

NARRATIVE RESOURCES IN DESTINATION STORYTELLING ON INSTAGRAM

An analysis of the English-language posts of Italian regional tourism boards

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Abstract - Storytelling has become an increasingly influential concept in tourism marketing, where destinations are frequently promoted through narratives designed to facilitate emotional engagement, identification, and narrative transportation. From a narratological perspective, however, storytelling traditionally implies the representation and communication of a story involving events, actors, and temporal development. This distinction is particularly relevant in social media communication, where promotional texts are often brief, fragmented, and lacking fully developed plots. Drawing on Abbott's (2008) notion of minimal narrative and on broader narratological approaches to narrativity, this study investigates the narrative resources through which destinations acquire narrativity in Instagram tourism discourse. The analysis is based on a specialised corpus of 74,319 words comprising 1,021 English-language Instagram posts published by nine Italian regional tourism boards between August 2025 and February 2026. Adopting a corpus-assisted discourse analytic approach, the study combines quantitative corpus-linguistic techniques with qualitative concordance analysis to examine three interconnected narrative dimensions: characterisation through personification and anthropomorphisation, experiential immersion, and temporality. The findings reveal that destinations are systematically represented as humanised entities endowed with agency, communicative abilities, personality traits, and symbolic identities. Experiential immersion is realised through the interaction of projected participation, sensory immersion, and affective framing, which encourage readers to imaginatively participate in projected destination experiences. Temporality is constructed through recurring patterns of temporal idealisation, temporal suspension, mythical temporality, and future orientation, frequently combined within the same promotional texts. The study further shows that these dimensions rarely operate independently but interact to create destination representations characterised by agency, experiential immersion, and temporal depth. The paper argues that Instagram tourism discourse often relies not on fully developed stories but on recurring narrative resources and minimal narratives that contribute to the construction of narrativity. By integrating narratological theory with tourism discourse analysis, the study provides new insights into the linguistic mechanisms through which destinations are represented, experienced, and imagined in contemporary social media communication.

Keywords: tourism discourse; narrative resources; storytelling; Instagram; promotion.

1. Introduction

Storytelling has become an increasingly important concept in contemporary communication studies and marketing research. Rather than presenting information through isolated facts or descriptive statements, storytelling organises content into meaningful narratives capable of engaging audiences emotionally and cognitively. Stories have been shown to facilitate understanding, stimulate emotional responses, and promote narrative transportation and persuasion more effectively than purely informational forms of communication (Green and Brock 2000; Fog *et al.* 2005; Woodside *et al.* 2008). From a narratological perspective, storytelling can be understood as the combination of a story, namely a sequence of events involving actors and actions, and the discourse through

which these events are communicated (Bal 2017).

The growing relevance of storytelling has led to its widespread adoption in branding and marketing, where narratives are used to construct brand identities, communicate values, and establish emotional connections with consumers (Herskovitz and Crystal 2010; Pulizzi 2012). In this context, storytelling functions not merely as a communication technique but as a strategic tool capable of generating engagement, emphasising identification, and influencing consumer behaviour (Júnior *et al.* 2023; Marques *et al.* 2023; Woodside *et al.* 2008). The persuasive power of narratives derives largely from their ability to evoke emotions and immerse audiences in symbolic worlds that transcend the immediate communicative situation (Yang *et al.* 2017).

Within tourism studies, storytelling has attracted growing scholarly attention due to its capacity to shape destination images, communicate local identities, and enrich tourist experiences (Moscardo 2020, 2021). Contemporary destination marketing has increasingly adopted storytelling as an explicit and strategic promotional practice. Destinations are therefore understood not simply as geographical locations but as narrative spaces in which places, cultures, landscapes, and communities are transformed into meaningful representations. As Chronis (2005) observes, the construction of a tourism destination essentially involves providing the setting for a story, thereby transforming ordinary spaces into distinctive and attractive places. Tourism storytelling may draw on local history, cultural traditions, myths, legends, personal experiences, and fictional narratives, all of which contribute to creating a unique sense of place (Smith 2015; Mei *et al.* 2020).

The effectiveness of tourism storytelling has often been explained through concepts such as narrative transportation, emotional engagement, perceived realism, and audience identification (Green and Dill 2013; Moscardo 2020; Nabi and Green 2015). Through these mechanisms, audiences become immersed in narrative worlds, establish emotional connections with destinations, and develop favourable attitudes and travel intentions (Hosany *et al.* 2020; Tussyadiah and Fesenmaier 2009). Storytelling therefore represents a particularly powerful resource in tourism communication, allowing destinations not only to inform potential visitors but also to create emotionally compelling representations capable of influencing perceptions, expectations, and behavioural intentions.

