
SLOW TOURISM AS A CONTEMPORARY TENDENCY IN THE TOURISM MARKET: IMAGE CONTENT AND GEOTAG ANALYSIS ON INSTAGRAM

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ABSTRACT

Although it originated from the Slow Food and Cittaslow movements, slow tourism has spread to many spheres of tourism. The purpose of the paper is to investigate what people associate with slow tourism, and how and where they engage in slow tourism. Social media content analysis on Instagram, using hashtag #slowlowtourism, was performed in the research. The general conclusion is that people mostly associate slow tourism with different forms of architecture and landscape, and to lesser extent with transport and food. Also, there was significant content variation within the architecture and landscape categories, suggesting that people associate different types of architecture and tourism destinations with slow tourism. When it comes to location, the majority of photos were taken in Italy, which is not surprising, considering that Slow Food and Cittaslow movements originated in this country.

Introduction

The slow tourism is a relatively new concept. It originates from the Slow Food and Cittaslow movements that appeared in Italy in the eighties and nineties of the last century. The concept of slow food was initiated by Carlo Pertini in the 1980's in Italy, as a response to the market oversaturation with fast-food restaurants, and today it has spread throughout Europe and to a smaller degree USA (Hall, 2006). This concept arose

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as a response to the worldwide standardization of food production and hospitality, which is typical of fast-food production (Miele & Murdoch, 2002). In slow food restaurants, traditional recipes are used to prepare dishes, all food is organic and always served fresh, and ingredients are sourced from local suppliers to avoid stockpiling that may spoil or change in flavor due to long storage (Dickinson & Lumsdon, 2010; Simonović, 2019). As it refers to food that is linked to local culture and heritage, the concept of slow food contributes to the maintenance of customs inherent in each community (Jones et al., 2003). Slow Cities, better known as Cittaslow, is a movement founded by Paolo Saturnini in 1999 “with the aim of improving the quality of life in cities by slowing down their overall pace” (Cittaslow International, 2024). Slow tourism is a travel approach that emphasizes connection with local community, culture, architecture, food and music. It relies on the idea that travel should educate and have an emotional impact, while remaining sustainable for the local community and environment.

There is currently no consensus definition for the term slow tourism, although many authors have tried to define it. It can be said that slow tourism represents such tourism concept, where the focus is on the journey itself, rather than on the destination, with an emphasis on a reduced tourism footprint. Pécsek (2014) argues that slow tourism should include four dimensions: local (local gastronomy, culture, workforce, shops); sustainable (profitability, environmentally friendly investments, small ecological footprint, longer stay in the destination); social well-being (consensual decision-making, population retention, growing well-being, community cohesion); and experiential (non-standard offer, selective attractions, active program, collective experience).

Various social platforms provide users with the ability to share and promote information important for making travel decisions (Filipović et al., 2023). These posts can affect tourists’ choice (Fatanti & Suiadnia, 2015; Sofronijević & Kocić, 2022), but in the same time be a very abundant data source for the scientific public when analyzing contemporary tourism trends (Zeng & Gerritsen, 2014). The Instagram platform, which is based predominantly on images, is particularly significant and aligned with the tourism industry due to “the particularly visual nature of tourism content” (Smith, 2019, p. 2). La Busque et al. (2021) conducted an image content analysis on Instagram to investigate how tourists relate to slow tourism. A similar analysis, albeit of the “fitspiration” trend, was conducted by Tiggeman and Zaccardo (2018) and Boepple and Thompson (2016).

Taking into account the importance of social networks content and its influence on tourists’ travel decisions, as well as the small number of papers dealing with the research of slow tourism on social networks, the paper aims to determine how social networks portray slow tourism, more specifically Instagram. Therefore, using social media content analysis, the paper aims to determine: 1) with which activities tourists associate slow tourism; and 2) which locations, i.e., countries, tourists associate with slow tourism.

Theoretical background

Many authors have tried to define slow tourism, but considering that it is still in the early stages of evolution, no generally accepted definition of this term still exist. Slow tourism is a conceptual framework that includes people who travel to destinations more slowly and by land, stay longer and travel less. This concept emphasizes the importance of the traveling experience to and within a destination, consuming slow food, exploring historical and cultural sites at a slower pace, and supporting the environment (Dickinson & Lumsdon, 2010). Slow tourism has many parallels with slow food, which implies the consumption of homemade food prepared according to a traditional recipe, using local ingredients. Authors Babou and Callot (2009) claim that slow tourism refers to slowing down the travel rhythm and rediscovering oneself (naturally and psychologically). This includes “not only a low carbon footprint, but also patience, peace of mind, enjoyment of deeper experiences, enhanced understanding and familiarity with the host country’s culture” (Moira et al., 2017, p. 4).

