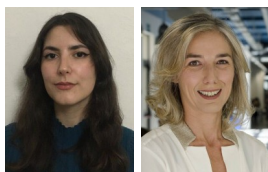


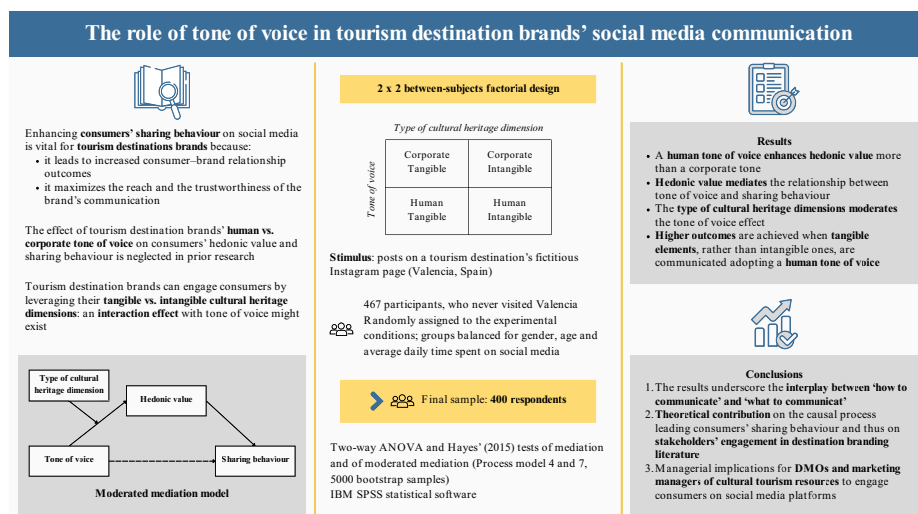
The role of tone of voice in tourism destination brands' social media communication

Marta Barattin and Sabrina Latusi



Marta Barattin and Sabrina Latusi are both based at the Department of Economics and Management, University of Parma, Parma, Italy.

Graphical abstract



Abstract

Purpose – Enhancing consumers' sharing behaviour on social media platforms is crucial for tourism destination brands. This can lead to increased consumer–brand relationship outcomes, amplified reach and perceived trustworthiness of their communication. This study aims to investigate the impact of the tone of voice (corporate vs human) adopted by a tourism destination in its social media communication on users' perceived hedonic value and sharing behaviour, while also considering the interplay with the type of cultural heritage dimensions (tangible vs intangible) highlighted in the communication.

Design/methodology/approach – A 2 (corporate vs human) × 2 (tangible vs intangible) between-subjects factorial design was used. A total of 400 respondents viewed a fictitious tourism destination brand page on Instagram, with posts manipulated according to the study variables and answered an online survey.

Findings – The conversational human voice generates a higher level of hedonic value than the formal corporate voice; in turn, the increased hedonic value positively influences sharing behaviour. The type of cultural heritage dimensions moderates the tone of voice effect. In this moderated mediation, higher outcomes are achieved when tangible rather than intangible elements are communicated by adopting a human tone of voice. These findings advance the knowledge of the causal process responsible for consumers' sharing behaviour, thereby enriching the discourse on stakeholder engagement in destination branding literature.

Originality/value – This study addresses the issue of tone of voice from the perspective of tourism destination brands, an angle of analysis neglected in prior research. It also sheds light on the effect

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of interaction between tone of voice and cultural heritage dimensions, unaccounted for in previous studies.

Keywords Human voice, Tourism destination brand(ing), Cultural heritage, Social media, Sharing behaviour

Paper type Research paper

旅游目的地品牌在社交媒体传播中的语调作用

研究目的: 提升消费者在社交媒体上的分享行为对旅游目的地至关重要。这不仅有助于加强消费者与品牌之间的关系,还能扩大传播范围并提升感知可信度。本研究探讨了旅游目的地在社交媒体传播中采用的语调(官方语调 vs 人性化语调)对用户感知享乐价值及分享行为的影响,并分析语调与文化遗产维度(有形 vs 无形)之间的互动效果。

研究设计/方法: 采用了2(官方语调 vs 人性化语调) × 2(有形文化遗产 vs 无形文化遗产)的被试间实验设计。共有400名受访者查看了一个操控语调和文化遗产维度的虚拟旅游目的地品牌Instagram页面,并完成了一份在线问卷。

研究结果: 结果显示,人性化且口语化的语调相比正式的官方语调更能显著提升用户感知的享乐价值,而享乐价值的提升会进一步增强用户的分享行为。此外,文化遗产维度对语调效果具有调节作用。当传播内容聚焦于有形文化遗产并采用人性化语调时,分享行为的效果最为显著。这些发现拓展了关于消费者分享行为因果路径的研究,为目的地品牌化领域中有利益相关者参与的讨论提供了新的视角。

研究创新: 本研究从旅游目的地品牌的角度分析语调对传播效果的影响,这一视角在现有文献中较为薄弱。此外,研究还揭示了语调与文化遗产维度的交互作用,这在现有研究中尚未被深入探讨。文章分类 研究论文

关键词 人性化语调、旅游目的地品牌(品牌化)、文化遗产、社交媒体、分享行为

文章类型 研究型论文

El papel del tono de voz en la comunicación de las marcas de destinos turísticos en las redes sociales

Resumen

Objetivo: Mejorar el comportamiento de los consumidores a la hora de compartir en las plataformas de redes sociales es crucial para las marcas de destinos turísticos. Esto puede conducir a mejores resultados en la relación entre el consumidor y la marca, a un mayor alcance y a una mayor percepción de confianza en su comunicación. Este estudio investiga el impacto del tono de voz (corporativo frente a humano) adoptado por un destino turístico en su comunicación en redes sociales sobre el valor hedónico percibido por los usuarios y el comportamiento de intercambio, al tiempo que considera la interacción con el tipo de dimensiones del patrimonio cultural (tangible frente a intangible) destacadas en la comunicación.

Diseño/Metodología/Enfoque: Se empleó un diseño factorial entre sujetos de 2 (corporativo vs humano) × 2 (tangible vs intangible). Un total de 400 encuestados vieron una página ficticia de marca de destino turístico en Instagram, con publicaciones manipuladas según las variables del estudio, y respondieron a una encuesta en línea.

Resultados: La voz humana conversacional genera un mayor nivel de valor hedónico que la voz corporativa formal; a su vez, el aumento del valor hedónico influye positivamente en el comportamiento de compartir. El tipo de dimensiones del patrimonio cultural modera el efecto del tono de voz. En esta mediación moderada, se consiguen mejores resultados cuando se comunican elementos tangibles en lugar de intangibles adoptando un tono de voz humano. Estos hallazgos avanzan en el conocimiento del proceso causal responsable del comportamiento de los consumidores a la hora de compartir, enriqueciendo así el debate sobre el compromiso de las partes interesadas en la literatura sobre la marca de destino.

