dynamic videos and a more traditional tone. The frequency of publication is good, with six posts per week, and the average involvement rate is 0.2%. The Instagram profile of "Feel Florence" has 8,292 followers. The visual appearance is rated at a high level, with text content at a medium level. Sustainability is at a low level, while Reels and UGC are absent. Integration with other services is rated at a reasonable level. The frequency of publication is moderate, with two posts per week and an average involvement rate of 0.8%. The Twitter

profile of "Feel Florence" has 8,447 followers. Visual appearance, text and video content are rated at a high level, Sustainability Reels and UGC are absent, while integration with other services is rated at a medium level. The frequency of publication is high, with a post-Canale YouTube "Feel Florence" that has 107 followers, a channel not so much used; the last publication dates back to about March 2023.

Figure 14. Feel Florence Social Media Analysis. Author's elaboration
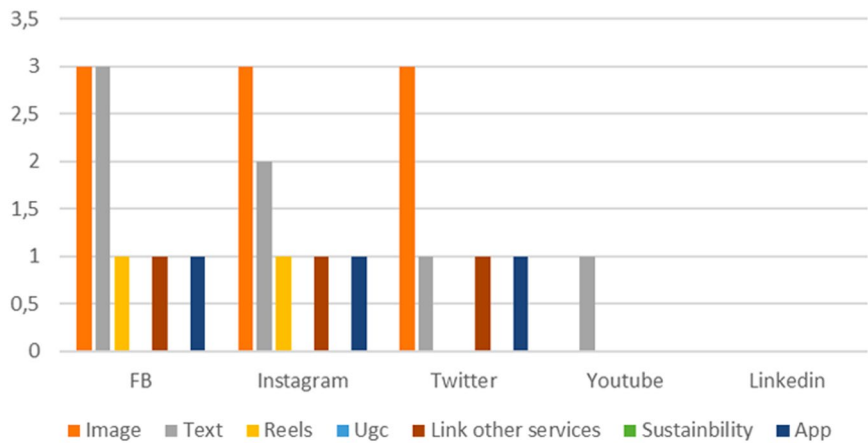
The digital presence of "Feel Florence" emerges as a well-structured model, with the official website that stands out for its completeness and ease of navigation. The explicit integration with the app provides a synergistic experience for visitors, allowing for detailed travel planning and continuous engagement during the visit. The contents linked to the sustainability of the city and its commitment are exhaustive and of quality, representing an element of innovation in the communication model used. On social media, the Facebook page and Instagram account show significant commitment. However, the absence of Reels and UGC could be an opportunity to enrich the digital narrative further and engage the community more deeply. However, the strong publication frequency and high quality of content on Facebook indicate a well-structured digital strategy. The presence on Twitter is distinguished by its high frequency of publication, maintaining a professional and sophisticated tone of voice. Although YouTube shows a less active presence, it could represent an area of future development by producing more recent video content.

In summary, "Feel Florence" has built a strong digital identity, but

exploring new opportunities like Reels, UGC on Instagram and increased activity on YouTube could further expand community engagement and consolidate Florence's position as a leading destination.

5.2.1.2. Destination Florence

Official Website Analysis. The site *destinationflorence.com* is supported by the municipality and by a partner of the destination, Destination Florence Convention & Visitors Bureau.

It's a marketplace that looks like a destination website where you can buy the city's tourist services, such as museum entrance and theatre shows, tours, hotel stays and much more. The information is detailed and accurate, and the usability from mobile is high. Visiting the site, a popup proposes that people subscribe to the monthly newsletters to be updated on events and various information.

Figure 15. Destination Florence Website Analysis. Author's elaboration
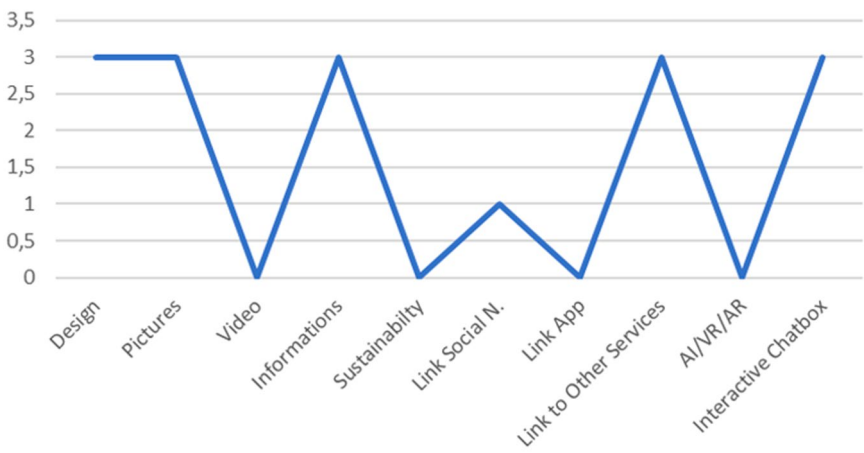
Social Media Analysis. A fresh and modern language is used on Instagram and Facebook, a dynamic alternation between texts, videos, images, and reels that communicate interactively a Florence to visit and live. YouTube, instead, is not updated, and the Twitter profile offers a language like that of Instagram, without video but with the component images and text and a strong presence of hashtags.

Images, videos, and texts are of high quality and involvement. The text contents are in English and have tags. The frequency of publication and the types of content suggest that there is a well-made editorial plan.
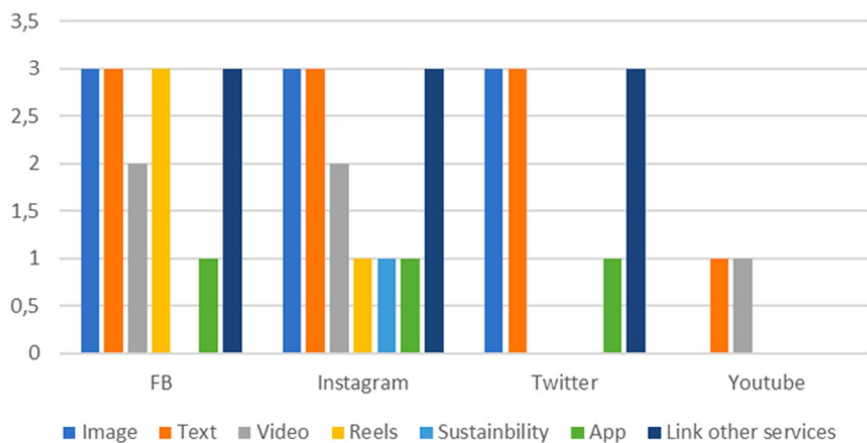
Destination Florence shows a sizeable follower base on Facebook and Instagram, with 94,913 followers and 12,000 on Instagram, followed by 732 on Twitter and 58 on YouTube; the destination presents a diverse digital presence on different platforms. The visual appearance is a distinctive feature on all platforms. On Facebook, Instagram, and even Twitter, the presence of images and videos is rated as high-level, indicating a significant commitment to creating eye-catching visual content. However, on YouTube, the absence of recent visual content represents an opportunity for expansion. Textual content on Facebook, Instagram and Twitter is rated as high-level, indicating a commitment to creating engaging messages and descriptions. However, the absence of text on YouTube suggests more than a more intense frequency of publication, a potential area for improvement in the description and contextualization of videos. The presence of Reels, though low on Instagram and Facebook, suggests the increased use of this engaging format. There is no user-generated content; the communication about sustainability belongs to Instagram. There is good link action and integration with complementary services through links and tags. The frequency of publication on Facebook and Instagram is good compared to the average number of destinations, with six and five posts per week, respectively. The average engagement rate on Facebook is 0.9%, while on Instagram it is 1.5%. These engagement rates align with expectations and indicate a satisfactory interaction with the community.

Destination Florence has a strong online presence through the destinationflorence.com website and numerous social media channels. The online marketplace offers in-depth information about tourist attractions and

services such as guided tours and hotel stays. Social media communication, particularly on Facebook and Instagram, is characterized by innovative and contemporary language combined with high-quality visual content, such as videos and Reels.

Destination Florence has built a solid follower base with over 94,913 on Facebook and 12,000 on Instagram. With 0.9% engagement on Facebook and 1.5% on Instagram, the regular posting frequency shows positive community interaction.

5.2.2. Padua

Padua is a city in the north-east of Italy. It is one of the oldest cities in the country, with a rich history and monuments such as the Basilica of Sant'Antonio and the Scrovegni Chapel. In addition, the city is known for its university, founded in 1222, which helped a lot of scientific and cultural progress over the centuries. Padua is a fascinating place to visit because of the lively atmosphere, the ancient arcades, and the crowded squares.

It's a destination inserted by Enit in its information section of the Italian DMO on the website *www.enit.it*. 206.540 inhabitants populate it, and in 2022, it saw well over 2130,000 visitors.

Official Website Analysis. The destination site called "Tourism Padua" has a basic design not immediate impact. However, there are good-quality videos and images.

Figure 17. Padua Website Analysis. Author's elaboration
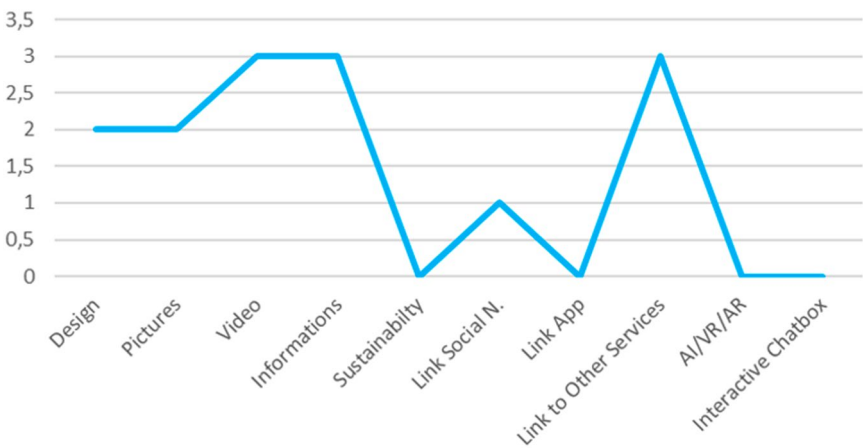
An interactive icon repeatedly invites you to book; clicking on it opens a new window that presents the destination marketplace, a booking section with the possibility to book hotels directly, restaurants, tours and experiences and with all links and contacts. There are links to the destination's social channels. On Facebook, the images appear "branded" with a blue frame that gives the impression of very institutional communication, dampening emotionality and involvement.

Social Media Analysis. Turismo Padova presents a digital presence with a decent Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, and YouTube follower base. With 25,099 followers on Facebook, 2,656 on Instagram, 440 on Twitter, 589 on YouTube and 129 on LinkedIn, the destination has a diversification of digital presence on different platforms, loves in merited to the activity we must emphasize the active presence on the two main channels Facebook and Instagram.