Despite its widespread use in tourism and marketing research, the concept of storytelling is not unproblematic from a narratological perspective. In marketing studies, the term is often employed broadly to refer to any communication strategy that uses narrative elements to create engagement and emotional resonance. Narratology, however, traditionally reserves storytelling for the representation and communication of a story, understood as a sequence of events involving actors and actions (Bal 2017; Chatman 1978). This distinction becomes particularly relevant when analysing tourism discourse on social media, where promotional texts frequently rely on isolated narrative elements rather than on fully developed stories. Consequently, examining how narrative meaning is constructed in tourism communication requires attention not only to storytelling as a marketing practice but also to the specific narrative resources through which destinations acquire narrativity.

While storytelling is often associated with stories involving characters, events, and plots, tourism discourse on platforms such as Instagram rarely contains fully developed narratives. Instead, communicative constraints favour short and fragmented textual forms in which narrative meaning is often conveyed through isolated narrative elements. According to Abbott (2008), narrative can be defined as the representation of an event or a series of events, with the event constituting its indispensable element. Under this broad definition, even a single event may qualify as a narrative, distinguishing narrative from

mere description. For example, while a statement such as ‘The Dolomites are a mountain range in northern Italy’ is purely descriptive, a sentence such as ‘The Dolomites welcome visitors with open arms’ introduces an action involving an actor and may therefore be regarded as a minimal narrative in Abbott’s sense (2008). At the same time, Abbott (2008) acknowledges that narrativity is a matter of degree, since some narratives possess only limited narrativity and lack the temporal development, causal progression, and complexity typically associated with fully developed stories.

Rather than treating such minimal narratives as instances of storytelling in themselves, they may be viewed as narrative resources that contribute to broader processes of destination storytelling. Expressions such as ‘The Dolomites welcome visitors’, ‘Time stands still in these villages’, or ‘Nature reveals its secrets’ do not develop plots, yet they attribute agency, action, and interaction to places and landscapes. In doing so, they transform destinations from passive geographical entities into active participants in the tourist experience. The analysis of these narrative resources is important because they reveal how destinations are endowed with personality and agency, provide the linguistic resources from which more complex destination narratives emerge, and contribute cumulatively to the construction of recurring narrative frames such as hospitality, authenticity, discovery, and timelessness. Consequently, even when tourism texts do not contain fully developed stories in the traditional narratological sense, the analysis of narrative resources and minimal narratives offers valuable insights into the mechanisms through which destination storytelling is constructed and sustained across tourism discourse.

Building on these perspectives, the present study focuses on three interconnected narrative dimensions through which destinations acquire narrativity in social media communication: characterisation, experiential immersion, and temporality. Characterisation concerns the construction of narrative actors and identities within discourse (Bal 2017; Herman 2009). In tourism promotion, this process frequently takes the form of personification and anthropomorphisation, whereby destinations, landscapes, and natural elements are represented as narrative actors endowed with human qualities, intentions, emotions, and agency. Personification, understood as an ontological metaphor that conceptualises non-human entities in human terms (Lakoff and Johnson 2003), enables places to be construed as hosts, companions, or protagonists. Anthropomorphisation extends this process by attributing more elaborate human-like motivations, mental states, and intentionality to non-human entities (Epley *et al.* 2007), thereby facilitating audience engagement with destinations as socially meaningful actors rather than merely physical locations.

Experiential immersion refers to the capacity of narrative resources to engage audiences cognitively, emotionally, and sensorially, encouraging forms of narrative transportation through which readers imaginatively project themselves into destinations and projected experiences (Green and Brock 2000; Moscardo 2020).

Temporality concerns the organisation of time and the ways in which destinations are positioned in relation to the past, present, and future (Currie 2007). Through references to heritage, nostalgia, timelessness, and anticipated future experiences, tourism discourse situates destinations within meaningful temporal frameworks capable of eliciting emotional engagement and tourist desire. The following sections examine how these three narrative dimensions are realised through specific discursive strategies in the construction of tourist destinations.

2. Narrative characterisation of places

Personification and anthropomorphisation are two similar rhetorical strategies frequently used in tourism discourse. Personification is a form of ontological metaphor in which something that is not human is given human characteristics (Lakoff and Johnson 2003), while anthropomorphisation is the attribution of humanlike features, motivations, intentions, or mental states to nonhuman agents (Epley *et al.* 2007). Anthropomorphisation can therefore be viewed as a stronger or more elaborate form of this process, where the target is endowed with a more complete human identity and agency. Whether an entity is perceived as human or nonhuman significantly influences how it is evaluated. Human-like entities are more likely to be regarded as moral actors deserving consideration and respect, whereas nonhuman entities are often viewed merely as objects (Epley *et al.* 2007). This distinction also shapes expectations about their future conduct and affects how their current actions are interpreted. Furthermore, anthropomorphised entities can serve as important sources of social connection, particularly in situations where interpersonal relationships are absent or limited (Epley *et al.* 2007, p. 864).