Originalidad: Este estudio aborda la cuestión del tono de voz desde la perspectiva de las marcas de destinos turísticos, un ángulo de análisis que se ha descuidado en investigaciones anteriores. También arroja luz sobre el efecto de la interacción entre el tono de voz y las dimensiones del patrimonio cultural, que no se han tenido en cuenta en estudios anteriores.

Palabras clave Voz humana, Marca(s) de destino turístico, Patrimonio cultural, Redes sociales,

Compartir contenido

Tipo de papel Trabajo de investigación

Introduction

Globally, over five billion people use social media platforms such as X, TikTok, Instagram and Facebook. Individuals aged 16–64 spend almost 2.3h daily on social media to maintain connections with friends and family, fill their spare time and seek inspiration for activities and purchases (We Are Social and Meltwater, 2024). The popularity of these platforms provides brands with huge opportunities to interact with consumers, foster engagement and cultivate relationships (Gretry *et al.*, 2017). Tourism in particular has been disrupted by social media,

which have drastically changed the way people seek and exchange information or come to a decision on which destinations to visit (e.g. [Gaffar et al., 2022](#); [Varkaris and Neuhofer, 2017](#)). Given the intangible and inherently experiential nature of visiting a destination, social media platforms have become complementary to and sometimes even substitutes for conventional sources of tourism information ([An et al., 2022](#)). Concurrently, tourism destinations have integrated social media into their branding strategies designed to build their unique positioning and create emotional connections with tourists (e.g. [Mandagi and Centeno, 2024](#)). Hence, social media have become indispensable marketing resources for engaging stakeholders and effectively communicating the identities of tourism destination brands.

Despite the aforementioned importance, uncertainties persist regarding the optimal strategies for engaging with consumers on these dynamic platforms ([Bastrygina et al., 2024](#)). Specifically, questions remain regarding the ideal methods for triggering factors that could affect consumers' willingness to share. Enhancing consumers' sharing behaviour (SB) – that is, consumers sharing a post on their profile – is vital for tourism destination brands. This can result in enhanced consumer–brand relationship outcomes ([Vinh and Phuong, 2020](#)) and an expanded reach and perceived trustworthiness of online communication ([An et al., 2022](#); [Buchanan and Benson, 2019](#); [Chu and Kim, 2011](#)). Nonetheless, relatively little is known about how consumers' sharing behaviour is affected by the communication style used by tourism destination brands on social media. Should a tourism destination brand adopt a more personal and humanised approach to these platforms? Alternatively, is it advisable to maintain a certain level of detachment and opt for a less intimate tone? The notion of conversational human voice in online communication – which refers to a tone of voice (ToV) that fosters a sense of closeness and authenticity and makes the brand seem more human (e.g. [Park and Cameron, 2014](#)) – remains relatively unexplored in the tourism literature, despite a growing interest in the topic ([Barcelos et al., 2019](#)). In addition, the extant literature predominantly focuses on tourist actors, such as hotels and restaurants, while a gap regarding the perspective of tourism destination brands remains.

Tourism destinations can engage consumers by leveraging their cultural heritage dimensions and hence their historical, artistic and creative assets ([Chhabra et al., 2003](#); [Steriopoulos et al., 2024](#)). Consequently, another question arises: Can the impact of the tone of voice vary depending on which type of cultural heritage dimension is highlighted in online communication? Essentially, a possibility exists of an interaction between ToV and the type of cultural heritage dimensions that has not been considered thus far.

The present study aims to fill the aforementioned gaps by ascertaining whether and how, in the social media context, the tone of voice (corporate/formal tone vs human/informal tone), as well as the type of cultural heritage dimensions (tangible vs intangible), influence consumers' sharing behaviour. Further, this study considers the role of hedonic value (HV) in mediating the effect of tone and cultural heritage on consumers' sharing behaviour. To this end, a 2×2 between-subjects factorial design was used, and a fictitious tourism destination brand page on Instagram was created, with posts manipulated according to the study variables.

This research contributes to the tourism destination branding literature in the following ways. First, to the best of the authors' knowledge, this is the first study to address the issue of tone of voice from the perspective of tourism destination brands. Second, the study expands the knowledge of tourism destination brands' social media communication by considering the interplay between tone of voice and cultural heritage dimensions. Third, this study contributes to the ongoing debate on destination branding strategies as multiple stakeholders' co-creative efforts by providing a deeper understanding of consumers' sharing behaviour. Finally, the present study offers a contribution to the body of literature on online consumer engagement by advancing the understanding of sharing behaviour in the tourism domain. In addition to the theoretical contributions, the results hold managerial value as they can inform destination management organisations (DMOs) on how to improve their social media communication efforts to foster more positive consumer engagement.

Literature review and hypotheses development

Human tone of voice in tourism destination brands' online communication

Although brands, even tourism destination brands, are not human beings, consumers may connect with and respond to them as if they were (Fournier, 1998). Given the very interactive nature of social media, on these platforms “the brand is always personified to a certain degree” (Barcelos *et al.*, 2018, p. 61); essentially, it gains some human-like characteristics. In addition to this effect, the stylistic choices that define the brand’s online communication style can make the brand more or less “human” to users. Following a continuum in communication styles, the two extremes recognised in the literature are a “conversational human” voice and a “corporate” voice. The conversational human voice was originally conceived as “an engaging and natural style of organizational communication as perceived by an organization’s public based on interactions between individuals in the organization and individuals in the publics” (Kelleher, 2009, p. 177). Afterwards, the conversational human voice has been conceptualised as a natural and informal communication style which leads to brands being perceived as closer to the public (Park and Cameron, 2014; Park and Lee, 2013). This contrasts with the corporate tone, which is defined as being less natural and more formal, in which the brand maintains a greater distance from the recipient.

The tone of voice “is more than just the words we choose. It’s the way in which we communicate our personality” (Nielsen Norman Group, 2023). Hence, in addition to the choice of words, a human tone can be expressed using a first-person perspective (“I” or “we”), in contrast to a third-person perspective typical of corporate tone (e.g. “the brand X”, “the staff”); or through expressions of emotions, rather than the rational appeals that are typical of a corporate tone (e.g. Barcelos *et al.*, 2018). In broader terms, ToV also depends on the musicality of the language used in spoken communication, the use of graphic elements within websites and the avatar used during the conversation (Gretry *et al.*, 2017).