Figure 18. Padua Social Media Analysis. Author's elaboration
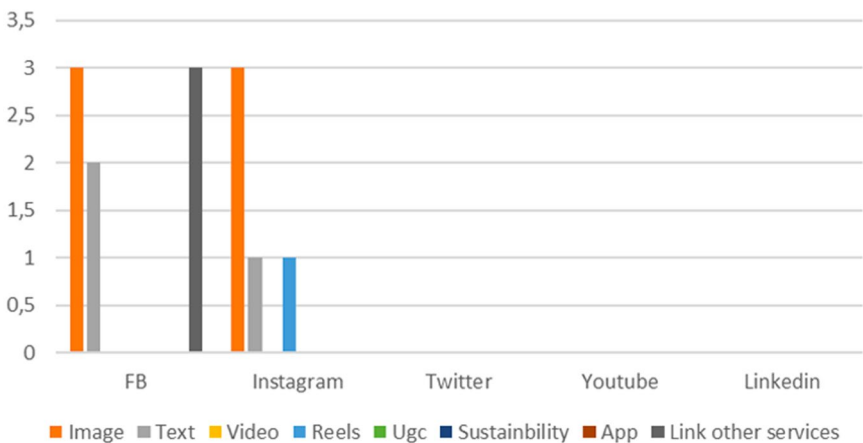
The visual aspect is a strong point on Facebook and Instagram, with high-level ratings. The presence of images and videos indicates a necessary significant commitment to creating eye-catching visual content. Textual content on Facebook and Instagram is rated as medium-high, indicating a commitment to creating engaging messages and descriptions. The lack of reels and User Generated Content (UGC) on all platforms suggests an area where the destination could involve its community more.

The communication integration of other services via links and tags is rated high but only on the Facebook platform, suggesting good connectivity with external services. The frequency of publication on Facebook presents a

high level, with seven posts per week, while Instagram presents a low level, with only one post per week. The average rate of involvement on Facebook is 0.03%, while on Instagram is 0.38%. These rates indicate low community interaction and represent potential areas for improvement.

Turismo Padova shows a solid digital presence, focusing on engaging visual and textual content. Implementing Reels, the promotion of UGC, sustainability content and increased publication frequency could improve the interaction with the community and the effectiveness of the digital strategy.

5.2.3. Ravenna

Ravenna is located in Emilia-Romagna, northeast of Italy. About 160,000[2] people live here. The city is famous for its rich history and artistic heritage, especially for Byzantine and early Christian monuments. It is a fascinating place because of its history, art, and culture. In addition to several important historical monuments from the Byzantine and Pauline eras, Ravenna offers a lively cultural atmosphere, with museums, art galleries and various events celebrating its historical heritage. The city is also famous for its artistic production in ceramics and gold processing.

Official Website Analysis. The website of Turismo Ravenna has a dynamic graphic interface, a lot of information, medium-quality images and a good presence of videos.

*Figure 19. Ravenna Website Analysis. Author's elaboration*
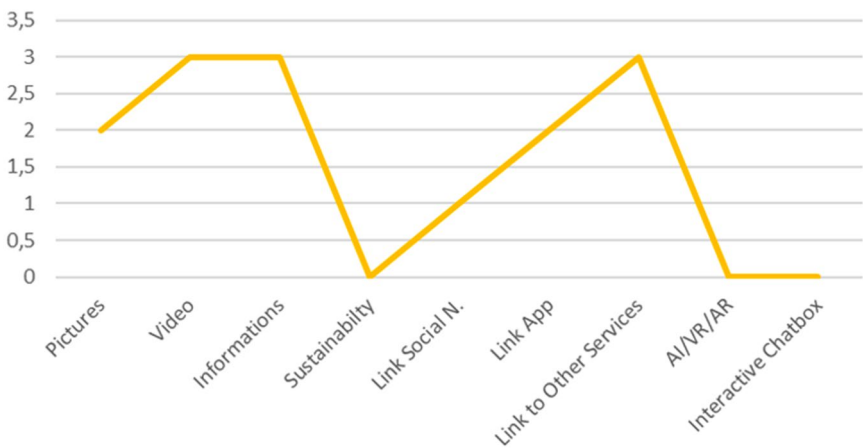
2. *www.demo.istat.it/app/?i=D7B*, *Provisional Data*, 2023.

There is no communication about its commitment to sustainability. However, links to other services, activities and experiences, accommodation, and dining are well integrated, allowing a nearly complete view of the destination. In a specific section of the site, you can also download maps and tourist materials differentiated by offer. It lacks new technologies such as virtual tours, AR, VR and interactive chatboxes.

Social Media Analysis. Ravenna Tourism has a strong following on Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, and Pinterest. With 40,760 followers on Facebook, 18,500 on Instagram, 3,438 on Twitter, 1250 on YouTube and 220 on Pinterest, the destination has a diversification of digital presence on different platforms.

Figure 20. Ravenna Social Media Analysis. Author's elaboration
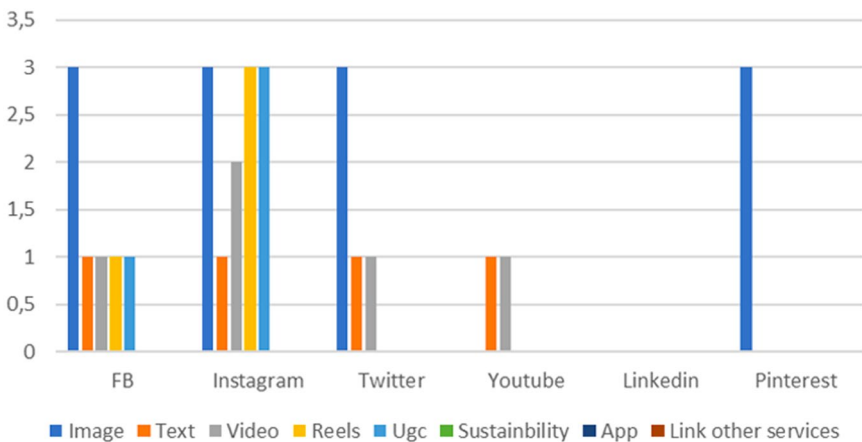
The visual aspect is a strong point on Facebook, Instagram, and Pinterest and has high ratings. The presence of images and videos indicates a significant commitment to creating impactful visual content. Textual content on Facebook, Instagram and Twitter is rated as medium-high, indicating a commitment to creating engaging messages and descriptions. The suggestions for other services and some applications were absent. The frequency of publication on Facebook is high, with eight posts in 7 days, while on Instagram, it is low, with a post every 0.6 days (4 posts per week). The average rate of involvement on Facebook is 0.3%, while on Instagram is 3.9%. These rates indicate a moderate interaction with the community, especially on Instagram.

In summary, Ravenna Turismo shows a solid digital presence on the two main channels, with a focus on visual and textual content engaging.

However, there is evidence of a lack of focus on sustainability, representing potential areas for improvement for a more effective digital strategy.

5.2.4. Palermo

Palermo is a city located on the northwest coast of Sicily, Italy. With a population of over 670,000, it has welcomed, according to Istat data, one million and 649 thousand visitors in 2022. Palermo is the capital of the Sicilian region and is renowned for its rich history, fascinating culture and lively gastronomic scene. The city boasts a fascinating blend of architectural styles, with Norman, Arab, and Baroque influences reflected in its monuments and streets. Besides being a historical treasure, Palermo is also a popular tourist destination, attracting visitors from all over the world. Tourists can explore ancient markets such as the Ballarò market, immerse themselves in the magnificence of Palermo Cathedral or relax in the surrounding beaches. Local cuisine is a real highlight, offering unique culinary delights that reflect the city's cultural diversity.

Official Website Analysis. The portal of the destination *www.turismo.comune. palermo.it*, presents a modern design with bright colors and stylized icons.

Figure 21. Palermo Website Analysis. Author's elaboration
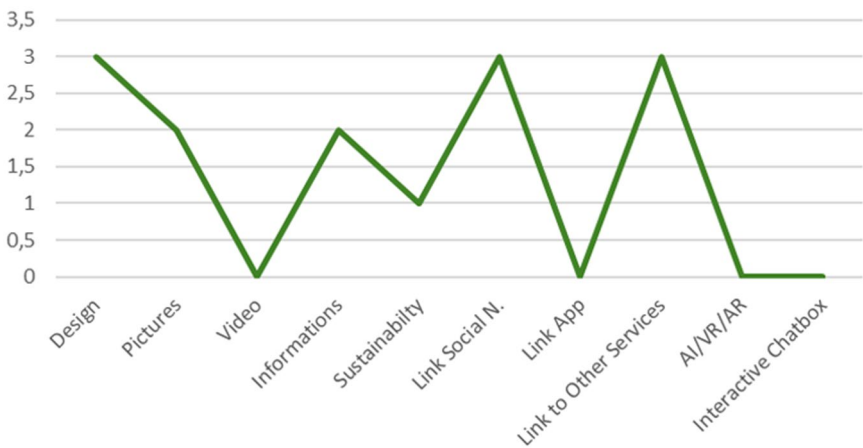
The images are of medium quality; there are no videos. A good density of information and links to other services meet the basic information that a visitor might want; there are links to social networks at the top visible, such

as Facebook and Instagram, that represent communal institutional channels not exclusively for tourist use.

Despite the city's growing commitment to a sustainable future through innovative projects, it is only the website dedicated to tourism. The destination is not present on social networks with a dedicated channel; some tourist information passes through the institutional profiles of the municipality that offer different service information, as well as those that are purely touristic.

5.2.5. Copenhagen

Copenhagen, with 65,6787 inhabitants in the municipality and over 1,300,000 in the area (as of 2023), is Denmark's capital and the most populous city. According to the Official Ranking 2023 based on Euromonitor data of the 25 most visited cities in Europe, the Danish capital, with its 6 million international arrivals, won 24th place. In the city, there is a DMO with the name Wonderful Copenhagen that in 2018 launched a major campaign, "Tourism for Good' it wanted the sustainable development objective to demonstrate its momentum for tourism to have a positive impact at the local and global levels. The communication contained concepts of craftsmanship, culinary identity and authentic experiences. Local knowledge and flavours are promoted, representing a good example of sustainable digital storytelling[3].

The strategy won the ICCA Innovation Award in 2019. In addition, Wonderful Copenhagen became the first Destination Management Organization (DMO) to receive Green Tourism Organization certification in the same year. This certification focuses on supporting destinations and organizations that engage in more sustainable actions. As the official tourism agency of the Capital Region of Denmark, it leads tourism development in a sustainable direction. Working with hundreds of public and private partners to develop city tourism, cultural tourism, new markets and knowledge. In the chart, we can observe the 2022 performance trends, which, in addition to the growth of the DMO itself, are represented as the results of the efforts that the destination has resulted that this consolidation involves, at the level of Supplier, Social and Environmental. Employed in the social and environmental sectors and with suppliers from a sustainable development perspective.

Official Website Analysis. The destination's website, with precise boxes, a clean and tidy style with soft colours, and modern lettering, recalls Nordic

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3. *www.gds.earth/Destination/Copenhagen/2022/*, n.d.

architecture and immediately refers to the identity of Denmark. It is a mainly informative site with the proper density of information that can be navigated intuitively, even from smartphones.

Figure 22. Copenhagen Website Analysis. Author's elaboration
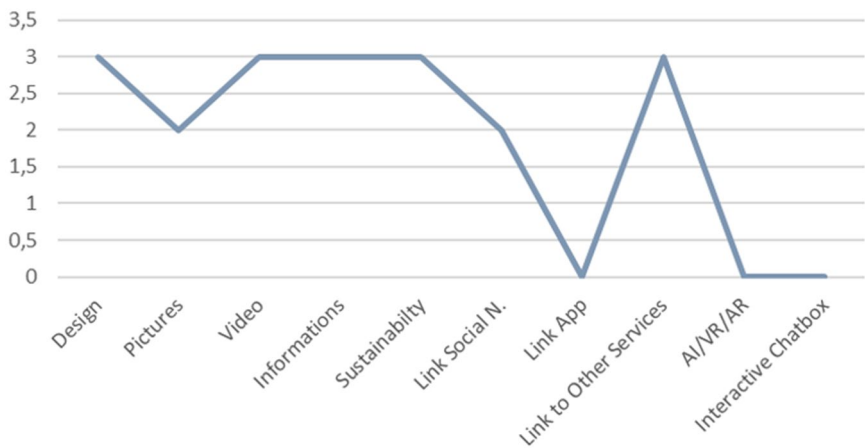
This is the communication on the commitment of the destination about sustainability with material that can also be downloaded from both laptop and mobile and with a short video content of excellent quality that reflects the clear identity of the destination. At the end of the site, below are links to the partners' sites and services and the social network channels. Clicking on it opens the Vist Copenhagen pages, except for Twitter and Linkedin, which are called Wonderful Copenhagen.