In the consumer behaviour domain, the set of human characteristics associated with a brand are labelled ‘brand personality’ (Aaker 1997, p. 347) or ‘brand anthropomorphism’, when the analogical association of human characteristics and qualities (e.g., trustworthiness, personality) in the evaluation of a brand is carried out (Ding *et al.* 2022, p. 409; Kim and McGill 2011; Portal *et al.* 2018) or when a brand is considered a real human with senses, power and temper (Fournier and Alvarez 2012; Kim and McGill 2011), “capable of reasoning and intent” (Perez-Vega *et al.* 2018, p. 340).

Brand personality traits are usually created and formed by the people associated with the brand, by any direct and indirect contact consumers have with the brand, and by product-related attributes, product category associations, brand name, symbol or logo, advertising style, price, and distribution channel (Aaker 1997, p. 348; Batra *et al.* 1993).

In the tourism domain, anthropomorphism is often operationalised through the personification of a place or destination, that is to say the description of a place as human-like (Ekinici *et al.* 2007; Hosany *et al.* 2006; Letheren *et al.* 2017, p. 65). The underlying aim of this strategy is to promote accessibility by relying on a common human schema for understanding the world, thereby leading to the development of a common language that can be understood even at a cross-cultural level. This imaginative engagement with a personified place can lead to stronger brand relationships (Huang and Mitchell 2014).

One way of achieving the characterisation of a place is through language, by attributing to places human traits and actions, and by considering destinations as narrative actors rather than neutral locations (Letheren *et al.* 2017). Hosany *et al.* (2006, p. 238) support the view of destination image as a multidimensional construct that combines the cognitive and affective dimensions, that is to say the knowledge about the physical attributes of a destination and the appraisal of the affective quality of feelings towards these attributes. Letheren *et al.* (2017, p. 67) suggest that the process of anthropomorphisation operates subconsciously and, for this reason, is very likely to elicit an affective response in line with the nature of destination marketing, which is emotionally driven for consumers (Delbaere, McQuarrie and Phillips 2011; Gnoth 1997).

Personification, together with metaphors and hyperbole, is pervasive in promotional discourse (Mattiello 2018). Examples (1) and (2) provided by Mattiello (2012, p. 75) describe the process through which some typically human actions are extended to an inanimate entity, and an inanimate entity acquires the properties of an animate one.

- (1) Corsica is one of the most beautiful places in the world, and seduces every visitor
- (2) Tahiti is the most famous island in the South Seas – Queen of the Pacific

In an analysis conducted on two parallel corpora of informational-promotional tourism websites (original texts in Italian and their translations into English), Mattiello (2018, p. 119) shows that the destinations in the Italian region of Tuscany are described through human characteristics such as ‘elegant’ and ‘intellectual’; they ‘charm’ and ‘seduce’ their visitors, or even ‘dominate’ part of the region. Nature and natural phenomena are also represented as human beings: nature is a ‘protagonist’ and ‘accompanies’ tourists, while ‘routes make you smile’, ‘mountains change clothes in winter’, ‘volcanoes sleep’, and stalactites have their own life.

Manca (2016) shows that, on the official website promoting Italy as a tourist destination, nature is frequently described as a powerful entity, which purifies and recharges visitors and tourists who immerse themselves in it.

Isakova *et al.* (2021, p. 4) consider personification as one of the most effective discursive methods to create a positive image of a region while consolidating its tourist identity. Personification can be used through a metonymic association with a regional leader who becomes the representative of the whole region, or by using a legendary or fictional character as a regional symbol. The examples she provides are ‘Village Gadovo, Homeland Gorynych the Dragon’, ‘Caves of Staritsa, home of Kashchei the Immortal’, and the museum ‘Museum of Goat’ in Tver. The construction of a regional image for tourism promotion often relies on myth-making and storytelling processes that give a place a distinctive and emotionally resonant identity. By drawing on symbolic narratives and culturally meaningful stories, territories can become more recognisable and memorable to both residents and visitors. This approach strengthens regional identity by emphasising a narrative-based relationship between people and their surroundings. Through localised stories, family traditions, and carefully crafted myths, individuals develop a sense of connection and attachment to their immediate homeland, reinforcing feelings of belonging and cultural continuity (Isakova *et al.* 2021).