The influence of the brand’s online communication style on the nature of the relationship with stakeholders has been the subject of increasing empirical investigation in the marketing literature. Most of these studies analyse the adoption of a conversational human voice in the context of crisis communication, examining its effects on customers’ brand perceptions, such as reputation and trustworthiness (e.g. Park and Cameron, 2014) and employer attractiveness (Kapuściński *et al.*, 2021). In the service literature, the conversational human voice has been primarily studied in offline service encounters. The focus has then shifted to online communication contexts, within which, beyond crisis communication, ToV has been investigated in terms of relational outcomes. It has been demonstrated that a conversational human voice is associated with customer commitment, satisfaction, trust (Kelleher, 2009) and positive corporate reputation (Dijkmans *et al.*, 2015). Despite growing interest, the concept of conversational human voice in online communication remains relatively unexplored in the service literature, and studies are even more scarce in the tourism research field (Barcelos *et al.*, 2019, 2018), where the perspective of tourism destinations is largely neglected.

Addressing this gap of knowledge is paramount given the strategic importance of social media communication for tourism destinations in shaping tourists’ expectations, knowledge and attitudes throughout the tourist journey (e.g. Liu *et al.*, 2020). To this end, the present paper sets out to examine the communication styles in the context of social media from the tourism destination brands’ perspective. Drawing upon previous studies, it is proposed that a human tone of voice will result in an enhanced hedonic value of the online consumer experience, which, in turn, will increase the consumers’ propensity to share. In addition, it is proposed that the type of cultural heritage elements (tangible vs intangible) highlighted in the message moderates the relationship between ToV and HV. The following sections expand upon these arguments.

Hedonic value in online consumers' experience

Traditionally, the literature has focused on the utilitarian value that consumers can derive from online experiences, concentrating on rational benefits. Consequently, extensive research has been dedicated to analysing the functional and instrumental dimensions of websites and digital platforms that support browsing and shopping (e.g. Childers *et al.*, 2001). The focus has then shifted from cognitive and non-emotional outcomes to hedonic value and, hence, to emotional benefits.

Hedonic value is derived from the pleasure and enjoyment perceived during an experience and is associated with its multisensory, emotional and entertaining aspects (Li *et al.*, 2022). Hence, HV stems from entertainment, high-arousal stimuli and effect-related aspects of the consumer's experience (e.g. Chiu *et al.*, 2014). Previous research has demonstrated that online experiences with a brand are moulded by the hedonic value that consumers can derive, for instance, from the interactivity of the website, sociability and flow perception (e.g. Rodríguez-Ardura *et al.*, 2024; Wang *et al.*, 2007). On social media, HV is strongly connected to sentiments of amusement and sociability obtained by interconnecting with brands or other consumers (e.g. Richard and Chebat, 2016). In these contexts, the brand communication style can play a pivotal role, given that a conversation that uses a human ToV is also a conversation with a greater social presence (Park and Cameron, 2014; Park and Lee, 2013), whose importance in transmitting emotions within media is acknowledged (McKenna *et al.*, 2002).

As the role of the conversational human voice in enhancing the hedonic outcomes of the online consumer experience has been demonstrated in the hospitality industry (Barcelos *et al.*, 2019, 2018), it is reasonable to assume that the same relationship applies to the context of tourism destination brands' online communication. Hence, a tourism destination brand employing a human ToV is expected to be capable of conveying more emotions than employing a corporate tone, leading to an increase in consumers' perceived HV. More formally, the following hypothesis is stated:

- H1.* The more human (corporate) the voice used by the tourism destination brand on social media, the higher (lower) the hedonic value of the online experience for the consumer.

Sharing behaviour in online consumers' experience

The development of social media, along with the increasing presence of brands in these channels, has allowed consumers/users to engage more frequently and intensely with both brands and other consumers. Activities such as sharing information, spreading word-of-mouth and offering feedback to brands have become widespread behaviours involving many more users than in the past. These online behaviours are indicative of a more involved and active user in the brand–user relationship; they fall under the umbrella of “consumer engagement”, defined as “consumer non-transactional interactions with a brand or with other consumers in a brand context” (Schamari and Schaefers, 2015, p. 21). Consumer engagement is posited to be related to several brand relationship outcomes, including the enhancement of consumer satisfaction, trust, connection, emotional bonding, loyalty and commitment (Brodie *et al.*, 2013). The consequences of consumer engagement can extend beyond the dyadic consumer–brand relationship: interactions between the brand and the consumer on social media are visible to all users, thereby allowing each observer to form impressions of the brand (Barcelos *et al.*, 2019).

Online consumer engagement behaviours can be categorised into four distinct behaviours: liking, commenting, sharing and creating (Vinh and Phuong, 2020).

The present paper focuses on sharing behaviour, which is defined as consumers sharing a post on their profile. The level of engagement in this case is higher than that of liking or

commenting (Kim and Yang, 2017; Vinh and Phuong, 2020), as the consumer demonstrates a more intense relationship with the content while supporting it. This activity extends beyond the “individual” sphere by making the shared post visible to the consumer’s followers, and thereby amplifying its reach (An *et al.*, 2022; Chu and Kim, 2011). Further, through the act of sharing, consumers communicate their opinions and thoughts to their followers, demonstrating that they are affected by the message and are personally involved in it. Consequently, they have the potential to affect the trustworthiness of the message perceived by their followers (Buchanan and Benson, 2019). In summary, for tourism destination brands, enhancing sharing behaviour is important in two ways: it leads to increased consumer–brand relationship outcomes; it maximises the reach and trustworthiness of the brand’s social media communication, thereby improving its efficiency and effectiveness.

From this perspective, hedonic value can play a crucial role, as it may make consumers more favourably disposed to marketing stimuli (Van der Heijden, 2004). It has also been demonstrated that HV affects Twitter use (Yoo *et al.*, 2014) and users’ willingness to share articles from companies’ official accounts in the context of WeChat (Ma *et al.*, 2018). Hence, it may be expected that the hedonic value of the online experience creates a more favourable disposition for consumers to share the posts published by the tourism destination brand on social media. More formally:

H2. The higher the consumer’s perceived hedonic value of the online experience with the tourism destination brand, the higher the consumer’s sharing behaviour.

In light of the aforementioned literature and hypotheses, it is posited that hedonic value mediates the relationship between tone of voice and consumers’ sharing behaviour. HV is increased by the adoption of a human ToV, which conveys a greater consumer enjoyment than a corporate tone. Subsequently, enhanced HV leads to greater SB. Hence, it is hypothesised that HV fully mediates the relationship between ToV and SB. More formally, it is proposed as follows:

H3. The influence of the tourism destination brand’s tone of voice on consumer’s sharing behaviour is mediated by the consumer’s hedonic value of the online experience.