Good quality images and videos, links to other services, and communication content regarding the commitment to sustainability show consistency with the aforementioned strategy.

Social Media Analysis. We analyze which digital communication model the destination applies in its Official Social Networks:

Visit Copenhagen has a strong presence on several platforms, with 305,464 followers on Facebook, 367,000 on Instagram, 55,800 on Twitter, 4,600 on YouTube and 20,000 on LinkedIn. The diversification of digital presence contributes to wide audience coverage.

The visual appearance is remarkable on all platforms, with high-level ratings. Images and videos are powerful on Instagram, YouTube and Facebook, indicating a significant commitment to creating eye-catching visual content. Textual content is rated as high-level, indicating a commitment

to creating engaging and descriptive messages across all platforms. Reels' presence is remarkable on Instagram and good on Facebook, highlighting a strategy of using the latest formats available. User-generated content (UGC) is significant on Facebook, Instagram and LinkedIn, indicating active community involvement. Sustainability is assessed as high-level, indicating a declared interest in sustainable issues on the most popular platforms. Integration with other applications is evaluated positively on these platforms, indicating connectivity with external services. The frequency of publication on Facebook is moderate, with three posts per week, while on Instagram, it is five. The average rate of involvement on Facebook is 2%, while on Instagram is 5%. These rates indicate great interaction on Facebook and significant engagement on Instagram.

Figure 23. Copenhagen Social Media Analysis. Author's elaboration
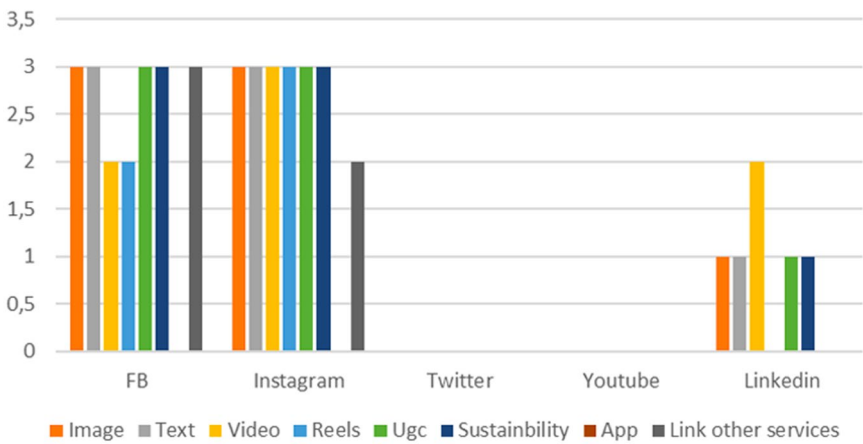
In summary, Visit Copenhagen/ Wonderful Copenhagen presents a strong and diverse digital presence that creates engaging visual and textual content. The use of Reels, the increased use of UGC on other platforms, the promotion of sustainable themes, and the integration with the app could further improve the effectiveness of the digital strategy.

5.2.6. Bordeaux

Bordeaux is a city in the southwest of France along the banks of the river Garonne. It is famous for its wine and elegance. The city, populated by about 250,000 people, has a rich architectural history, with historical monuments

such as the Place de la Bourse and Saint-André Cathedral. Its long tree-lined avenues and large squares invite you to peaceful walks. Bordeaux is a food and wine centre with various restaurants, cafes, and markets that sell local products. The city is famous for its renowned wine region, which makes it an excellent destination for wine lovers. Bordeaux enchants visitors with its refined style, breathtaking beauty, and a blend of culture, history, and gastronomy.

The French city, populated by 228,051 residents[4]. is well known for its vineyards, food and wine tourism, and culture. It recorded 2022 6,4 million overnight stays, of which 80% were French and 20% foreign, mainly European. Data were taken from the DMO website, where tourism analysis, performance, and impact on the city are reported: *agora-tourism-bordeaux. com/visitors/*.

Together with Valencia, she won the "European Capital of Smart Tourism" competition of 2022[5] proposed by the European Union.

Official Website Analysis. The website of the destination *www.bordeaux-tourisme.com* has a modern design, full of quality images, and an interactive chatbox where you can receive information in real-time to another series of interactive activities even just by passing the cursor on the page. Full of information on services, guided tours and related links for purchase.

*Figure 24. Bordeaux Website Analysis. Author's elaboration*
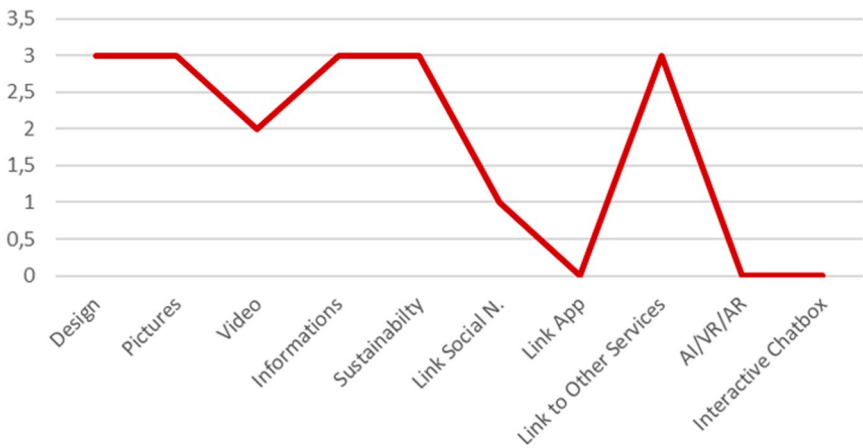
Perfectly navigable also from mobile, at the top of the front page is an icon that symbolizes sustainability and offers sustainable products and services that the city is committed to offering. At the end of the main page is a link to the social profiles.

Social Media Analysis. Bordeaux boasts a solid digital presence with 158,699 followers on Facebook, 98,944 on Instagram, 4,898 on Twitter and a remarkable following of 1,030 on YouTube. The diversification of the digital presence indicates a well-structured strategy.

Figure 25. Bordeaux Social Media Analysis. Author's elaboration
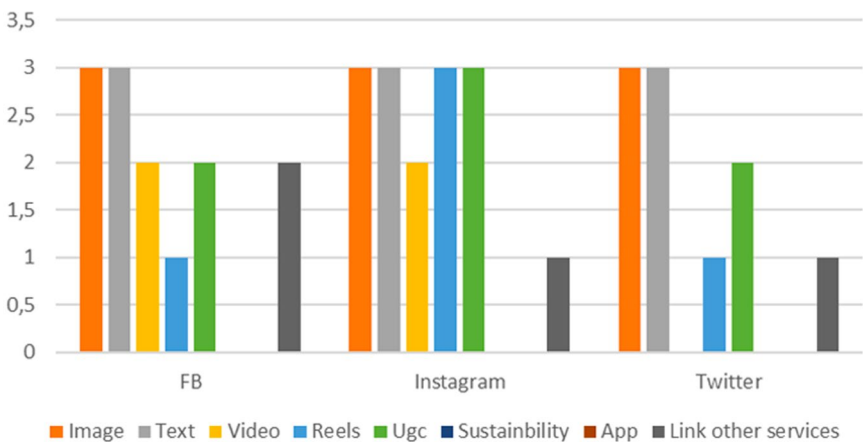
The visual appearance is remarkable on all platforms, with high-level ratings. Images and videos are powerful on Instagram and Facebook, indicating a significant effort in creating engaging visual content. Textual content is rated high-level, indicating a commitment to creating engaging and descriptive messages on all platforms. Reels' presence is remarkable on Instagram, while the use of user-generated content (UGC) is significant on Facebook, Instagram and Twitter, indicating an active involvement of the community. Communications regarding sustainability are evaluated, but only on YouTube and Pinterest platforms. Integration with other applications is evaluated positively on almost all platforms, indicating connectivity with external services. The frequency of publication is not very high, with two posts per week on Facebook and Instagram and three on Twitter. The average engagement rate is reasonable on all platforms: Facebook is 1%, Instagram is 3%, and Twitter is 1%. These rates indicate significant involvement on both major platforms.

In summary, Visit Bordeaux presents a strong and diverse digital presence that emphasises creating engaging visual and textual content. Using Reels, increasing the use of UGC on other platforms and promoting sustainable issues could further improve the effectiveness of the digital strategy.

5.2.7. Valencia

Valencia, a city on the east coast of Spain, combines history, art and contemporaneity. Valencia is the third largest city in the nation, with about 809,501 people (*www.valencia.es*). The city has long sandy beaches, green parks and charming architecture thanks to its Mediterranean climate. The City of Arts and Sciences, an extraordinary modern work, contrasts with the historic heart with the Cathedral and the famous Micalet. Valencia is also known for the Fallas, a traditional festival that ends with spectacular fireworks. Paella is one of the typical Mediterranean dishes in local cuisine. Valencia is a fascinating destination thanks to its lively atmosphere and the combination of tradition and innovation. Torre di

Official Website Analysis. The website of the destination*, www.visitvalencia. com*, presents a simple, neat, modern design and the font used. The images are good quality, as much video quality appears as soon as you enter the site. It is a site full of information and allows you to buy direct services and experiences.

Figure 26. Valencia Website Analysis. Author's elaboration
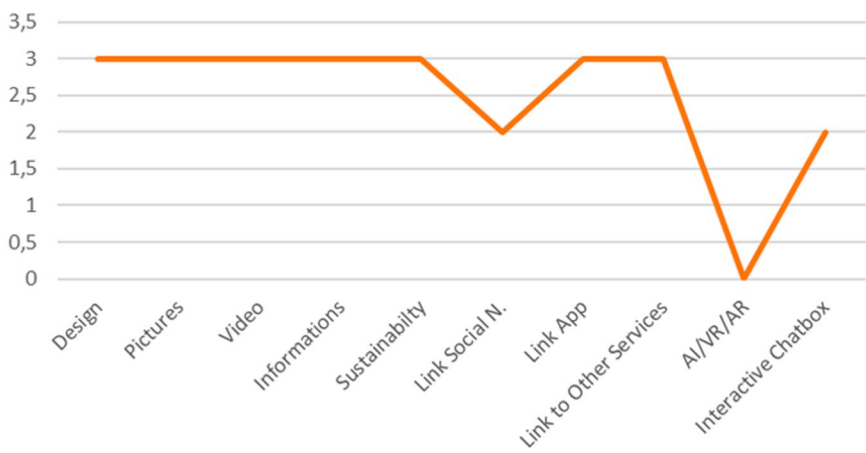
At the end of the page, there is a detailed section related to the sustainability of Valencia, where you can find information on the sustainable activities that the city carries out and where services and activities are proposed for travellers sensitive to this theme. There are links to the social pages and to the destination app, but there is no interactive chat box, only a WhatsApp link to request information directly.

Social Media Analysis. As we can see, the city is present on six different Social Networks and in all with a good quality of communication; it is difficult, however, to calculate the rate of involvement of some channels such as LinkedIn and YouTube because the frequency of publication is in line with the communication format of the channel often not precisely detectable from outside.