Differently from metaphors, which may cause misunderstandings in cross-cultural communication where shared knowledge and expectations may vary, personification draws from a source domain that is universal, namely human characteristics and qualities (Iritspukhova 2023). The familiar domain of the ‘living organism’ (Lakoff and Johnson 2003) can be further manipulated by using a metaphorical zeugma (Iritspukhova 2023, p. 102; 2025; Steen 2016, p. 219), as in example (3) where the concrete size of the country is combined and compared with the abstract size of Wales’ personality (Iritspukhova 2023, p. 102):

- (3) Small in size but big on personality, Wales is bordered by England to the east

From a narratological perspective, personification and anthropomorphisation function as narrative resources that transform places, destinations, and regions from passive settings into active narrative agents. By attributing human qualities, emotions, intentions, and agency to places, tourism discourse increases the narrativity of destination representations while simultaneously contributing to the construction of destination storytelling. This process facilitates narrative engagement by making destinations more relatable and memorable, while also providing a coherent framework through which cultural values, local myths, and place identities can be communicated. As a result, personification and anthropomorphisation contribute not only to the construction of destination image but also to the development of compelling destination stories that reinforce regional identity,

strengthen emotional attachment, and enhance the overall persuasive power of tourism narratives.

3. Experiential immersion and narrative transportation

Tourism promotion heavily relies on persuasive language to transform destinations from physical locations into meaningful and desirable experiences (Manca 2016). This perspective reflects a broader tendency within tourism studies to conceptualise destinations not merely as places to visit but as multisensory environments that engage visitors on emotional and experiential levels. Research in tourism studies has increasingly emphasised the importance of engaging all human senses when examining tourist experiences (Agapito *et al.* 2013, p. 7). Scholars argue that understanding tourism requires a comprehensive sensory framework, referred to as a ‘sensescape’, which extends beyond visual landscapes to encompass other sensory dimensions, including soundscapes, tastescapes, haptiscapes, and smellscapes (Agapito *et al.* 2012; Dann and Jacobsen 2003; Ellis and Rossman 2008; Govers *et al.* 2007; Gretzel and Fesenmaier 2003; Kastenholz *et al.* 2012; Pan and Ryan 2009; Urry 2002; Veijola and Jokinen 1994).

Within this framework, experiential immersion may be understood as a strategy used in destination communication that seeks to recreate the lived experience of a place by engaging audiences on sensory, emotional, and cognitive levels. Rather than focusing exclusively on factual information, experiential narratives invite potential tourists to imagine themselves within a destination through vivid descriptions and affective representations of place.

The relationship between experiential immersion and audience engagement can be explained through the concept of narrative transportation. Narrative advertising may generate more intense emotional reactions because it encourages audiences to become absorbed in the story being presented (Ma *et al.* 2023). This process, commonly referred to as narrative transportation, occurs when the narrative structure draws viewers into the depicted events and experiences (Kang *et al.* 2020). As audiences become immersed, they engage in vivid mental imagery and intensive cognitive processing, constructing internal representations of the situations described in the advertisement (Kim *et al.* 2014; Ma *et al.* 2023; van Laer *et al.* 2014). Empirical evidence from marketing research suggests that storytelling-based advertisements generate higher levels of emotional arousal and memorability than advertisements relying primarily on scenery and music, as narratives promote greater attention and deeper cognitive immersion (Ma *et al.* 2023).

A frequently employed linguistic strategy in destination promotion is the use of sensorial language, which appeals to the five senses and enables potential tourists to experience a destination before visiting it. Through references to sights, sounds, smells, tastes, and tactile sensations, promotional texts create vivid mental imagery that enhances emotional engagement and destination attractiveness (Manca 2013). By stimulating mental imagery, sensorial language enables audiences to simulate experiences cognitively and emotionally, even in the absence of direct physical contact with the destination. Analysing the linguistic features adopted to advertise holidays in hotels, farmhouses, and campsites in Italy and the United Kingdom, Manca (2013) found that, particularly on Italian tourism websites, natural surroundings are frequently described through abstract nouns and lexical items associated with sight, hearing, smell, taste, and touch. These linguistic choices contribute to the creation of multisensory and evocative representations of destinations.

Further evidence of the role of sensory dimensions in tourism communication emerges from studies investigating tourists’ own descriptions of their experiences. Agapito

et al. (2014), for example, analysed the sensory impressions associated with tourists' experiences in rural destinations and found a strong tendency to focus on sensory elements such as light, fresh air, local food, natural sounds and silence, and the colours of the surrounding landscape. References to taste frequently included local beverages, bread, fruit, aromatic plants, and sweet or salty flavours, while tactile impressions related to the texture of sand and seawater as well as sensations of warmth. These findings suggest that tourists themselves tend to conceptualize destinations through multisensory experiences, thereby reinforcing the importance of sensorial language in experiential immersion.