Some authors (Dickinson et al., 2010; Heitmann et al., 2011; Conway & Timms, 2012; De Salvo et al., 2013) define slow tourism as an aggregation of four dimensions: environmental (reduced carbon footprint, environmentally friendly transport, travel closer to the place of residence and at shorter distances, longer stay in the destination); experiential (quality time, meaningful experience, slower pace, pleasant way of spending free time); economic (selection of local suppliers, economic contribution to local communities); and ethical (giving something back to the local community and places visited, conscious and thoughtful choices, conscious and informed travel, slow and sustainable consumption, awareness and care).

A slow tourist is an environmentally friendly and responsible tourist, who stays longer in one place, gets to know the culture of the country and the lifestyle of its population, gains an authentic experience, treats the environment and its diversity responsibly, and discovers attractions unknown to other travelers. During his trip, the slow tourist will learn more about the natural and cultural heritage, local cuisine, traditions and special attractions of the destination. With a tour of the local market, the surrounding village, a meal in a traditional restaurant, as well as a conversation with the local population, the slow tourist absorbs the atmosphere and engage in a more authentic experience on his trip (Caffyn, 2022). Slow tourism can also have an element of relaxation and re-creation, as it involves spending quality time with loved ones, sharing experiences and seeking peace and tranquility during a break from everyday life. In contrast, mass tourism involves visiting popular and commercialized destinations for a short and limited period of time. Mass tourism does not give tourists the opportunity to enjoy the destination, get in touch with the inhabitants, try the local gastronomy or get to know the culture.

One of the main components of slow tourism is the opportunity for the tourists to actively participate in the local community and establish a connection with the locals, strengthening their memories of the journey and the destination (Moira et al., 2017). Slow

tourists stay in the chosen destination as long as it takes to experience and engage with the local community's daily activities. They would rather use accommodation that is in balance with the natural and social surroundings; they avoid all-inclusive resorts and hotel chains. Generally speaking, slow tourists would rather experience personalized or small-scale services and local goods. Additionally, they travel more independently and exhibit greater option flexibility, as they try to experience the authentic dimension of local culture.

It is essential to consider the idea of slow tourism within a larger sociocultural framework (Fullagar et al., 2012). The intention to "slow down" life's routine is evident in the effort to discover ways for stress reduction. Choosing a slow destination could be one of them. The slow tourism ideology holds that getting to know one small area in-depth is more significant than getting to know a large number of destinations quickly (Georgica, 2015). Mainly, slow travel offers a way out of the hectic, daily life. Also, this type of travel is less expensive. Specifically, slow travelers choose to stay in less expensive lodging than hotels, prepare meals using local ingredients, or sample local cuisine. In this sense, slow tourism enables visitors to engage with the destination, people, and culture by integrating them into the daily activities of the local community.

Increasing the variety of value added to the location where this activity is taking place is one advantage of slow tourism. By fostering a genuine interest in, respect for, and concern for the customs and culture of the area, slow tourists enhance the economic value and preserve the social and natural environment. Communities that are remote from major cities or political hotspots and are more vulnerable to depopulation and/or political power loss (rural or mountainous areas) are considered to benefit from this type of tourism. The promotion of community cohesion and a stronger sense of entrepreneurship are two important aspects of any thriving community that can be fostered through the slow tourism. On the other hand, tourists enjoy destinations where the local population is satisfied and proud of their tourism values.

Materials and methods

In order to achieve the research goals, social media content analysis was used in the paper. For the purpose of analyzing the content of slow tourism on Instagram, the pictures shared by the users of this social network were used. Images containing the hashtag #slowtourism were found using the hashtag search feature.

Taking into account the subject of the paper, that is to investigate what people associate with slow tourism, and how and where they engage in slow tourism, the hashtag #slowtourism was used in the analysis. Following similar research (Boepple & Thompson, 2016; Tiggemann & Zaccardo, 2018; Le Busque et al., 2021), the first 600 images, under 'top posts' category were subject to coding. The research was conducted on 28th March, 2024. Pictures were classified under a general content category: Architecture, Landscape, Transport, Food/Beverage and People, and further into subcategories where suitable. Further analysis involved determining the location of the pictures, using Instagram Geotag.

Results and discussion

In March 2024, the hashtag #slowtourism had about 183,000 posts, while hashtag #tourism that had 1.2 million posts. Only 1.2% of the posts did not include geotag. Table 1 shows the percentage of countries represented as the location of Instagram posts with the hashtag #slowtourism. It is noted that about 87% belong to European countries. Italy (33%) and France (30.2%) have the highest percentages.