Figure 27. Valencia Social Media Analysis. Author's elaboration
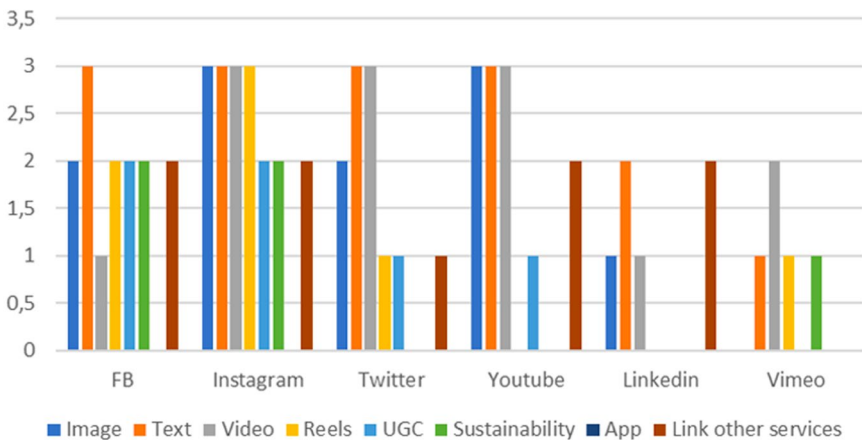
Valencia has a solid presence on several platforms, with 54,337 followers on Facebook, 144,000 on Instagram, 2,626 on Twitter, 2,460 on YouTube, 7,000 on LinkedIn and 68 on Vimeo. The diversification of digital presence contributes to wide audience coverage. The visual appearance is remarkable on all platforms, with high-level ratings. Images and videos on Instagram and YouTube are powerful, indicating a significant commitment to creating eye-catching visual content. Textual content is also high-level, indicating a commitment to creating engaging and descriptive messages on Facebook, Instagram, Twitter and LinkedIn. Reels' presence is remarkable on Instagram, highlighting a strategy of using the latest formats available. User-generated content (UGC) is significant on Instagram, indicating

active community involvement. Sustainability is rated highly on Facebook, Instagram, and YouTube, showing interest in sustainable issues. Integration with other applications is rated positively on Facebook, Instagram, Twitter and LinkedIn, indicating connectivity with external services. The frequency of publication on Facebook is moderate, with six posts per week, while on Instagram, it is high, with a daily post. The average engagement rate on Facebook is 0.08%, while on Instagram it is 1.94%. These rates indicate moderate interaction on Facebook and significant engagement on Instagram.

In summary, Visit Valencia presents a strong and diverse digital presence that focuses on creating engaging visual and textual content. Using Reels, increasing the use of UGC on other platforms and promoting sustainable issues could further improve the effectiveness of the digital strategy.

5.2.8. Dublin

The historic city of Dublin, the capital of Ireland, is located on the island's east coast, with about 1.2 million people[6]. Dublin is the nation's cultural and financial centre. The city, surrounded by the river Liffey, offers a fascinating combination of modernity and the past. Its historic neighbourhoods, such as Temple Bar, have cobbled streets, traditional pubs, and a dynamic art scene. Dublin also has important cultural centres such as Trinity College, its renowned Old Library and the Book of Kells. The traditional music that resonates in the pubs and the inhabitants' hospitality make the city famous for its friendly and welcoming atmosphere.

Official Website Analysis. Browsing on *www.visitdublin.com* you perceive a modern design, simple and delicate in colors. It's a site full of information about the city and things to do; there are also direct links to catering services and accommodation-related interactive maps.

There are no videos; however, the images are good quality and describe a dynamic city. There is no communication on sustainability and the city's commitment. Direct links to the social pages and a chat box allow you to quickly search for any information within the site. There is no communication about the app as the destination does not have it.

6. *www.treccani.it/enciclopedia/dublin*.

Figure 28. Dublin Website Analysis. Author's elaboration
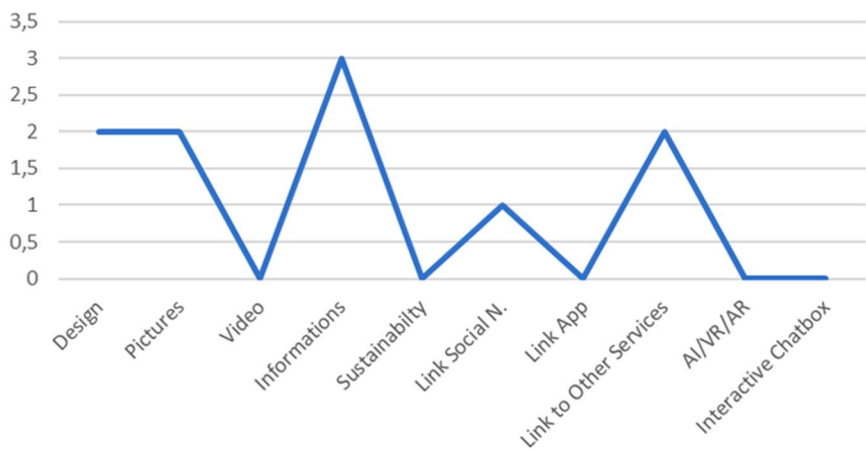
Social Media Analysis. In the following table, we observe the presence of the destination on social networks.

Visit Dublin features a robust digital presence with 185,954 followers on Facebook, 210,000 on Instagram, 124,735 on Twitter and 4,280 followers on YouTube. The diversification of platforms suggests a comprehensive digital strategy.

Figure 29. Dublin Social Media Analysis. Author's elaboration
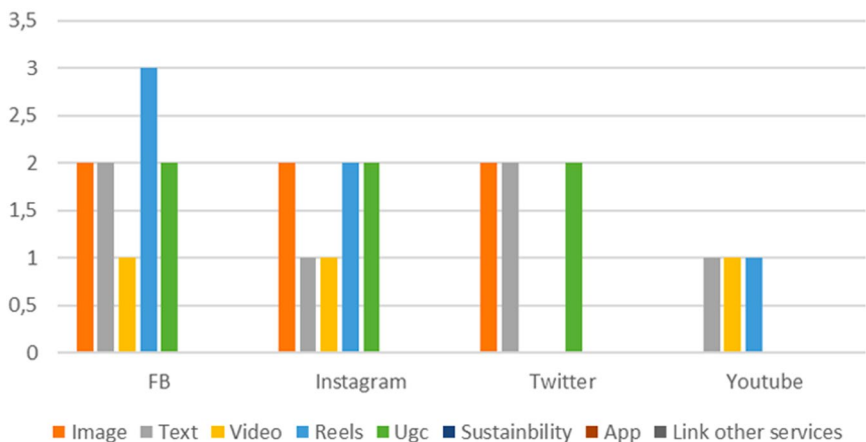
The visual appearance is evaluated at an average level. A solid presence of images and, if sometimes not very good quality, the level of video and

Reels on Facebook and Instagram indicates a potential improvement in the diversification of visual content. Textual content is rated as mid-level, with a balance between text and images across all platforms. Reels' presence is remarkable on Facebook and Instagram, suggesting an awareness and use of formats in line with those channels. The use of user-generated content (UGC) is a constant and at a good level on Facebook, Instagram and Twitter. Sustainability is not a direct communication content perceived on any platform. Integration with other applications is absent or unspecified, suggesting an area where more excellent connectivity with external services could be implemented. The frequency of publication on Facebook is moderate, with four posts per week, while on Instagram, it is two posts per week. The average engagement rate on Facebook is 0.07%, on Instagram is 1.20%, and on Twitter is 0.05%. These rates indicate significant engagement on Instagram and consistent presence on other platforms.

In summary, Visit Dublin has a good digital presence with a particular emphasis on platform diversification. Potential improvements include improved image quality text, increased use of video and Reels on Facebook, and an expansion of the UGC on other platforms. Implementing sustainable themes and integrating them with other applications could improve the digital strategy.

5.2.9. Kasrluhe

Karlsruhe is a German city located in Baden-Württemberg. It is situated in the southwestern part of Germany near the Black Forest. The city, with a population of approximately 308,707[7], is renowned for its fan-shaped urban design, featuring radial streets emanating from the splendid Karlsruhe Palace. The palace is the city's focal point, surrounded by well-maintained gardens. Karlsruhe is a vibrant hub of theatres, museums, and artistic activities. The pleasant and livable environment is fostered by the welcoming climate and a blend of modern and historical architectural styles.

Official Website Analysis. Karlsruhe Tourismus GmbH manages the official website, serving as a municipal tourism marketing organization (TMO) for the city of Karlsruhe.

The website, characterized by bright violet and acid green colours, has numerous sections, which may lead to potential navigation challenges. Despite being information-rich, it is a marketplace where visitors can

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7. *www.statistik-bw.de/BevoelkGebiet/Bevoelk_I_D_A_vj.Csv*, n.d.

book accommodations, access various services, and purchase destination merchandise. However, the absence of video content is notable, and the images, though of good quality, can get somewhat lost amid the site's abundance of information, sections, and colours. Notably, there is a lack of content regarding the city's commitment to sustainability.

*Figure 30. Kasrluhe Website Analysis. Author's elaboration*
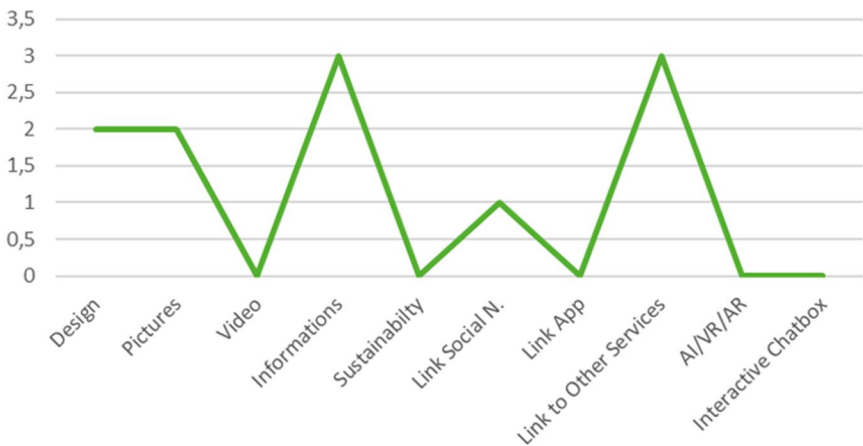
Social Media Analysis. Regarding Social media presence, Visit Karlsruhe has 15,648 followers on Facebook, 19,000 on Instagram, 3,411 on Twitter, and 307 on YouTube. The multi-platform presence suggests a well-distributed digital strategy, albeit with minimal content quality.

The visual appearance is moderate, with images and videos on all platforms. Instagram stands out with a higher level of video and reels and relative quality, indicating a good diversification of visual content. Textual content is rated as medium, with a balanced distribution of text and images across all platforms. Sustainability content was found on YouTube. Integration with other applications is missing or unspecified, indicating an area where greater connectivity with external services could be implemented. The frequency of publication on Facebook is low, with one post per week, while on Instagram, it is higher, with four posts over 7 days. The average engagement rate on Facebook is 0.14%, and on Instagram is 2.41%. These rates indicate significant engagement on Instagram, while you may need to improve your engagement strategy on other platforms.

In summary, Visit Karlsruhe has a digital presence with adequate distribution on different platforms. Potential areas for improvement include communication frequency and the implementation of Reels and UGC to

increase community interaction and connectivity with other applications. The engagement strategy could be further improved on Twitter to ensure a more comprehensive presence across all platforms.