Type of cultural heritage dimensions

Cultural heritage represents a fundamental means of identifying and differentiating a tourism destination in the market (Chhabra *et al.*, 2003). It can be considered unique and attractive to both international and domestic tourists and represents a valuable asset in creating a competitive advantage (Lam and Hsu, 2006). It is consequently not surprising that cultural heritage is integral to destination branding strategies.

Cultural heritage is defined as “what we have inherited, which can mean anything, from historical buildings, to works of art, to characteristic scenarios” (Yale, 1991, p. 21). This legacy, inherited from the past, encompasses a multitude of local traditions – including lifestyles, dances, rituals, festivals, oral traditions – as well as built heritage assets, such as museums, buildings and parks (Poria *et al.*, 2003; Qiu, 2023). Cultural heritage is classified into two distinct categories: tangible (or physical) and intangible attributes, both of which are typically leveraged by tourism destinations to attract tourists (Park, 2014; Yu and Xu, 2019). Hence, it is interesting to explore the possible interplay between the tone of voice used by a tourism destination brand in its social media communication and the cultural heritage dimensions highlighted in the message. This study posits that the effect of ToV on HV can be moderated by the type of cultural heritage dimension mentioned. Tangible cultural heritage dimensions are typically communicated by highlighting quantitative or factual information (e.g. monument building dates or functions) and more tacit values and qualities (e.g. symbolic meanings and architectural qualities) (Nofal *et al.*, 2017). The intrinsic content of this communication may translate into more limited pleasure and enjoyment perceived by the recipient, in comparison

to intangible cultural heritage dimensions. Indeed, it is acknowledged that intangible cultural heritage attributes can “increase the interactivity of destinations and consolidate the impression of local entertainment [...]” (Qiu *et al.*, 2022, p. 14).

Based on the literature above, it is argued that the effect of a conversational human voice on consumers’ hedonic value of the social media experience with a tourism destination brand should be stronger when the message highlights intangible cultural heritage dimensions. This is because of the benefits of a conversational human voice that is inherently emotional and can be reinforced by the emotional and entertainment aspects of the intangible dimensions of cultural heritage, such as festive events and lifestyle. Conversely, the influence of a conversational human voice on consumers’ hedonic value should be less strong when the message highlights tangible cultural heritage dimensions. The following hypothesis is stated:

H4. The type of cultural heritage dimensions moderates the relationship between tone of voice and hedonic value, such that the influence of tone of voice results in a higher (lower) hedonic value when the cultural heritage dimension is intangible (tangible).

The relationships posited by *H3* and *H4*, considered together, can be interpreted as a moderated mediation effect. The following hypothesis is proposed:

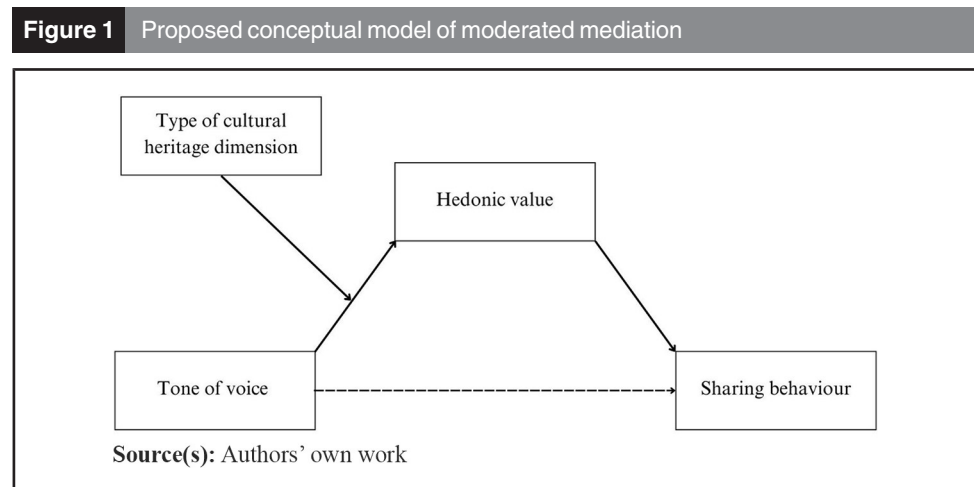
H5. The influence of tone of voice on sharing behaviour via hedonic value is moderated by the type of cultural heritage dimensions. Specifically, the effect of tone of voice on sharing behaviour via hedonic value is higher (lower) when the cultural heritage dimension is intangible (tangible).

Figure 1 depicts the key paths of the posited moderated mediation.

Methodology

The present study aims to assess the influence of tone of voice and the type of cultural heritage dimensions on hedonic value, and its further effect on sharing behaviour. Consistent with this aim, the study took a post-positivist research perspective, asserting that causes determine the effects (Creswell and Creswell, 2018) and conducted a quantitative study. Particularly, given the research objectives, a 2×2 between-subjects factorial design was used to manipulate the tone of voice (corporate vs human) and the type of cultural heritage dimensions (tangible vs intangible) while also measuring participants’ hedonic value and sharing behaviour.

Instagram was selected as the social media platform for the research because of its broad usage and relevance to businesses (We Are Social and Meltwater, 2024), and for being a



social media platform where users can view interactions with the brand and with other users – a characteristic beneficial for the study's aims. For the study, a fictitious tourism destination brand page was created to test participants' reactions without bias from profiles they already followed. The tourism destination chosen for the purpose of the study was Valencia (Spain) because it is a city rich in both tangible and intangible cultural heritage dimensions. Valencia was also selected because, although it is well-known, it is not an outstanding destination in terms of awareness and uniqueness of tourist attractions (compared with destinations such as Paris or Venice). In summary, Valencia was deemed an appropriate destination for examining the moderating role of tangible and intangible cultural heritage dimensions on the tone of voice effects, while concurrently mitigating the potential for bias stemming from a high level of destination awareness.

Stimuli and pre-test

The stimuli used in the study were posts on the tourism destination's fictitious Instagram page, containing a combination of content and description. Two versions of the content (tangible and intangible cultural heritage dimensions) and two versions of the description (corporate and human tone of voice) were created, resulting in four experimental conditions. Precisely, three tangible cultural heritage dimensions and three intangible cultural heritage dimensions were posted on the fictitious account twice: one with a human-tone description and the other with a corporate-tone description ([Appendix](#)). The tangible cultural heritage dimensions were monuments and buildings connected to the historical events of Valencia, whereas the intangible cultural heritage dimensions included traditions, customs and legends. Messages that adopted a corporate ToV used formal language and only transmitted essential information without expressing emotions or emoticons, whereas messages with a human ToV used a more informal, colloquial and conversational communication style with emotional language and a rich use of emoticons. Previous studies that dealt with linguistic choices and sentiments of closeness/humanness inspired the tone of voice manipulation ([Barcelos et al., 2019, 2018](#); [Park and Cameron, 2014](#); [Park and Lee, 2013](#)). To improve realism, each message was accompanied by an identical image for each experimental condition.