Beyond stimulating mental imagery, sensorial language also plays an important emotional role, as sensory descriptions can trigger affective responses that influence destination evaluation and decision-making. Studies of emotions in advertising commonly distinguish between integral and incidental emotions (Achar *et al.* 2016; Poels and Dewitte 2019). Integral emotions arise directly from the advertising message and are often strategically incorporated by marketers to shape consumer responses. Incidental emotions, by contrast, originate from unrelated events, contexts, or experiences but may nevertheless influence how consumers process information and make decisions.

The role of emotions in experiential immersion is also reflected in broader advertising research. Bhatia (2019) identifies two principal approaches to branding and advertising. The first, commonly referred to as informational or rational advertising, focuses on communicating objective facts and functional attributes to persuade consumers. The second, emotional advertising, seeks to establish an affective connection with audiences by using language to evoke emotions and highlight the experiential dimensions associated with a product. Drawing on the work of cognitive scientists such as Ekman (1973), Ekman and Davidson (1994), Izard (1977), and Plutchik (1982), Bhatia (2019, p. 437) proposes a classification of seven or eight fundamental emotions organized into three broad categories: positive emotions, such as happiness and love; neutral or potentially positive emotions, such as surprise; and negative emotions, including fear, anger, sadness, and disgust. Events, objects, and interactions can further generate more complex and intensified emotional responses derived from these primary emotions. For example, feelings associated with love may evolve into progressively stronger affective states, ranging from joy and jubilation to elation and triumph.

The persuasive effectiveness of emotional language can also be explained through the Elaboration Likelihood Model (ELM) developed by Petty and Cacioppo (1986). According to this model, persuasion may occur through two distinct processing routes. The central route involves careful evaluation and critical analysis of information directly related to the issue under consideration, whereas the peripheral route relies on indirect cues, such as emotions, associations, and heuristic judgments. Emotional language strategies typically operate through the peripheral route, influencing audiences through imagery, tone, and affective appeal rather than through logical argumentation. Within tourism discourse, emotional appeals are frequently reinforced through figurative devices and through emotional triggers, which contribute to the creation of memorable destination narratives (Rigby and Lee 2024). Nostalgia, in particular, has been identified as an emotional trigger that may evoke positive memories and enhance the persuasive impact of promotional messages (Dann 1996, p. 218; see Section 4 of this article).

Taken together, these studies suggest that experiential immersion in tourism promotion relies on the strategic combination of sensory and emotional language. By evoking mental imagery, stimulating affective responses, and encouraging narrative transportation, these linguistic resources contribute to the construction of destinations as lived and memorable experiences. The analysis presented in this study examines how such resources are employed in the selected tourism narratives.

4. Temporal framing in the narrative construction of tourist destinations

While tourism is commonly understood as movement through space, scholars have long argued that it should also be conceived as a journey through time (Cohen 1986; Dann 1996). Tourism often involves a temporary departure from the rhythms and routines of everyday life, creating an alternative temporal experience (Graburn 1983). In this sense, tourists are not only travelling to different places but are frequently engaging with representations of the past, seeking a sense of continuity, comfort, and cultural anchorage (Dann 1996, p. 218).

Among the strategies used to construct this alternative temporality is the ‘denial of time’ (Dann 1996, p. 50; Gottlieb 1982), which operates a symbolic inversion of everyday life, where the weekday becomes the weekend and the tourist is free from temporal constraints. A closely related strategy refers to ‘time as standing still’, which logically implies a form of ‘eternal time’ (Dann 1996, p. 51). This strategy is often realised through the use of the present tense, which reinforces the idea of timelessness as it makes places, traditions, and cultural practices appear stable, continuous, and unchanged over time. For this reason, rather than emphasizing historical development or transformation, the present tense constructs destinations as existing in an eternal present, thereby reinforcing narratives of continuity, authenticity, and permanence. For example, on Italian tourist promotional websites, the word *natura* (‘nature’) is frequently modified by the adjective *incontaminata* (‘unspoilt’). In such contexts, the term does not merely refer to an environment unaffected by modernity; it constructs a temporally suspended landscape in which change, development, and the passage of time appear to be absent (Manca 2013; 2025).

Within tourism discourse, the past is frequently represented as superior to the present (Dann 1996) and is considered, particularly by some cultures, as a safe haven, where ambiguity and uncertainty are notably absent. Consequently, what is associated with past times has an extremely positive connotation (Manca 2011; 2016). This view of the past implies constant references to the myths of the golden age (Dann 1996, p. 51; Francesconi 2007, p. 74). Urry and Larsen (2011, p. 140) point out that there is a distinction between authentic history, which is continuing and therefore dangerous, and heritage, which represents a safe and dead past and conceals authentic history. The timeless space created in tourism promotion implies the establishment of a semi-spiritual relationship and the activation of a romantic tourist gaze, in which tourists’ enjoyment is derived from experiencing places as unique, authentic, and emotionally significant, often in conditions of relative solitude or intimacy rather than collective participation (Urry 1990; Urry and Larsen, 2011). What tourists experience is an idealised representation of the past.