Figure 31. Kasrluhe Social Media Analysis. Author's elaboration
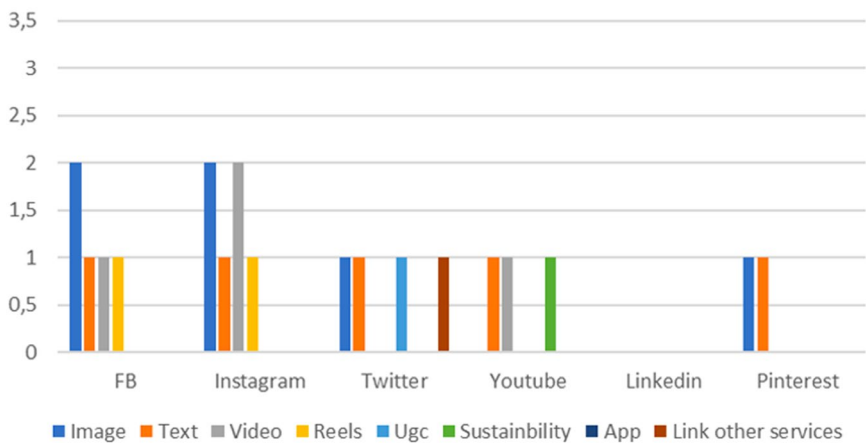

5.2.10. Alba Iulia

Alba Iulia is located in Transylvania, about 380 kilometres from Bucharest and on the banks of the river Mures. About 71,000 people live in Alba Iulia. It is said that this city is the spiritual capital of Romania, so much so that its payoff is "The Other Capital". The town offers a peaceful environment with slow rhythms yet rich in history. A fortress that has played an essential role over the centuries dominates its core. The streets are neat, and the tranquillity of the city can, while the historic architecture gives a touch of authenticity. This is the right place for those who appreciate the tranquility and rich history of this Romanian resort. It is a significant economic, cultural, and tourist hub, an important centre of the Revolution of 1848 and a symbol of national unity, marked by the proclamation of the union of Transylvania and Romania in 1918.

Official Website Analysis. *www.visitalbaiulia.city* is the site of the destination that, at first glance, gives the perception of a simple, clean design, with many clickable quality images to discover details on the offer autistic; in most cases, the links open to an error page; in clickable instances, you can enter into so it is ineffective to continue with the analysis.

Figure 32. Alba Iulia Website Analysis. Author's elaboration
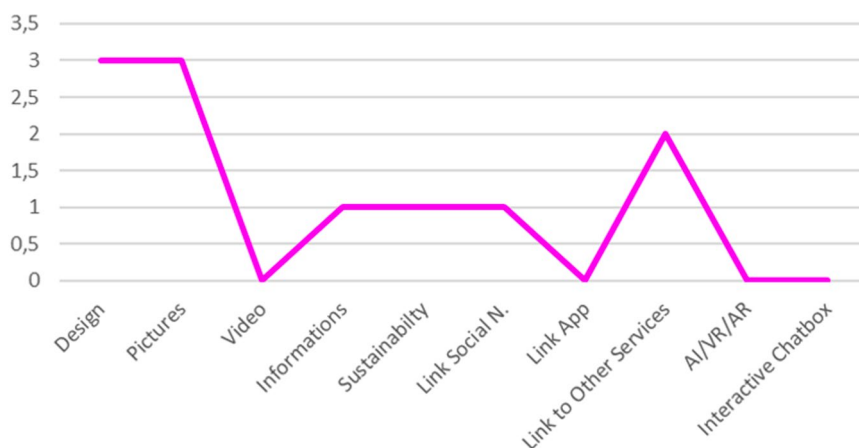
There are references to the main social pages of Facebook and Instagram. Twitter is closed to 2019, and the YouTube channel is the City Hall channel. The pictures are of high quality; there are no videos; however, there is a timid mention of sustainability. The site integrates the information conveyed with links to other services to complete the destination's offer.

Social Media Analysis. Alba Iulia has a follower of 20,027 on Facebook, 2,428 on Instagram, 120 on Twitter, and 228 on YouTube, even if it is not a canal dedicated to the tourist area of the destination. Presence on different platforms indicates a distribution of presence in the digital strategy.

The visual appearance is rated qualitatively low on Facebook and good on Instagram. The presence of images is remarkable on both platforms. The balance between text and images seems to be more pronounced on Instagram. A few videos and a few reels are present. Instagram is the only channel where community involvement is through user-generated content. Sustainability is not assessed on any platform, and integration with other applications is absent or unspecified. This suggests opportunities to improve connectivity with external services and communicate sustainability efforts more effectively. The frequency of publication on Facebook is low; the destination did not publish content that week, and there was only one in the reference month of the sample week (August), which has an occasional publication frequency.

In summary, Visit Alba Iulia has a digital presence that is distributed on different platforms. However, there is scope to improve engagement strategy and publication frequency to increase community interaction.

In addition, opportunities for more effective communication regarding sustainability efforts and integration with other applications could be explored.

Figure 33. Alba Iulia Social Media Analysis. Author's elaboration
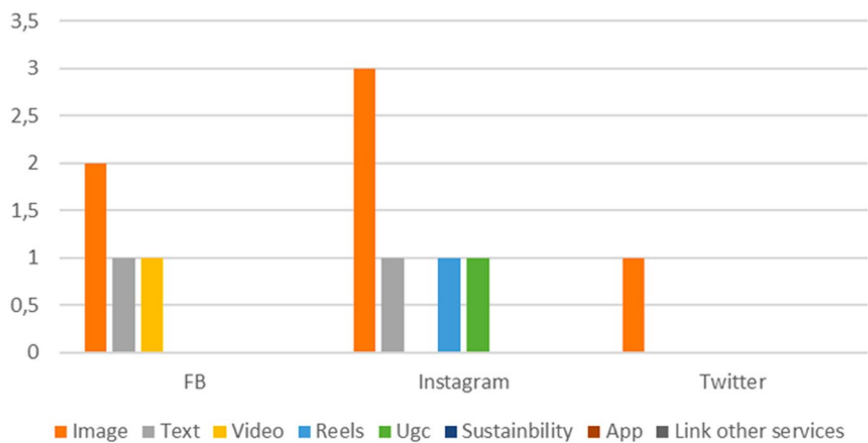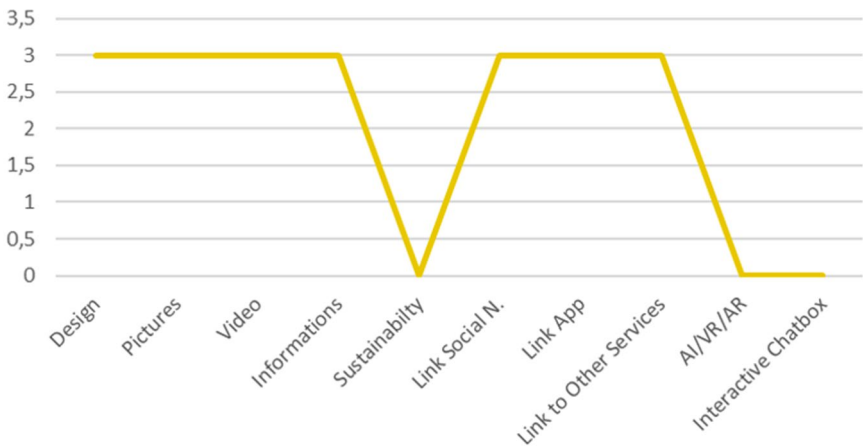
5.2.11. Dubrovnik

With 49,562 inhabitants, it is the best-known city in Croatia. It is a port and tourist centre located in southern Dalmatia. The impressive medieval walls surrounding the old town of Dubrovnik, the "Pearl of the Adriatic", catch the eye. Old buildings, historic churches and charming squares are visible along the narrow-cobbled streets. The main road, Stradun, is full of cafes, shops and restaurants. The walls offer spectacular views of the Adriatic Sea and the nearby islands. The cultural landscape is enhanced by churches such as San Biagio and monuments such as the Orlando Column. The beaches of the Dubrovnik Riviera are ideal for relaxation, while the Summer Festival offers music, theatre, and art performances in the streets, as well as a beautiful and unique atmosphere.

Official Website Analysis. When browsing Dubrovnik.hr, you will see an interactive, intuitive, and informative website. The design is simple and quite elegant; the colours white and gold recall the elegance.

The images are of good quality, and there is a section highlighted with many videos that tell not only the natural beauty but also the history of the place. There are also links and detailed information about stakeholders and

service providers at the destination. No communication messages about sustainability are visible in the destination app.

Figure 34. Dubrovnik Website Analysis. Author's elaboration

*Social Media Analysi*s. Dubrovnik Riviera has a following of 120,516 on Facebook, 13,800 on Instagram, 3,745 on Twitter and 86 on YouTube. Deployment across multiple platforms suggests a multi-channel approach to digital strategy.

The visual appearance is rated as mid-level on Facebook and Instagram. The presence and image quality are good on both main platforms.

Figure 35. Dubrovnik Social Media Analysis. Author's elaboration
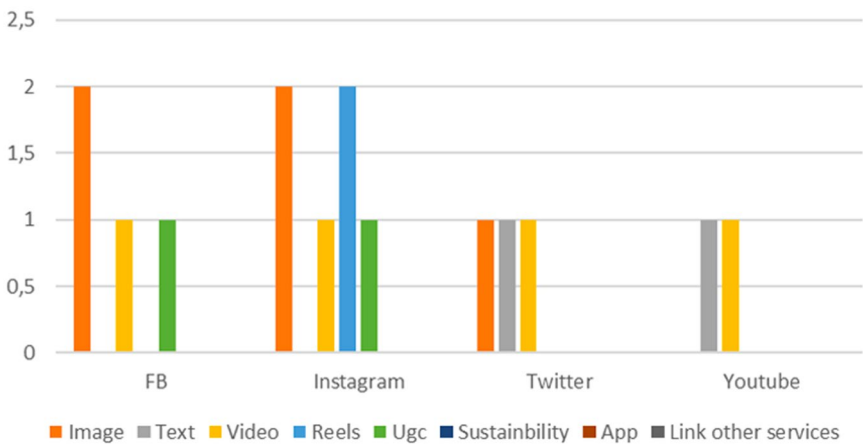
Textual content is rated as low level. The lower rating indicates poor care and emphasis on the text accompanying the images. Reels' presence is detected on Instagram. There is low average community involvement through user-generated content. Sustainability is not assessed on any platform, and integration with other applications is absent or unspecified. This could indicate opportunities to improve connectivity with external services and communicate sustainability efforts more effectively. The frequency of publication on Facebook is low, with two posts per week; on Instagram, it is higher, with four posts in 7 days. Despite that, the average rate of engagement on Facebook is 1%, and on Instagram, it is 3%. These rates indicate moderate community interaction, but there is room to improve engagement strategy and publication frequency to stimulate user interest.