A pre-test was conducted to determine the effectiveness of the manipulations of the tourism destination brand's tone of voice on social media. A total of 51 participants were exposed to the fictitious tourism destination brand's social media page, which displayed the posts created. Subjects were randomly allocated to one of the two conditions (corporate ToV vs human ToV), and they responded to a four-item measure adapted from [Gretry et al. \(2017\)](#), assessing the extent to which the brand communicated informally (i.e. "communicates in an informal/unofficial/casual/easy-going way"); a seven-point scale was used (Cronbach's $\alpha = 0.966$). Subjects in the human ToV condition rated ToV as significantly more informal than those in the corporate ToV condition [$M_{\text{Corporate}} = 1.92$, $M_{\text{Human}} = 5.84$; $t(49) = -18.890$, $p < 0.001$]. Hence, the results indicate successful manipulations of the tone of voice.

Main study, participants and procedure

A questionnaire was created for each of the four experimental conditions, comprising the following sections: introduction regarding the account expressly created for the study, its purpose (promoting the city of Valencia and its attractions) and links to the three posts related to a specific experimental condition, measurement of the dependent variables and socio-demographic questions.

A convenience sample of 467 individuals who had never visited Valencia participated in the study. This selection criterion was employed to prevent the respondents' evaluations from being influenced by previous tourism experiences in the city (whether positive or negative). Participants were recruited on several social media platforms. After agreeing to participate, they were randomly assigned to one of the four experimental conditions, and the groups were

balanced for gender, age and average daily time spent on social media. Each participant was provided with a link to the corresponding questionnaire and was asked to read the introduction, open the links to the three posts and read them carefully. The participants completed the survey that included the study's measures of interest after viewing the posts for as long as they wanted. The entire process took approximately 10 min on average.

Measures

To measure the different constructs, scales adapted from the literature were adopted (Table 1). HV was assessed with a four-item scale (Cronbach's $\alpha = 0.878$) adapted from Barcelos *et al.* (2018) and SB was assessed with a four-item scale (Cronbach's $\alpha = 0.865$) adapted from Evans *et al.* (2017), each measured on a five-point Likert scale, anchored by 1 = "strongly disagree" and 5 = "strongly agree".

Methods of data analysis

Regression analysis, two-way ANOVAs and Hayes (2015) tests of mediation (Process Model 4) and moderated mediation (Process Model 7) were used to test the hypotheses. Data analysis was performed using the IBM SPSS statistical software (SPSS Inc., Chicago, IL, USA; Release 28.00).

Results

Respondent characteristics

The final sample comprised 400 participants who completed the questionnaire. The participants' average age was 27 years, ranging from 17 to 65 years; 269 (67.25%) were women, 129 (32.25%) were men and two (0.50%) preferred not to answer. A majority of participants (56.00%) declared that they spent, on average, less than one hour a day on social media, 25.00% spent one to two hours and 19.00% spent more than two hours. The analysis of the demographic data and time spent on social media demonstrated homogeneity among the groups as well as heterogeneity within each group for these characteristics (see details in Table 2).

Tests of hypotheses

First, the regression analysis determined that the impact of ToV on HV was significant [$\beta = 0.532, p < 0.001; F(1, 398) = 44.063, p < 0.001$]. Results from a two-way independent

Table 1 Mediator variable and independent variable

Variable	Measurement items	Alpha
Hedonic value (adapted from Barcelos <i>et al.</i> , 2018)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – I enjoyed spending time on the profile of the tourist destination – Visiting the profile of the tourist destination was a pleasant experience – Compared to other things I could have done, being on the profile of the tourist destination was really enjoyable – I liked visiting the profile of the tourist destination for the pleasure of doing so, not just for the useful information I found (1–5: strongly disagree – strongly agree) 	0.878
Sharing behaviour (adapted from Evans <i>et al.</i> , 2017)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – I am interested in sharing these posts with my friends on Instagram – I am interested in sharing my experience with this tourist destination with my friends on Instagram – I am willing to spread word-of-mouth about this tourist destination on my Instagram page – I am willing to share these posts of the tourist destination on my Instagram profile (1–5: strongly disagree – strongly agree) 	0.865

Source(s): Authors' own work

ANOVA showed a significant main effect of ToV on HV [$M_{\text{Corporate}} = 3.101$, $SD = 0.83$; $M_{\text{Human}} = 3.634$, $SD = 0.78$; $F(1, 396) = 44.379$, $p < 0.001$]. Hence, the human ToV has a greater effect on HV than the corporate ToV, regardless of the type of cultural heritage dimensions. Based on these results, *H1* is supported.

A mediation (i.e. Model 4, 5000 bootstrap samples) analysis was then performed employing Hayes (2015) process macro v4.2. Tone of voice was taken as an independent variable, hedonic value as a mediator and sharing behaviour as a dependent variable. Table 3 lists the output specifications. The model revealed that HV derived from the online consumer experience positively predicts SB ($\beta = 0.9123$, $p = 0.0000$). Based on these results, *H2* is supported. The exclusion of zero from the confidence interval for the indirect effect indicated that HV mediates the relationship between ToV and SB ($\beta = 0.4858$, CI 95% [0.3419; 0.6438]). Hence, *H3* is supported. The direct effect of ToV on SB was not significant ($\beta = 0.0030$, $p = 0.9689$), suggesting a full mediation (Baron and Kenny, 1986).

To examine *H4* and *H5*, a moderated mediation (i.e. Model 7, 5000 bootstrap samples) analysis was carried out with Hayes (2015) process macro v4.2. Tone of voice was included as an independent variable, the type of cultural heritage dimensions as a moderator, hedonic value as a mediator and sharing behaviour as a dependent variable. Table 4 lists the details of the output.