These assumptions are connected to the concept of nostalgia (Dann 1996, p. 218), “a positively toned evocation of a lived past in the context of some negative feeling toward present or impending circumstance” (Davis 1979, p. 18). As Francesconi points out (2007, p. 76), nostalgic tourism advertising shapes the holiday experience not as a moment of separation but as a reassuring confirmation of a previous condition. Consequently, destinations tend to be represented as existing within a temporally suspended space. Since these places do not exist or have never existed, the longing for a timeless holiday destination can be interpreted as a self-centred longing for pleasure and an auto-referential fulfilment (Francesconi 2007, p. 78). Furthermore, these non-existent and out-of-time places are embedded within a magical framework in which extraordinary events can occur and visitors can be transformed into versions of themselves distinct from their everyday

identities (Dann 1996, p. 55). Consequently, destinations are frequently represented as magical spaces or wonderlands, while natural and cultural elements are attributed transformative powers capable of producing extraordinary experiences.

Beyond nostalgia and timelessness, tourism discourse may also evoke forms of mythical temporality. As destinations are represented as magical spaces, wonderlands, or sites of legend (Dann 1996), they become detached from ordinary historical chronology and relocated within what Eliade (1954) describes as sacred or mythical time. In such representations, destinations are not merely old or historical but appear to exist in a temporality characterised by permanence, renewal, and symbolic authenticity, where visitors are invited to experience a reality distinct from everyday life. This tendency is particularly evident in Italian tourism discourse, where references to tradition, heritage, and historical continuity frequently occupy a central role in destination promotion. This emphasis may be related to the tendency identified in the literature for Italian culture to display a more past-oriented conception of time (Manca 2008, 2011, 2016; Katan 2004). For example, the adjective *antico* ('ancient') conveys an added value beyond mere age because of its association with culturally valued past styles and historical periods (Manca 2008, p. 378, 2016).

What is promised and offered to potential tourists who are planning their trip is presented in the form of the future. Advertising presents an unconsumed product or service not yet tasted or experienced (Dann 1996, p. 53) and invites us to project ourselves into that representation and make it our own. Future orientation is linked to the notion of escape (Urbain 1989), which possesses two temporal modes, 'escape from', implying the acknowledgement of the problem, and 'escape to', referring to the solution to the problem (Dann 1996, p. 54).

Taken together, these perspectives suggest that temporality constitutes a central dimension of narrativity through which destinations are promoted. Tourism discourse frequently constructs destinations through processes of temporal suspension, in which places appear detached from ordinary historical change and located within an eternal present. At the same time, it relies on forms of temporal idealisation, whereby the past is selectively reconstructed as a source of authenticity, continuity, and emotional reassurance. In many cases, these representations are further reinforced by forms of mythical temporality, which relocate destinations within symbolic worlds of legend, magic, and wonder. Finally, tourism narratives often display temporal hybridity, understood here as the coexistence of references to past, present, and future within the same promotional text. Through the interaction of these temporal strategies, destinations are transformed into narrative spaces that transcend everyday temporal experience and become particularly powerful objects of tourist desire.

Beyond these forms of temporal representation, narratological approaches also emphasise the importance of considering the different temporal positions involved in narrative discourse. Currie (2007) identifies three temporal loci: the time locus of the narrated, the time locus of the narrator, and the time locus of the reader. Based on the theories discussed above, in tourism narrative discourse, this structure is characterised by the interaction of multiple time loci. The time locus of the narrated is situated within a temporally hybrid framework, namely one in which different temporal dimensions coexist and overlap, allowing destinations to be represented as simultaneously rooted in an idealised past, existing in an eternal present, and awaiting future consumption. The narrator occupies the present moment of promotion, from which the destination is constructed through references to heritage, timelessness, and anticipated experiences. The reader, likewise positioned in the present, is encouraged to move imaginatively across temporal boundaries: away from the constraints of everyday life, towards a desirable

future holiday, and into a nostalgic past associated with authenticity, continuity, and emotional reassurance. Tourism narratives therefore rely on a form of temporal hybridity, whereby references to past, present, and future coexist within the same narrative frame (see Manca 2025). Destinations are simultaneously presented as rooted in heritage, suspended in a timeless present, and projected as future experiences awaiting consumption. The persuasive power of tourism discourse thus derives, in part, from its ability to collapse conventional temporal distinctions and create a temporally suspended experiential world in which readers move imaginatively across different temporal horizons.