In summary, Dubrovnik Riviera has a digital presence and distribution on different platforms. However, there is scope to improve engagement strategy and publication frequency to increase community interaction. Opportunities for more effective communication regarding sustainability efforts and integration with other applications could also be explored.
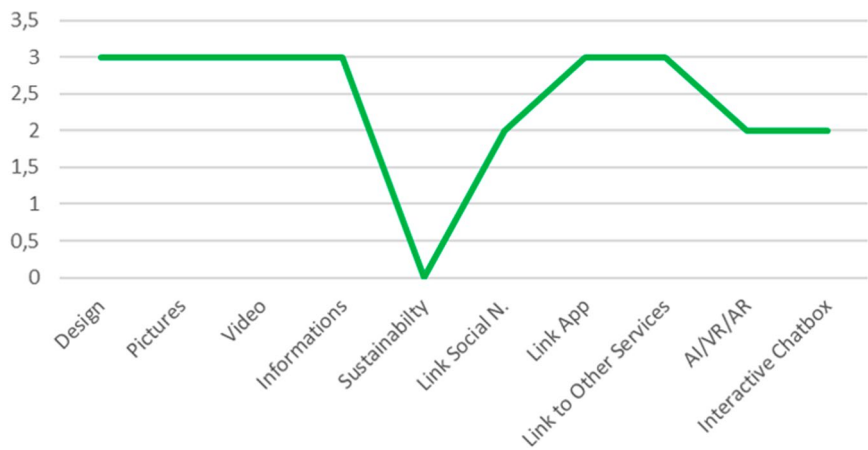

5.2.12. Ljubljana

Ljubljana is a town of about 284,293 inhabitants and is the capital of Slovenia. Surrounded by parks and protected natural areas, it is also known for being a cultural, artistic, and creative capital. It is also appreciated for its urban look, relaxed atmosphere and fascinating mix of modernity and history. The city's heart is crossed by the river Ljubljanica, which has beautiful bridges and cafes along the banks. From above, Ljubljana Castle offers spectacular views of the city. Cosy squares like Preseren Square have elegant architecture and a vibrant cultural scene. Ljubljana is famous for its lively markets and the beautiful Tivoli Park, a green oasis in the city centre.

Official Website Analysis. By browsing on www.visitljubjana.com, you can see the density of content, quality photos, information of all kinds and links that offer different including booking and purchase of tours and the shop with the sale of branded gadgets Visit Ljubljana.

The videos in the explore section are VR videos that allow you to see the content at 360 degrees. There seems to be no direct communication content about sustainability.

Figure 36. Ljubljana Website Analysis. Author's elaboration

Social Media Analysis. Visit Ljubljana has a following of 231,297 on Facebook, 69,900 on Instagram, 21,155 on Twitter, 127.300 on TikTok, 1,310 on YouTube and 860 on Pinterest. The presence on different platforms suggests an integrated marketing strategy.

Figure 37. Ljubljana Social Media Analysis. Author's elaboration
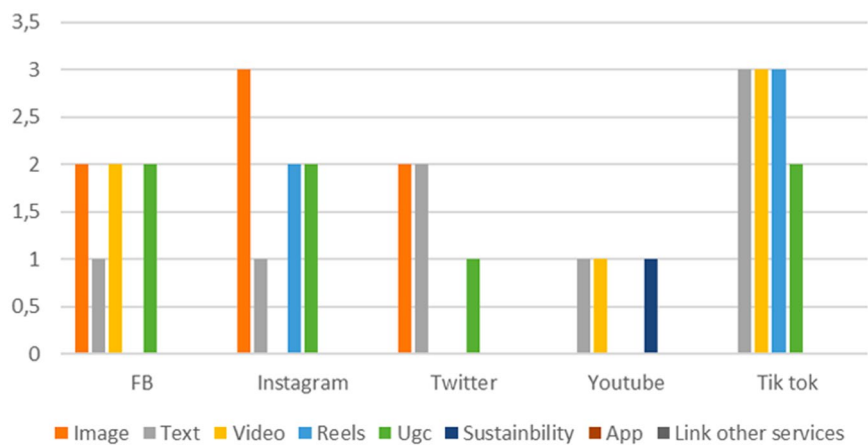
The visual appearance is rated as mid-level on Facebook, high on Instagram and medium-high on Twitter. Facebook and Instagram make good use of images, while the evaluation of Twitter suggests a greater emphasis on the visual aspect. The text content is rated as low-level on Facebook,

moderate on Instagram and medium-high on Twitter. It indicates that Twitter might be more text-oriented than Facebook and Instagram. Reels' presence is absent on Facebook but good on Twitter. The UGC is rated a good average on the various channels, indicating good community involvement. The sustainability is communicated on You tube, while the application is absent or unspecified. Exploring more effective communication opportunities regarding sustainability efforts and integration with other applications could be beneficial. On TikTok, the communication and the content are coherent with the channel. Many reels talk about the destination's offer in a modern language where visual part, music, and text are mixed with involving the specific target. 7.300 followers in total and the post frequency in the sample week was four posts with a good engagement rate. The post frequency on Facebook is high, with six posts per week; on Instagram, it is daily; and on Twitter, it is high, with twelve posts per week. Despite this, the average rate of involvement is low on Facebook (0.16%, good on Instagram (1.45%), good on Twitter (0.05%) and good on TikTok (0,24%)

In summary, Visit Ljubljana has a solid digital presence and distribution on different platforms. The engagement strategy and publication frequency are strong on Instagram and Twitter, while they could be further improved on Facebook. Communication on sustainability efforts and integration with other applications could be explored to optimize the overall digital presence.

RESULTS & FINDINGS

6.1. Sardinian Destinations Results

Compared to the Sardinian destinations analysed, a heterogeneous picture emerges of the strategies adopted on social media.

The analysis of the digital communication models of Sardinian destinations highlights several salient features for both websites and social pages. As for websites, it was found that they feature a modern and attractive design, offering a wide range of tourist information, guaranteed proposals and links to social profiles. However, some sites have problems viewing from mobile devices, while others do not provide clear information about managing and updating content.

Figure 39. Regional Destinations Website Analysis. Author's elaboration
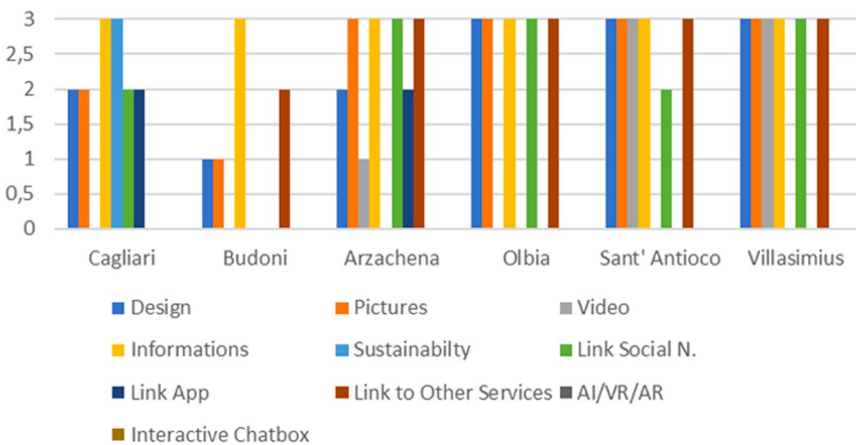
Through the analysis of social network pages, it has been observed that some destinations have a good frequency of publication on Facebook and Instagram, with particular attention to the visual quality of content. However, communication regarding the sustainability and app of destinations is often absent, and the management of social profiles is not always professional, with a change in the frequency of publication. Despite this, some social profiles show considerable community involvement, suggesting significant user interaction.

In the case of Cagliari, the strong presence on Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter highlights a solid visual strategy, although accompanied by a lack of activity on YouTube. It lacks the management of sustainability and application, suggesting opportunities for improvement. Arzachena, instead, presents a Facebook profile with visual aspects and medium-low content, with limited activity on YouTube and absence on Twitter and LinkedIn. Budoni, with a significant presence on Facebook and Instagram, stands out for a remarkable involvement of users, suggesting possible sponsored activities. The lack of sustainability reporting is a significant shortcoming. Sant'Antioco, while presenting a medium-level visual image, shows limits in the textual management and communication of sustainability. The high frequency of publication on Instagram contrasts with the limited interaction, suggesting a more in-depth analysis. Villasimius Turismo shows a basic presence on Facebook and Instagram, with considerable involvement and a moderate presence on Instagram. The absence of Twitter and LinkedIn could represent an opportunity for expansion, while YouTube could benefit from a more coherent editorial strategy. In addition, the analysis emphasizes that the application is a strength on Instagram, contributing to a good level of integration with other services.

We observe (Table 8) the representation of the data of frequency publication and relative engagement rate of the Sardinian destinations.

From the table, it emerges that Cagliari adopts a model of effective communication that generates a good level of involvement on multiple social networks and with a moderate commitment to the frequency of publication; the general trend in more sectors, not only on travel, is the decrease in the frequency of posts per week. Arzachena and Villasmius follow, while Budoni's presence is staggered, probably due to the nature of the only post-of-the-week sample taken in the analysis. This could be a sponsored post. You decide not to take into consideration that data.

In summary, the digital communication models of the analyzed destinations have strengths and weaknesses in both websites and social pages, highlighting the need for a comprehensive digital communication strategy and a coherent editorial plan that takes account of sustainability,

user experience and interaction with the community to maximize the impact and tourist attractiveness of Sardinian destinations.

Table 8. Green: high engagement, Light blue: low-medium, Orange: outliers. Author's elaboration & benchmark data of 2023 Social Media Industry Benchmark Report, Rival IQ

	Facebook		Instagram		Twitter		Tik Tok	
	Post per Week	ER%	Post per Week	ER%	Post per Week	ER%	Post per Week	ER%
Reference Benchmark	3.36	0.088%	3.44	0.465%	1.82	0.032%	1.5	7.43%
Cagliari	6	0,6	4	3,6	6	0,1	0	0
Budoni	1	28,3	1	43,8	0	0	0	0
Arzachena	3	0,2	7	0,4	0	0	0	0
Olbia	1	0,02	1	0,1	0	0	0	0
Sant'Antioco	10	0,02	4	3,6	0	0	0	0
Villasimius	2	0,9	8	0,2	0	0	0	0

6.2. National and International Destinations Results

As part of the analysis of the digital communication strategies adopted by the three Italian tourist destinations analyzed (for Florence, "Feel Florence", and "Destination Florence", then "Tourism Padua", and "Ravenna Tourism"), several peculiarities and opportunities for improvement emerge.

Figure 40. National Destinations Website Analysis. Author's elaboration
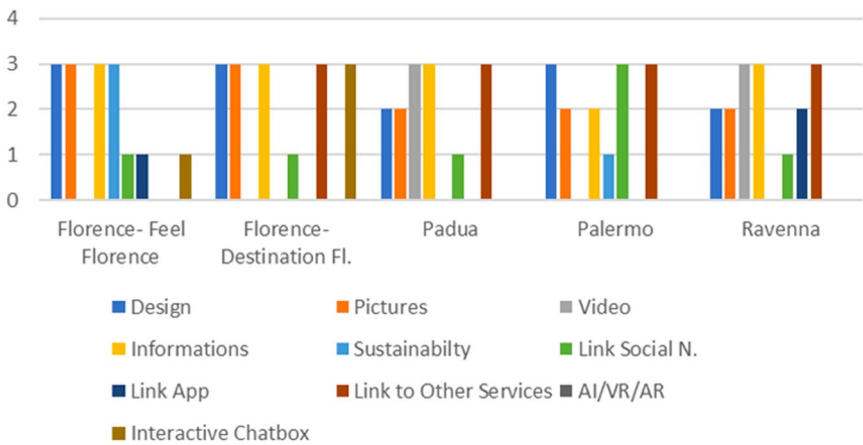
Looking at the above chart, it is observable as visually (images and text dimensions), all destinations are rated with a medium-high, poor presence instead of video on some platforms, and almost absent communication about the awareness or actions carried out by cities. None of the four portals (3 destinations) use new technologies as a tool for sustainable communication and generating engagement.

"Feel Florence", through the channels of Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, and YouTube, has a consistent frequency of high-quality publications. However, YouTube has been under-used, remaining inactive for nine months. In addition, the effectiveness of the sustainability communication could benefit from an improvement.