To explore the potential moderation, the interaction effect was examined; the mediator variable model showed a significant interaction between the type of cultural heritage dimensions and ToV on HV, at a 0.05 level of significance ($\beta = -0.3450$, $p = 0.0315$). Therefore, the type of cultural heritage dimensions moderates the impact of ToV on HV. The simple slopes revealed that this impact was significant for both tangible ($\beta = 0.7050$, $p = 0.0000$) and intangible cultural heritage dimensions ($\beta = 0.3600$, $p = 0.0016$). To explore this further, a two-way independent ANOVA was carried out. The results showed that when tangible cultural heritage dimensions were communicated in the post, the effects on HV were significantly different between corporate and human ToV [$M_{\text{Corporate}} = 3.033$, $SD = 0.79$; $M_{\text{Human}} = 3.738$, $SD = 0.74$; $F(1, 396) = 38.894$, $p < 0.001$]. The effects were also significantly different in the intangible cultural heritage dimensions condition [$M_{\text{Corporate}} = 3.17$, $SD = 0.87$; $M_{\text{Human}} = 3.53$, $SD = 0.80$; $F(1, 396) = 10.142$, $p = 0.002$]. This interaction

Table 2 Participants' demographic characteristics and time spent on social media in the four conditions

Characteristics	Experimental condition*				Total
	1	2	3	4	
<i>Gender</i>					
Male	31	35	33	30	129
Female	69	64	67	69	269
Prefer not to say	/	1	/	1	2
<i>Age</i>					
17–24	28	27	30	29	114
25–34	62	61	59	60	242
35–65	10	12	11	11	44
<i>Average daily time spent on social media</i>					
< 1 h	54	56	60	54	224
1–2 h	27	23	24	26	100
> 2 h	19	21	16	20	76
<i>Total</i>	100	100	100	100	400

Note(s): *1 = corporate ToV and tangible cultural heritage dimension; 2 = corporate ToV and intangible cultural heritage dimension; 3 = human ToV and tangible cultural heritage dimension; 4 = human ToV and intangible cultural heritage dimension

Source(s): Authors' own work

Table 3 Results of the mediation analysis

<i>Antecedent</i>	<i>Hedonic value</i>			<i>Consequent</i>		
	<i>Coeff</i>	<i>SE</i>	<i>p</i>	<i>Coeff</i>	<i>SE</i>	<i>p</i>
Constant	2.5688	0.1268	0.0000	-0.2559	0.1621	0.1152
Tone of voice	0.5325	0.0802	0.0000	0.0030	0.0758	0.9689
Hedonic value	-	-	-	0.9123	0.0450	0.0000
	$R^2 = 0.0997$			$R^2 = 0.5356$		
	$F(1,398) = 44.0632, p = 0.0000$			$F(2,397) = 228.9476, p = 0.0000$		
<i>Total, direct and indirect effects of Tone of voice on Sharing behaviour</i>						
Total effect of Tone of voice on Sharing behaviour	Effect	SE	t	p	LLCI	ULCI
	0.4888	0.1026	4.7653	0.0000	0.2871	0.6904
Direct effect of Tone of voice on Sharing behaviour	Effect	SE	t	p	LLCI	ULCI
	0.0030	0.0758	0.0391	0.9689	-0.1461	0.1520
Indirect effect of Tone of voice on Sharing behaviour	Effect	BootSE			BootLLCI	BootULCI
Hedonic value	0.4858	0.0768			0.3419	0.6438

Source(s): Authors' own work

Table 4 Results of the moderated mediation analysis

<i>Mediator variable model (Hedonic value)</i>	β	SE	t	p
Constant	1.8450	0.3997	4.6163	0.0000
Tone of voice	1.0500	0.2528	4.1539	0.0000
Type of cultural heritage dimension	0.4825	0.2528	1.9088	0.0570
Interaction: Tone of voice \times Type of cultural heritage dimension	-0.3450	0.1599	-2.1580	0.0315
Conditional effects of the focal predictor (Tone of voice) at values of the moderator (Type of cultural heritage dimension)	β	SE	p	95% CI
Tangible	0.7050	0.1130	0.0000	[0.4828; 0.9272]
Intangible	0.3600	0.1130	0.0016	[0.1378; 0.5822]
<i>Dependent variable model (Sharing behaviour)</i>	β	SE	t	p
Constant	-0.2559	0.1621	-1.5787	0.1152
Hedonic value	0.9123	0.0450	20.2917	0.0000
Tone of voice (direct effect)	0.0030	0.0758	0.0391	0.9689
Conditional indirect effects of Tone of voice on Sharing behaviour	β	SE		95% CI
Mediator	Moderating variable (Type of cultural heritage dimension)			
Hedonic value	Tangible	0.6432	0.1040	[0.4439; 0.8490]
Hedonic value	Intangible	0.3284	0.1100	[0.1159; 0.5498]
<i>Index of moderated mediation</i>				
Type of cultural heritage dimension		-0.3147	0.1474	[-0.6025; -0.0327]

Source(s): Authors' own work

effect is portrayed in Figure 2, which graphically illustrates that a conversational human voice results in a higher perceived hedonic value than the corporate tone, for both tangible and intangible heritage dimensions. However, the steepest slopes were observed for consumers exposed to tangible heritage dimensions. In summary, the effect of ToV on HV is moderated by the type of cultural heritage dimensions. This effect was found to be weaker for intangible cultural heritage dimensions; consequently, *H4* is not supported.

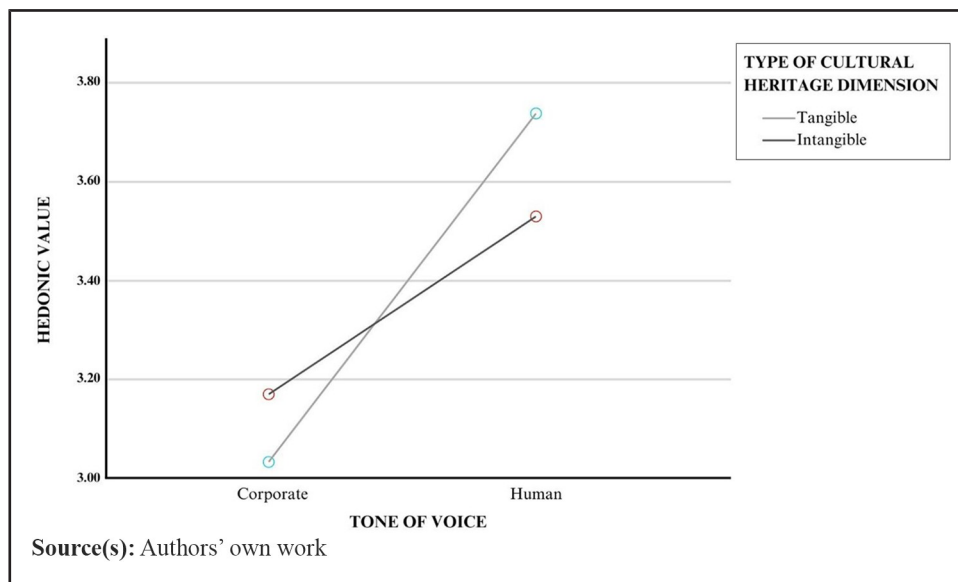
Then, the analysis focused on testing the moderated mediation. To determine whether the indirect effect of ToV on SB through HV varied across different levels of the moderator, conditional indirect effects were analysed. The index of moderated mediation was significant ($\beta = -0.3147$, CI 95% [-0.6025; -0.0327]), indicating that the mediating role of HV is moderated by the type of cultural heritage dimensions (Hayes, 2015). Specifically, the analysis showed that the conditional indirect effects were statistically different between tangible ($\beta = 0.6432$, CI 95% [0.4439; 0.8490]) and intangible ($\beta = 0.3284$, CI 95% [0.1159; 0.5498]) cultural heritage dimensions. In essence, HV plays a crucial mediating role in understanding the influence of ToV on SB and is conditional on the type of cultural heritage dimensions. In the case of tangible cultural heritage dimensions, the indirect effect of ToV was found to be positive: relative to the corporate ToV, the human ToV resulted in a higher HV, which in turn translated to greater SB. When the type of cultural heritage dimensions was intangible, the indirect effect was positive but weaker. As the indirect effect of ToV on SB through HV was weaker for intangible cultural heritage dimensions, *H5* is not supported.