5. Data and methodology

To analyse the narrative construction of tourist destinations, the official Instagram pages managed by the Italian regional tourism boards were selected as the data source. Since the focus of the study is on the narrative resources adopted to promote Italian destinations to an international audience, only posts written in English were included. Nine regional tourism boards systematically publish content in English on their Instagram pages: Emilia-Romagna, Friuli Venezia Giulia, Lombardy, Sicily, Umbria, and Veneto publish bilingual Italian-English posts, whereas South Tyrol, Tuscany, and Trentino publish content exclusively in English.

Posts published over a six-month period, from August 2025 to February 2026, were collected and assembled into a specialised English-language corpus. The corpus consists of 74,319 running words distributed across 1,021 Instagram posts published by the official tourism accounts considered in the study. The dataset includes captions accompanying photographs, reels, and other promotional visual material. These texts comprise destination descriptions, event promotion, cultural heritage narratives, gastronomic content, and experiential representations of places.

The study adopts a corpus-assisted discourse analytic approach combining corpus linguistics techniques with qualitative discourse analysis. The qualitative component was employed to identify and interpret narrative patterns associated with personification and anthropomorphisation, experiential immersion, and temporality, while the quantitative component relied on corpus-linguistic tools, including wordlists, concordances, and collocation analysis, to identify recurrent linguistic patterns associated with these narrative dimensions. Concordance lines were manually inspected to verify the contextual relevance of the retrieved items and to exclude occurrences that did not perform the discourse functions under investigation. The identification of coding categories was therefore followed by qualitative concordance analysis in order to determine how individual linguistic resources functioned within context. The analysis did not assume that all occurrences of a lexical item contributed equally, for example, to narrativity or experiential immersion but examined the specific discourse functions performed by these resources within the corpus.

The coding categories were developed deductively from the theoretical framework discussed in Sections 2–4 and subsequently refined through iterative examination of concordance lines. In addition, each post was manually examined to distinguish instances of storytelling in the strict narratological sense from posts relying primarily on narrative resources and minimal narratives. Following Bal (2017) and Abbott (2008), posts were classified as storytelling when they contained a sequence of events involving temporal progression, development, transformation, or causal connection. Posts lacking such event sequences but containing isolated narrative elements were classified as minimal narratives

or as instances of narrative resource use.

Because the identification of personification and anthropomorphisation involves an interpretative component, coding was conducted through a combination of corpus-assisted retrieval and qualitative contextual analysis. Potential instances were first identified through searches for human-related adjectives, verbs of agency, emotion and communication, references to mental states, and metaphorical role nouns. Each occurrence was subsequently examined in its immediate concordance context to determine whether a non-human entity (e.g. a destination, landscape, natural element, cultural artefact, or abstract concept) was being represented as possessing human characteristics, intentions, emotions, communicative abilities, agency, memory, or identity. Only cases involving a clear attribution of human qualities to non-human entities were retained for analysis.

Personification and anthropomorphisation were therefore investigated through the identification of linguistic structures in which places, regions, landscapes, natural elements, cultural artefacts, or abstract entities function as animate or human-like actors. Particular attention was devoted to: (a) human-related adjectives and social dispositions attributed to places (e.g. ‘welcoming’, ‘generous’, ‘warm-hearted’, ‘caring’, and ‘proud’); (b) verbs denoting human actions, intentions, communication, or agency associated with non-human entities (e.g. ‘welcome’, ‘embrace’, ‘invite’, ‘tell’, ‘reveal’, ‘whisper’, ‘await’, ‘inspire’, ‘surprise’, and ‘seduce’); (c) references to mental states, emotions, memories, identity, interiority, or personality traits attributed to destinations; and (d) metaphorical constructions in which places are represented as human or quasi-human figures, such as protagonists, companions, guardians, hosts, queens, storytellers, sentinels, or living beings.

Experiential immersion was examined through linguistic resources capable of facilitating narrative transportation and imaginative participation in projected destination experiences. Following previous research on tourism discourse (Manca 2013; 2016; Agapito *et al.* 2014), the analysis focused on sensory vocabulary associated with the five senses. For the visual dimension, a distinction was made between perception verbs and visual landscape descriptors. Perception verbs included lexical items such as ‘see’, ‘admire’, ‘observe’, ‘witness’, ‘look’, ‘listen’, ‘hear’, ‘smell’, ‘feel’, ‘taste’, and ‘savour’, which position readers as potential experiencers of the destination. Visual landscape descriptors comprised nouns and adjectives referring to what can be seen, including visual environments (‘view’, ‘panorama’, ‘vista’, ‘landscape’, ‘scenery’, and ‘horizon’) and colour- and appearance-related descriptors (e.g. ‘colourful’, ‘vibrant’, ‘golden’, ‘blue’, ‘turquoise’, ‘picturesque’, ‘spectacular’, and ‘breathtaking’). Hearing-related items included references to sounds, silence, music, and natural acoustic environments (e.g. ‘listen’, ‘hear’, ‘echo’, ‘melody’, ‘whisper’, and ‘silence’). Smell-related items comprised lexical references to scents, aromas, fragrances, perfumes, and freshness. Taste-related items encompassed vocabulary associated with food, flavours, and gustatory references (e.g. ‘taste’, ‘savour’, ‘flavour’, ‘sweetness’, ‘richness’, and ‘delicacy’). Touch-related items included lexical items referring to texture, temperature, physical contact, and bodily sensations (e.g. ‘soft’, ‘warm’, ‘crisp’, and ‘immerse’).