The digital narration of "Destination Florence" stands out for its wide base of followers on Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter, denoting a strong appeal. However, the lack of recent visual updates on YouTube suggests a possible gap in the platform update. In addition, Reels' limited presence on Instagram can be an opportunity for more dynamic engagement. The digital context of "Turismo Padova" emerges as a diversified ecosystem on various platforms, with high visual quality on Facebook and Instagram. However, the lack of Reel and user-generated content highlights potential areas for expansion and engagement. An increase in the frequency of publication on Instagram could increase its digital resonance. The digital story of "Ravenna Tourism", articulated on Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, and Pinterest, is characterized by a high visual impact. However, the absence of indications on other services and sustainability is a gap. A higher frequency of posting on Instagram could expand the interaction with the community. In this context, the emphasis on sustainability, the optimization of inactive platforms, the adoption of new formats such as Reels and the integration of user-generated content could further enrich the digital narratives of destinations, increasing engagement and consolidating their position in the digital tourism landscape.

The data analysed for the Italian tourist cities show a detailed picture of the digital communication models of the destinations analysed. As has been established, destinations such as "Feel Florence", Turismo Padova, Ravenna Tourism and Destination Florence demonstrate a diversified presence on digital platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, and YouTube. Websites and social pages show a significant commitment of some more virtuous cities in creating eye-catching visual content and engaging texts, with a constant publication frequency and various formats, including good quality videos and well-written texts. However, there are areas for improvement, such as the absence of Reels, the lack of user-generated content (UGC), and poor integration with target services and

sustainability. In addition, the analysis highlights the need for more frequent publication on some platforms and better description and contextualisation of content on YouTube.

Table 9. Green: high engagement; light blue: low-medium; orange: outliers. Author's elaboration & benchmark data of 2023 Social Media Industry Benchmark Report, Rival IQ

	Facebook		Instagram		Twitter		Tik Tok	
	Post per Week	ER%	Post per Week	ER%	Post per Week	ER%	Post per Week	ER%
Reference Benchmark	**3.36**	**0.088%**	**3.44**	**0.465%**	**1.82**	**0.032%**	**1.5**	**7.43%**
Florence – Feel Florence	6	0,2	2	0,8	7	0,1	0	0
Florence – Destination Fl.	6	0,9	5	1,5	0	0	0	0
Padua	6	0,03	2	0,38	0	0	0	0
Palermo	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Ravenna	8	0,3	4	3,9	7	0,4	0	0

In summary, through the frequency of the posts for the week sample taken into consideration and the thaw of involvement, we can evaluate the effectiveness of the communication model adopted by the analysed destinations. As we can observe, Destination Florence (DMO Florence) and Ravenna highlight the best performance; they are therefore able to actively involve users through quality video images and a fresh and engaging language with their model.

However, even though some destinations have a solid foundation, there are opportunities to improve community interaction and the effectiveness of digital strategy, both on websites and on social pages.

The analysis of the digital communication models of the listed European tourist destinations highlighted the unique approach adopted by each city in managing its digital presence and the strengths and areas of improvement specific to each city examined. Let's see some of the differences highlighted by the analysis.

As for websites, Copenhagen, Bordeaux, and Valencia have been evaluated as the destinations with the most effective websites, characterized by a modern and interactive design, a well-organized information structure, a section dedicated to sustainability and the possibility to book services directly from the platform. However, Dublin, Karlsruhe, and Alba Iulia showed some areas for improvement, such as the need to improve image quality, communication on sustainability and integration with other applications.
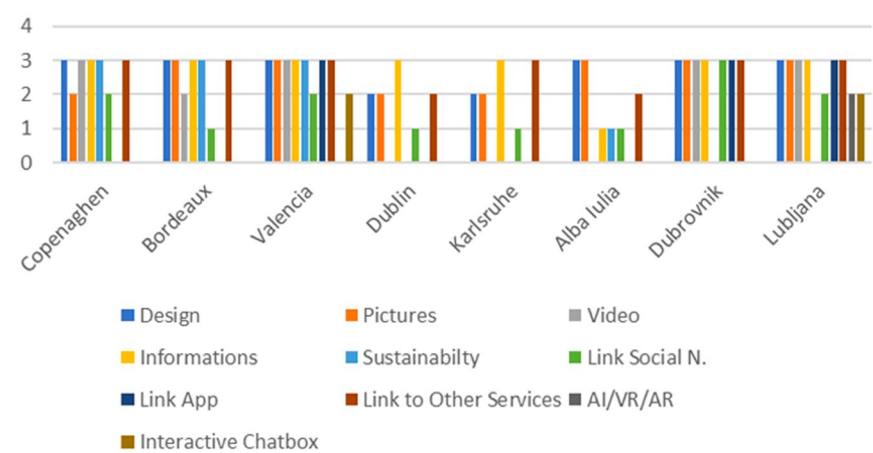
For example, the Copenhagen site stands out for its Nordic design and well-organised information structure, with a sustainability section reflecting the city's commitment to promoting sustainable practices. In contrast, the Dublin site shows potential for improvement in image quality and sustainability communication. In addition, the Valencia site offers intuitive navigation and the ability to purchase services directly from the site, with a detailed section on sustainability that underlines the city's commitment to this area. The website of the Dubrovnik Riviera was evaluated as interactive and informative, with a presence on different social platforms, but with the need for further developments in the communication of sustainability and integration with other applications. Similarly, the Ljubljana site was rated as rich in content with an online store and highly interactive, even through 360-degree VR videos.

Analyzing the social network pages of European tourist destinations has highlighted some significant differences in the strategies cities adopt. For example, the Copenhagen page features a strong presence on different social platforms, with a high level of visual and textual content, an active strategy on Instagram and effective communication on sustainability. On the contrary, the Bordeaux page could improve communication on sustainability on other platforms. In addition, the Valencia page has a strong presence on several social platforms, with a particular emphasis on the diversification of the digital presence and the remarkable visual content on Instagram and YouTube.

Table 10. Green: high engagement; light blue: low-medium. Author's elaboration & benchmark data of 2023 Social Media Industry Benchmark Report, Rival IQ

	Facebook		Instagram		Twitter		Tik Tok	
	Post per Week	**ER%**	**Post per Week**	**ER%**	**Post per Week**	**ER%**	**Post per Week**	**ER%**
Reference Benchmark	**3.36**	**0.088%**	**3.44**	**0.465%**	**1.82**	**0.032%**	**1.5**	**7.43%**
Copenaghen	3	2	5	5	0	0	0	0
Bordeaux	2	1	2	3	3	1	0	0
Valencia	6	0,1	7	1,94	0	0	0	0
Dublin	2	1	4	3	0	0	0	0
Karlsruhe	1	0,14	3	2,41	0	0	0	0
Alba Iulia	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Dubrovnik	2	1	4	3	0	0	0	0
Lubljana	6	0,16	7	1,45	7,7	0,05	4	0,25

By analysing the data in the table above, it can be observed that Ljubljana, Valencia, Copenhagen and Bordeaux show a strong presence on different social platforms, with a high level of visual and textual content, an active strategy on Instagram and effective communication on sustainability. Ljubljana and Bordeaux have also shown a strong presence on social platforms and high involvement. However, there is a need for further developments in communication on sustainability and integration with other applications. The analysis highlighted the importance of an integrated digital strategy, including websites and social pages and effective communication on sustainability to promote sustainable tourism.

Benchmark Analysis

After observing the presence on the web of the tourist cities of Sardinia included in the sample, it is appropriate to compare the practices with the other destinations analysed to highlight the strengths and weaknesses of the models used. For the size of the analysis of the website, we will evaluate the best practices based on the total score, resulting from the sum of the indices attributable to each indicator in the analysis phase. At the same time, we will observe the Engagement rate in which the destination has aroused more community involvement, trying to investigate the elements that have made the winning model.

7.1. Website Communication Model

The top 5 destinations that have registered a major category are Valencia, Ljubliana, Dubrovnik, Copenhagen, Bordeaux and Villasimius. They all presented an excellent level of visual content, completeness of information, and integration with the app of the destination's social channels and other services. This key aspect offers the visitor a system vision for a complete experience. Three of these destinations have included in their messages the communication related to the commitment to sustainability, which is important not only to inform about good practices but also to spread a more virtuous behaviour of the visitor. Two offer an interactive chat on which to request information in real-time (also through a system of audio messages)

Only one, Ljubljana, that we will see will be the first city also for the level of ER on social, integrates into the communication conveyed by the site, video in virtual reality with 360-degree viewing.

Table 11. Total score of website analysis. Author's elaboration

Destinations	Design	Pictures	Video	Informations	Sustainabilty	Link Social N.	Link App	Link to Other Services	AI/VR/AR	Interactive Chatbox	Total Score
Valencia	3	3	3	3	3	2	3	3	0	2	25
Lubljana	3	3	3	3	0	2	3	3	2	2	24
Dubrovnik	3	3	3	3	0	3	3	3	0	0	21
Copenaghen	3	2	3	3	3	2	0	3	0	0	19
Villasimius	3	3	3	3	0	3	0	3	0	0	18
Bordeaux	3	3	2	3	3	1	0	3	0	0	18
Sant' Antioco	3	3	3	3	0	2	0	3	0	0	17
Florence- Destinatio	3	3	0	3	0	1	0	3	0	3	16
Ravenna	2	2	3	3	0	1	2	3	0	0	16
Olbia	3	3	0	3	0	3	0	3	0	0	15
Florence- Feel Floren	3	3	0	3	3	1	1	0	0	1	15
Cagliari	2	2	0	3	3	2	2	0	0	0	14
Budoni	1	1	0	3	0	0	0	2	0	0	14
Padua	2	2	3	3	0	1	0	3	0	0	14
Palermo	3	2	0	2	1	3	0	3	0	0	14
Karlsruhe	2	2	0	3	0	1	0	3	0	0	11
Alba Iulia	3	3	0	1	1	1	0	2	0	0	11
Dublin	2	2	0	3	0	1	0	2	0	0	10
Arzachena	2	3	1	3	0	3	2	3	0	0	10

The most virtuous destinations have used a communication model that takes care of the design in a predominant way; these are all sites that offer intuitive navigation even from mobile, as well as pleasant thanks to the choice of colours and images; these aspects recall for impact and coherence the identity image of the destination that was in my perception before the analysis. It would, therefore, be helpful to proceed in the search for strategic communication plans of destinations to see how these models result from good governance of the destination that highlights coordinated and effective strategic planning.

Analysing the sample of destinations in Sardinia, an interesting discrepancy emerges between the online presence on websites and the communication strategy on social media. In the context of website analysis, the selected Sardinian destinations seem to defend themselves well, showing fundamental indicators such as attractive design, quality images, detailed information, links to social media and, in the case of Cagliari, content focused on sustainability.

However, a more consistent approach to social media communication could help consolidate the overall image of destinations, with substantial improvements, especially in terms of the quality and completeness of the content. Despite a well-structured website, some destinations present an ineffective management of social channels, creating a potentially negative gap in visitor perception.

7.2. Social Media Networks Communications Models

Based on benchmark indices for weekly publication frequency and engagement rate, we can see which destinations have most successfully engaged their community.