The Slow Food and Slow Cities movements originated in Italy, so it is not surprising that the majority of photos are from this country. These two movements spread outside of Italy, especially across Europe (Perano et al., 2019), which can explain the fact that the most images are from Europe. Also, the common border of Italy and France can explain the largest number of photos from France, right after Italy. It is interesting to note that tourists began to associate the United Kingdom, South Africa and the USA with slow tourism, which was not the case with earlier research (Le Busque et al., 2021). This indicates that new countries are positioning themselves on the slow tourism market and that they have recognized its importance.

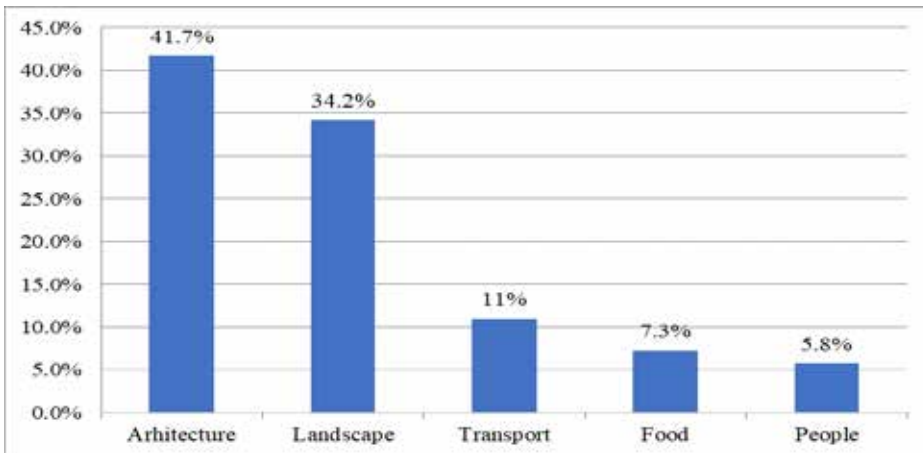
Table 1. Location of Instagram posts

Percent of posts	Country
33%	Italy
30.2%	France
9.3%	Spain
6.5%	Portugal
3.2%	Greece
2.3%	UK
1.2%	Ireland
1%	Scotland
0.8%*	Marocco, Mexico, South Africa
0.7%	Belgium, Croatia, Germany, India, USA
0.5%	Switzerland
**	Argentina, Austria, Brazil, Finland, Holand, Kenya, Romania, Vietnam
***	Australia, Bali, Chile, Columbia, Columbia, Costa Rica, Czech, Denmark, Estonia, Guinea, Hungary, Mauritius, Malaysia, Nepal, Norway, Pakistan, Poland, San Marino, Seychelles, Turkey
1.2%	Did not include a geotag

*Legend: * means percent of posts for each country; ** means 2 Instagram posts for each country; *** means 1 Instagram post for each country*

Source: Authors' research

Figure 1. Key categories of images



Source: Authors' research

Most of the images (Figure 1) include various forms of architecture (41.7%), followed by landscape (34.2%) and various forms of transport (11%). Although it is considered an important part of slow tourism, especially since slow tourism originated from the Slow Food movement, few photos are related to slow food, only 7.3%. Out of the total number, 5.8% of the photos contain people. The resulting categories, people excluded, were further divided into subcategories, as shown in Table 2.

Although the first association of slow tourism is nature or food, the majority of Instagram photos contained some form of architecture (41.7%), which is dominated by some type of accommodation or residentials, as much as 50.4%. This can be explained by the fact that many accommodations are advertised or associated with slow tourism. The following are photos that included some form of architecture in smaller areas, i.e. villages (19.2%), thereafter urban areas (11.2%). Photos of cultural and historical objects and heritage that people associated with slow tourism follows, such as castles (10.4%), churches (4.8%), and lighthouses (2.4%). It is interesting to note that all the lighthouses, except for one, were photographed in France, more precisely in the Brittany region.

Table 2. Subcategories of image content analysis

Architecture (total 41.7%)		Landscape (total 34.2%)		Transport (total 11%)		Food/Beverage (total 7.3%)	
Of the 41.7%		Of the 34.2%		Of the 11%		Of the 7.3%	
Accommodation/ Residential	50.4%	Sea/Beach	36.6%	Cycling	30.3%	Food	68.2%
Village	19.2%	Greenery	22.4%	Trekking	30.3%	Wine	31.8%
Urban	11.2%	Mountain	16.1%	Hiking	16.7%		
Castle	10.4%	Flowers	8.8%	Boat	13.7%		