Discussion and conclusions

Main findings and implications

Since the beginning of the 21st century, user-generated content has emerged as a major topic in the tourism destination marketing literature. Studies have analysed the usage of photos and their connection with destination attractiveness, destination image and as a source of insights into tourists' behavioural patterns (e.g. Giglio *et al.*, 2019; Van der Zee and Bertocchi, 2018; Zain *et al.*, 2024). The present study restores attention to the active role of tourism destinations in shaping users' online engagement behaviours by analysing

Figure 2 Moderating role of type of heritage cultural dimension



the impact of communication styles and content used on social media. Hence, from a theoretical standpoint, this study echoes [Leung et al. \(2019\)](#) call for deeper insights into social media marketing from a tourism supply-side perspective.

This study investigated whether the impact of tone of voice on sharing behaviour is mediated by the hedonic value perceived by consumers and whether this indirect effect is moderated by the type of cultural heritage dimensions discussed in the social media post. To the best of the authors' knowledge, this is the first attempt to examine the relationships among these constructs considering tourism destination brands. This study contributes to tourism destination branding literature by advancing the understanding of the causal process that leads to consumers' increased tendency to share. This understanding is relevant from the brand-building process perspective, given that destination branding strategies are acknowledged as co-creative efforts involving multiple stakeholders (e.g. [Mandagi and Centeno, 2024](#)). Consequently, by providing insights into consumer engagement, this study contributes to the theoretical discourse on fruitful collaboration among stakeholders.

The results of the 2×2 between-subjects factorial design show that the use of a conversational human voice on social media generates a higher level of hedonic value for the consumer as opposed to a formal corporate voice; in turn, the increased hedonic value positively influences the consumer's sharing behaviour. Moreover, the results show that the effect of tone of voice on consumer's sharing behaviour operates through hedonic value. The findings on the role of the conversational human voice in enhancing the hedonic outcomes of the online consumer experience are consistent with those of [Barcelos et al. \(2019, 2018\)](#) in the hospitality industry. Thus, this study confirms that a human ToV plays an important role in boosting consumers' hedonic value, a conclusion that applies equally to tourism destination brands. Providing evidence for the positive mediating effect of hedonic value on the relationship between tone of voice and consumers' sharing behaviour, the findings of the study reinforce existing knowledge on the role of perceived enjoyment in shaping consumers' responses to marketing stimuli ([Ma et al., 2018](#); [Van der Heijden, 2004](#); [Yoo et al., 2014](#)).

In addition, the results underscore the interplay between "how to communicate" and "what to communicate". The study demonstrates that the type of cultural heritage dimensions (the "what") moderates the relationship between tone of voice (the "how") and hedonic value. The hedonic value was higher when a human tone of voice was used (compared with a corporate tone of voice), regardless of whether the cultural heritage dimensions communicated in the post were tangible or intangible. This positive effect of the human tone of voice on hedonic value, and thus, on sharing behaviour, was stronger for tangible cultural heritage dimensions than for intangible ones. This result contrasts with what was expected, based on the greater impression of entertainment that is typically ascribed to intangible cultural heritage dimensions ([Qiu et al., 2022](#)). The expected interplay between the conversational human voice and the engaging aspects of the intangible heritage dimensions did not occur. Conversely, contrary to expectations, the positive influence of the conversational human voice on consumers' hedonic value and, therefore, on sharing behaviour was heightened when the message highlighted the tangible cultural heritage dimensions. One potential explanation for this finding may be that individuals are accustomed to seeing tangible cultural heritage dimensions described in a formal manner, such as in educational settings, tourist guides and art history books. Consequently, a message that conveys these dimensions in a conversational/informal manner may prove to be a surprising and welcome deviation from the "standard", thus enhancing the perceived enjoyment. This aligns with the common assumption that novelty is directly related to hedonic value ([Berlyne, 1970](#)).

From a managerial standpoint, this study's findings are significant for promoting tourism destination brands, given that "in the dynamic landscape of social media, passive content

consumption is no longer sufficient” (Bastrygina *et al.*, 2024, p. 235). In this context, the ability to foster consumers’ sharing behaviour can maximise the efficiency and effectiveness of tourism destination brands’ social media investments by broadening the reach and trustworthiness of the shared content (Vinh and Phuong, 2020). From this perspective, the findings of the study are of interest to DMOs, who are responsible for the narrative of tourism destination brands and are in control of the content and communication styles used in social media communication. Destination branding strategies typically leverage both tangible and intangible cultural heritage dimensions. When these assets are highlighted to foster consumers’ sharing behaviour, the study’s findings show that increasing consumers’ enjoyment and entertainment is relevant. In that context, a conversational human voice, rather than a corporate voice, should be used because it leads to better results. Further, the best outcomes are achieved when a conversational human voice is used to communicate tangible cultural heritage dimensions.

This study’s findings hold significance also in guiding marketing managers of specific cultural tourism resources (for example, a given monument or cultural event). Peco-Torres *et al.* (2021) stated that these resources demand effective strategies to actively foster online consumer engagement. In this regard, the present study identifies the adoption of a conversational human voice as an effective way to engage consumers on social media platforms.