Table 12. Indicators with relative attributes. Green: high engagement; ligth blue: low-medium; orange: outliers. Author's Elaboration

	Facebook		Instagram		Twitter		Tik Tok	
	Post per Week	ER%	Post per Week	ER%	Post per Week	ER%	Post per Week	ER%
Reference Benchmark	**3.36**	**0.088%**	**3.44**	**0.465%**	**1.82**	**0.032%**	**1.5**	**7.43%**
Cagliari	6	0,6	4	3,6	6	0,1	0	0
Budoni	1	28,3	1	43,8	0	0	0	0
Arzachena	3	0,2	7	0,4	0	0	0	0
Olbia	1	0,02	1	0,1	0	0	0	0
Sant'Antioco	10	0,02	4	3,6	0	0	0	0
Villasimius	2	0,9	8	0,2	0	0	0	0
Florence- Feel Florence	6	0,2	2	0,8	7	0,1	0	0
Florence- Destination Fl.	6	0,9	5	1,5	0	0	0	0
Padua	6	0,03	2	0,38	0	0	0	0
Palermo	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Ravenna	8	0,3	4	3,9	7	0,4	0	0
Copenaghen	3	2	5	5	0	0	0	0
Bordeaux	2	1	2	3	3	1	0	0
Valencia	6	0,1	7	1,94	0	0	0	0
Dublin	2	1	4	3	0	0	0	0
Karlsruhe	1	0,14	3	2,41	0	0	0	0
Alba Iulia	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Dubrovnik	2	1	4	3	0	0	0	0
Lubljana	6	0,16	7	1,45	7,7	0,05	4	0,25

Although the algorithms of social media networks are constantly updated, it can be said that a good frequency of posts allows you to maintain some coverage and a certain level of involvement. However, one key reflection from the analysis is that the number of posts is not always proportional to community involvement. This highlights the crucial importance of a well-defined communication strategy. Beyond the mere frequency of publication, it is necessary to consider content, timeliness, and relevance to maintain

authentic involvement. Interestingly, many destinations focus their efforts mainly on Facebook and Instagram.

Ljubljana stands out as the most virtuous destination, highlighted in green to indicate performance significantly superior to benchmarks in all platforms considered. This suggests an effective and well-calibrated communication strategy on different social platforms regarding content, presence on other social networks, and performance.

Cagliari, Ravenna, Copenhagen, and Florence are destined to be placed above benchmarks in at least one of the platforms, suggesting a targeted communication setting and a good interaction with the online community. These findings indicate that these destinations have successfully addressed the challenges of online presence.

Observing the performance of Bordeaux, Dublin and Dubrovnik tourist destinations on social media, a picture emerges of these locations approaching industry benchmarks but not yet reaching the levels of excellence observed in some of the other destinations. These destinations are progressing in their online presence but could benefit from optimizing engagement strategies and diversifying their presence across multiple platforms.

In general, it is essential to note that the ever-changing context of social media algorithms requires a dynamic and adaptable approach to maximize the impact of online presence.

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CONCLUSIONS

In a changing world where global digitalization is central to various sectors, tourist destinations must come to terms with processes that integrate new approaches and technologies in building new products and effective communication models. Involving an increasingly demanding and updated target audience with new changes is essential. Therefore, the need for a coherent communication model that considers both the communication of websites and social networks is increasingly widespread. Through the construction of a precise and studied model on the target audience, which reflects the identity of the destination and which is the spokesman of the identity values that characterize it. A plan that considers the elements of innovation we have seen in this analysis is the difference, for example, attractive and interactive visual content that integrates new technologies, information and awareness-raising activities on actions related to the destination's commitment to sustainability. Again, using user-generated content is an important strategy that, if well used, makes visitors become authentic storytellers, generating a relationship of trust between them and other tourists. Many virtuous destinations also allow booking and buying visits, overnight stays, and other services directly from their channels (mainly websites). The less virtuous offer is at least the reference links or contacts to be used for those interested in such activity. The latter case is less functional but is part of the concept of complete information that generates the perception in the visitor of an organized system.

In the evolving landscape of digital tourism, the conclusions drawn from the analysis of tourist destinations' communication practices in this project's context provide key information on which digital strategies can influence the attractiveness and impact of destinations. It is proposed through this research to provide a complete communication model where the contents tell the destination intending to build a brand destination on a cultural basis. The analyses related to the communication of tourist destinations present in the literature are many and different but focus mainly, for example, on one

or more theoretical and technical aspects of a single dimension. For instance, in the paper *Web Communication in Tourism: analysis of the tourist portals of the Italian Regions* the authors (Pencarelli Tonino *et al.*, 2019) highlight, from a technical IT point of view, the concept of usability and accessibility of the destinations' websites, not stating the importance of content and omitting other dimensions and indicators that are fundamental to the construction of an integrated communication model. Another study *Internet as a "point of synergy" between communication and distribution: hypothesis of model applied to tourism* aims to identify and integrate that involves the main levers of the marketing mix where the internet is a fundamental lever in the promotion-distribution of destinations (Singer *et al.*, 2010).

What seems to be missing in the literature is a multiplicity of studies proposing constructing an effective digital communication model of the destination, starting from a vast proposal of practical actions aimed at the authentic story of identity and culture.

Through this project, we can emphasise the importance of an *integrated digital communication model* that considers both the online presence through websites and the different social networks, which is the basis of every successful communication for destinations and businesses. It is essential to be present and integrate both through a website and on social networks. To cover the heterogeneous target of reference clearly with links and references and the presence of apps or links to access information or purchase services in the context of the destination.

Let's see what the key factors concerning the destination's website and social profiles need to be considered from an integrated digital communication perspective.

Table 11. Key factors of a virtuous digital communication model. Author's elaboration

Integrated digital communication model
• Authenticity in storytelling: identity and cultural values
• High quality of contents
• Effective communication on sustainability
• Interaction strategies with the online community
• Use of innovative new format technologies (e.g. virtual reality, augmented)

Authenticity in storytelling: identity and cultural values. The authenticity of storytelling depends on the presence of identity and cultural values. To be attractive, the destination must anticipate a story and its history and highlight what experience the potential consumer could experience. By its nature, digital communication offers the risk of standardizing the message, resulting in a loss of originality and a reduction in the ability to stand out.

The cities that have been able to narrate their culture effectively have done so by building a message consistent with their identity, with clear semantics, that starts from the tone of the voice to touch the universe of signs, symbols, colours, and images (Copenhagen, Bordeaux, Valencia). In the proposed model, therefore, culture is understood in coherence but with a modern approach, with the definition provided by Levis Strauss, according to which culture is like language, consisting of a finite number of signs that give an infinite variety. A set of symbols (in this case digital) that come to life in the communicative exchange (Gertz, 1973).

In terms of content, Copenhagen expressed the cultural approach, therefore social habits, knowledge, values, and customs, through the narration of architecture, sustainability, local gastronomy, and sustainable mobility. He did this through images of historic buildings, modern buildings with sustainable architecture, images and videos of food derived from local gastronomy, and images that tell the choice of sustainable mobility as an approach to everyday life. He did it with coherent language and a dynamic tone of voice. He also declined the type of content used (colours, quality photos, and videos) that is typical of Danish culture and in line with your perception. A second example is Bordeaux, which has decided to confirm its cultural identity linked to food and wine but also making it discover more about its historical aspect and its modern and urban renewal, so much so that in the structure of the website, the first cluster of contents are just those related to the "City and its heritage". Even on social media, beyond the food and wine content, there is a story of Bordeaux linked to cultural liveliness, monuments, urban architecture, museums and galleries, and its sustainable commitment from 9 to. In the Global Destination Sustainability Index. As can be observed, culture is the fundamental element of the communication model, which must be told through a wider activity of storytelling that takes into account several aspects, including formats (e.g., texts, images, video, audio) and their quality, colours, tone of voice, theoretically understood as a universe of signs and symbols that convey the anthropological concept of culture understood as "Culture, or civilization, understood in its broad ethnographic sense, is that complex whole that includes knowledge, beliefs, art, morality, law, custom and any other skill and habit acquired by man as a member of a society" (M. Tylor, *Primitive Culture*, 1871).

High quality of visual and textual content. As Bill Gates said in 1996, "Content is king": element accuracy, a design designed and responsive, intuitive navigation and quality content, visual or textual, are crucial to creating an immersive experience for visitors.

Effective communication on sustainability is understood both from the point of view of the promotion of the destination and the awareness of correct consumer behaviour. This emerging aspect of contemporaneity is crucial. Destinations that communicate transparently their actions and commitments to sustainability inform visitors, promote virtuous behaviour and contribute to constructing a positive perception of the destination. A tangible example of this practice is Ljubljana, which has stood out for implementing sustainable policies and initiatives, highlighted clearly and transparently through its digital communication. Through a wide range of visual and textual content, Ljubljana communicated its commitment to sustainability, informing visitors about the actions taken and encouraging them to adopt responsible behaviour during their visit. This approach has helped inform and raise awareness of sustainability among visitors and consolidated Ljubljana's image as a conscious and cutting-edge tourist destination.

Interaction strategies with the online community. Destinations that can actively engage their community, encouraging participation and sharing user-generated content create a stronger and more lasting bond with their visitors. Cagliari, Ravenna and Florence represent an example of effective interaction with the online community. These destinations have proven to be able to actively involve their communities through a policy of enhancing the content generated by users, regularly sharing photos, videos, and stories from them and representing their experience. This approach has helped create a stronger and lasting bond with visitors and amplified the scope of communication, increased their accessibility, and attracted online audiences.

Using new technologies and innovative formats, such as virtual reality videos or other interactive communication tools, can further enrich the visitor's digital experience and differentiate the target on the market. Ljubljana is a relevant example of adopting new technologies and innovative formats. The city has demonstrated a particular virtuosity in integrating advanced communication tools, such as virtual reality (VR) videos and interactive tools, to enrich the visitor's digital experience. Using 360-degree VR videos and other interactive elements, Ljubljana has offered potential visitors an immersive and engaging view of the city and its attractions. This approach not only differentiated Ljubljana on the tourist market but also helped to create a unique and memorable digital experience for visitors, thus increasing its appeal and attractiveness. Alba Julia instead offers onsite virtual reality technologies in the context of the

consumption of the tourist product that, however, acts as entertainment and is not attractive, so it is only for those who have already decided to arrive at the destination[1].

With new technologies and a renewed and more widespread awareness of sustainable issues, it is changing not only the way of living in a destination and its environmental, social, and economic context but also the communicative approach that allows the traveller to get in touch with the destination and establish a relationship before going there and possibly even after.

An effective digital communication strategy requires an integrated and dynamic approach, considering the different aspects of online presence inspired by the essence of identity and culture. The website must also show its digital dimensions, such as website and social network.

Destinations that can implement such strategies coherently and modernly with the aspects summarised above (Fig. 11) can maximise their impact and consolidate their position in the digital tourism landscape

1. Author's survey on site, degree's study trip, double degree, University of Sassari and University of Babes Bolyai, May 2022.

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Antonio Usai, Ph.D., is Associate Professor of Economics and Business Management at the University of Sassari. He directs research groups working on issues of innovation and strategic management, tourism management, and innovative and sustainable development strategies for tourist destinations. He is the author of numerous publications and the Founder and CEO of Tourism Plus, a University of Sassari spin-off.

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In a context of increasing digitalization and personalization of tourism offerings, where the online channel is now considered a key axis for the sector's development, this research investigates six tourist destinations in Sardinia to study their digital communication methods relative to European benchmark standards. The objective is to evaluate the effectiveness of communication strategies through indicators applied to official websites and social media channels, including design, content, user interaction, immersive technologies, and sustainability. The research adopts an innovative approach grounded in a systemic vision of the tourism product as an integrated expression of the supply chain, where the destination represents a global aggregate of cultural goods and services. The findings reveal significant asymmetries: while some destinations demonstrate strong communication performance in storytelling and innovation, others exhibit weaknesses in content quality and the integrated management of communication and territorial promotion. The study proposes a replicable communication framework based on identity-driven storytelling, sustainability, and technological innovation as strategic levers to enhance the competitiveness of tourism destinations.

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