Architecture (total 41.7%)		Landscape (total 34.2%)		Transport (total 11%)		Food/Beverage (total 7.3%)	
Of the 41.7%		Of the 34.2%		Of the 11%		Of the 7.3%	
Church	4.8%	Lake	5.9%	Van	4.5%		
Lighthouse	2.4%	River	4.9%	Train	3%		
Other	1.2%	Forest	2.4%	Horse	1.5%		
		Cave	0.97%				
		Other	1.93%				

Source: Authors' research

There was a wide range of landscape shown in the Instagram photos, indicating that slow tourism is not only about one kind of landscape. The most frequently portrayed landscapes were the sea or the beach (36.6%), some type of greenery (22.4%), mountains, with or without snow (16.1%), flowers (8.8%), lake (5.9%), river (4.9%), forest (2.4%), and cave (0.97%).

Transport is an important aspect of slow tourism, emphasizing the need to use a greener, more sustainable, and slower form of transport in order to experience the destination at a slower pace and thus more fully. Cycling and trekking were the most common form of transport shown in the Instagram posts (30.3% each), followed by hiking (16.7%), boat (13.7%), van (4.5%), train (3%), and horse (1.5%). This indicates that tourists have recognized the importance of transportation as part of slow tourism and are using more sustainable ways to get around destinations. Electric scooters are a form of transport that did not appear in the analysed pictures, but belong to a greener form of transport, and a chance for tourists to experience destination in a slower and more detailed way, especially cities. Taking this into account, it may be expected that, in the future, tourists will start to associate this form of transport with slow tourism.

As for the Food/Beverage category, 68.2% of the images portrayed some type of food, while 31.8% contained wine or/and vineyard. This is a surprisingly small percentage considering that slow tourism originated from the concept of slow food, and that one important aspect of slow tourism is using local food and buying local ingredients.

Conclusions

The concept of slow tourism is relatively new and originated from the Slow Food and Slow Cities movements. It is a tourism concept that promotes sustainable and slow travel, enjoying the nature and cultural heritage in a slower pace, staying in local accommodation rather than in large hotel chains, trying local food, buying local ingredients, giving something back to the local community and places visited, etc. From the above, it can be concluded that slow tourism is associated with many aspects of tourism travel. Applying social media content analysis, the paper aimed to determine how slow tourism is portrayed on Instagram, and which countries people most often associate slow tourism with. Using hashtag #slowlowtourism, first 600

photos under ‘top category’ were used in the analysis. Images were classified under following categories: Architecture, Landscape, Transport, Food/Beverage and People, and further into subcategories where suitable. Analysis also involved determining the location of the pictures, using Instagram Geotag. The results showed that people mostly associate slow tourism with various forms of architecture (41.7%), landscape (34.2%), transport (11%), food/beverage (7.3%), and people (5.8%). The results are surprising considering that slow tourism is most often associated with nature, but also with food, taking into account that it originated from the Slow Food movement. Further analysis of subcategories revealed interesting facts, given that over 50% of the architecture contained some form of accommodation or residential. Other subcategories included some form of architecture in smaller areas, i.e. villages (19.2%), urban areas (11.2%), castles (10.4%), churches (4.8%), and lighthouses (2.4%). Of the 34.2% images that contained landscape, the majority portrayed sea or beach (36.6%), some type of greenery (22.4%), mountains (16.1%), flowers (8.8%), lake (5.9%), river (4.9%), forest (2.4%), and cave (0.97%). The most common form of transport shown on Instagram images were cycling and trekking (30.3% each), followed by hiking (16.7%), boat (13.7%), van (4.5%), train (3%), and horse (1.5%). Even though it is considered as important aspect of slow tourism, food/beverage was associated with only 7.3% of the images - 68.2% of the images portrayed some type of food, while 31.8% contained wine or/and vineyard.

When it comes to the location analysis, about 87% of images belong to European countries, with Italy (33%) and France (30.2%) leading. These results were not surprising given that Slow Food and Slow Cities movements on which slow tourism is based originated from Italy. The analysis also showed that several new destinations are associated with slow tourism, such as United Kingdom, South Africa and the USA, which was not the case in the earlier research (Le Busque et al., 2021).

Social media analysis provides rich insight into tourist preferences, and can identify tourism trends and serve as an important tool for more detailed analysis. The contribution of the paper is in the theoretical coverage of the slow tourism concept, as well as in empirical knowledge about where and in what way people get engaged in slow tourism. However, the paper has certain limitations. It is unclear whether people who share images on Instagram choose to post architecture and landscape photos more than food and transport, because they are more appealing or because they associate it in larger extent with slow tourism. In order to obtain more valid conclusions, future research should also include a survey of tourists’ opinions about what they associate slow tourism with.

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Conflict of interests

The authors declare no conflict of interest

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