Limitations and future research

Like all empirical research, this study is not without limitations which point to areas for future research on topics of interest to both academics and DMO professionals. The first set of limitations is related to the research sample. Convenience sampling was used in the present study. Future research could adopt a more systematic approach for recruiting participants. Participants in the current study had never visited Valencia; however, familiarity with the destination was not taken into account. Future studies could deepen the understanding of the effects explored here by considering different levels of individual knowledge. Second, this study was based on Valencia, which is not a top global tourism destination. It would be beneficial to investigate whether the relationships reported here also hold significance for destinations that stand out in terms of awareness and uniqueness of their tourist attractions. Third, the manipulation considered the textual aspect of social media posts, with the visual aspect held constant across experimental conditions. Moreover, textual manipulation was not replicated. Given the variety of possibilities for a conversational human voice, future research might replicate this study using different textual approaches. Further insights may be derived from manipulating the visual aspect to analyse the potential interplay between the textual and visual elements of a post in driving consumers’ sharing behaviour. A further limitation is the “instantaneous” nature of the study. According to Vinh and Phuong (2020), online consumer engagement behaviours also depend on the duration of the brand–user relationship. A longitudinal study exposing consumers to multiple stimuli for an extended period could yield a more comprehensive understanding of the topic. Finally, future research could investigate whether ToV and its interplay with the type of cultural heritage dimensions impact outcome variables other than hedonic value and sharing behaviour.

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Figure A1 Extract from the fictitious profile: post examples for tangible cultural heritage dimension (formal ToV on the left; human ToV on the right)



visiting_valencia

Valencia Cathedral


The Valencia Cathedral was consecrated in 1238 by the city's first bishop, after the Christian army's Reconquest of the Moorish kingdoms. It is dedicated to the Assumption of Mary and to James I.

Built on the site of the ancient mosque of Balansiya, the Cathedral features predominantly the Valencian Gothic style, although it retains numerous elements from different periods, from Romanesque to Baroque.

The cathedral retains frescoes from the early Spanish Renaissance of the 15th century, commissioned by the future Pope Alexander VI. Inside, the Cathedral Museum displays up to 90 works of various styles (Gothic, Renaissance, Mannerist...), including paintings by Maella, Goya, and Juan de Juanes.

Its bell tower is called Micalet; by climbing 207 steps to reach the summit, a panoramic view of the city can be enjoyed.

In the 15th century, the Chapter House was built. It is known as the "Chapel of the Holy Grail" because documentation and archaeological studies suggest that it contains the Holy Grail, the one used by Jesus during the Last Supper. This makes the Valencia Cathedral a must-visit for explorers.



visiting_valencia

Valencia Cathedral

Dear followers, are you passionate about mysterious legends? The Valencia Cathedral is a must-visit for explorers like you! 🔍

Here, you can admire the Holy Grail, the cup that Jesus Christ used at the Last Supper. Legend or reality? 🤔 We only know that this is what is suggested by documentation and archaeological studies!


Want to stay grounded? The cathedral, dedicated to the Assumption of Mary and James I, will amaze you with its wonderful architecture and history: consecrated in 1238 by the city's first bishop after the Spanish Reconquista 🇪🇸 of the Moorish kingdoms, it was built on the site of the Balansiya mosque.

Its architecture blends Valencian Gothic, Romanesque, and Baroque elements. Art enthusiasts 🎨 can admire the early Spanish Renaissance frescoes from the 15th century commissioned by Pope Alexander VI and find, in the dedicated museum, up to 90 works of various styles, including paintings by Maella, Goya, and Juan de Juanes.


You can't miss the chance to snap breathtaking shots from the top of the Micalet, the cathedral's bell tower; don't let the 207 steps 🏃🏻🏃🏻 deter you from reaching the summit: it's truly worth it! 📸👍

Note(s): The originals were in Italian
Source(s): Authors' own work

Figure A2 Extract from the fictitious profile: post examples for intangible cultural heritage dimension (formal ToV on the left; human ToV on the right)



visiting_valencia
Las Fallas
Las Fallas is a traditional Valencian festival in honor of Saint Joseph (patron saint of carpenters). This festival was declared a UNESCO World Heritage Site in 2016. The peak of the festival is between March 15 and 19. It seems that this folkloric festival originated from an ancient tradition of Valencian carpenters who, celebrating the beginning of spring, burned wooden sticks (the Parot) that they used to raise the lamps that illuminated their workshops during the winter on the night of March 19. Over the years, the Parot became Ninot: statues up to 20 meters high. Inspired by current events in Valencia, the region, or internationally, they are created throughout the year by fallero artists and placed in various neighborhoods of the city. On the night of March 19 (the "nit del foc"), the Cremà takes place. During this night, every Ninot is burned except for the one favored by the citizens, lighting up the city and offering an unforgettable spectacle. Other peculiarities of Las Fallas include: the masclètà (pyrotechnic displays that create a deafening effect) and the falleras (the queens of the festival representing each neighborhood).



visiting_valencia
Las Fallas
Hey friends! Are you ready to be catapulted into a world of fireworks, damsels, and enormous caricature statues? 🇪🇸 It's the Valencian festival of Las Fallas! 🇪🇸
This extraordinary tradition, which peaks between March 15 and 19, celebrates Saint Joseph and was declared a UNESCO World Heritage Site in 2016. 🇪🇸
A ✨curiosity✨: it seems that Valencian carpenters originated this tradition by burning their Parot (the wooden sticks they used to raise the lamps that illuminated their workshops during the winter) every March 19 to celebrate the beginning of spring. 🇪🇸🇪🇸
Over the years, the Parot became Ninot: enormous caricature statues that represent local or international realities and are placed in every neighborhood of Valencia. The tradition is so rooted that the floats are designed throughout the year by fallero artists. On the night of March 19 (the "nit del foc"), the Cremà takes place: every Ninot is 🔥burned🔥 except for the one favored by the citizens, lighting up the city and offering an unforgettable spectacle. Las Fallas will also enchant you with its pyrotechnic displays called masclètà (bring your earplugs!) and the falleras, the queens representing each neighborhood.

Note(s): The originals were in Italian
Source(s): Authors' own work

About the authors

Marta Barattin is doctoral student in Economics and Management of Innovation and Sustainability at the Department of Economics and Management, University of Parma, Italy. She holds a master's degree in Trade and Consumer Marketing from the Department of Economics and Management, University of Parma, Italy. Her research interests include consumer behaviour and tourism management.

Sabrina Latusi is Associate Professor of Marketing and Management at the Department of Economics and Management, University of Parma, Italy. She holds a PhD in Business Administration from the University of Naples "Parthenope". Her research interests include retail marketing, consumer behaviour, place branding and communication strategies. Sabrina Latusi is the corresponding author and can be contacted at: sabrina.latusi@unipr.it

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