Experiential immersion was further investigated through the presence of linguistic markers of audience involvement and narrative transportation, including second-person pronouns (‘you’, ‘your’), imperative constructions, and perception verbs associated with the five senses. During the qualitative stage of the analysis, particular attention was devoted to the different discursive functions performed by imperative constructions, distinguishing between conventional promotional calls to action and expressions that project readers into imagined experiential scenarios (e.g. ‘picture yourself’, ‘imagine’, ‘step inside’, and ‘follow’).

Particular attention was also devoted to emotional, affective, evaluative, and figurative language. Emotional language included lexical items expressing emotions such as joy, excitement, and happiness; affective language comprised references to tranquillity, relaxation, and well-being; evaluative language included items such as ‘unique’, ‘authentic’, and ‘unforgettable’; while figurative expressions such as ‘magic’ and ‘magical’ were analysed separately as resources contributing to the imaginative framing of destinations.

Temporality was analysed through four principal narrative dimensions derived from the theoretical framework discussed above: temporal suspension, temporal idealisation, mythical temporality, and temporal hybridity. Temporal suspension was investigated through the predominance of present-tense forms and lexical items associated with permanence, continuity, and timelessness (e.g. ‘always’, ‘forever’, ‘timeless’, ‘eternal’, ‘everlasting’, ‘unchanged’, and ‘endless’). Temporal idealisation was explored through references to heritage, tradition, memory, authenticity, and the past (e.g. ‘ancient’, ‘historic’, ‘centuries-old’, ‘traditional’, ‘heritage’, ‘roots’, ‘legacy’, and ‘memory’). Mythical temporality was examined through lexical references to myths, legends, folklore, magic, wonder, mystery, enchantment, and symbolic narratives (e.g. ‘legend’, ‘myth’, ‘mythical’, ‘magic’, ‘magical’, ‘enchanted’, ‘fairy-tale’, ‘wonderland’, ‘dreamlike’, and ‘sacred’). Unlike the other temporal dimensions, temporal hybridity was identified qualitatively through the co-occurrence of references to past, present, and future temporal frames within the same post, including explicit temporal markers, verb tenses, and future-oriented expressions inviting readers to anticipate forthcoming experiences (e.g. ‘your next journey’, ‘waiting for you’, ‘discover’, ‘experience’, and ‘come and explore’).

While experiential immersion and temporality were investigated through lexical inventories whose occurrences could be quantified directly, personification and anthropomorphisation required a partly interpretative coding procedure. Unlike sensory or temporal markers, personification and anthropomorphisation do not correspond to closed lexical categories but to rhetorical strategies realised through a range of linguistic resources. For this reason, the analysis combined corpus searches with qualitative concordance analysis. Because the identification of personification and anthropomorphisation depends on the relationship between lexical items and their contextual subjects, frequencies are reported only for lexical categories that can be reliably quantified through corpus searches, while personification and anthropomorphisation are primarily discussed through the analysis of recurrent patterns and representative examples. Building on the narratological framework outlined above, the analysis identified three major groups of narrative resources that contribute to the construction and promotion of destinations in Instagram tourism discourse: (1) narrative characterisation through personification and anthropomorphisation; (2) experiential immersion through sensory, emotional, and audience-involving language; and (3) temporal framing through references to heritage, timelessness, mythical temporality, and future-oriented anticipation. These categories do not constitute storytelling in themselves; rather, they represent recurrent narrative resources through which destinations acquire narrativity and contribute to the construction of coherent destination narratives.

6. Results and discussion

The analysis reveals that approximately 10% of the corpus consists of posts that can be classified as storytelling in the strict narratological sense (Bal 2017), namely texts presenting sequences of events unfolding through time and involving processes of

development or transformation. The remaining posts rely primarily on minimal narratives (Abbott 2008) and recurrent narrative resources, confirming that destination narrativity is most often constructed through the accumulation and interaction of these resources rather than through fully developed stories.

Experiential immersion emerges as the most prominent dimension in the corpus, as demonstrated by the high frequency of audience-involvement markers, visual descriptors, emotional-evaluative language, and sensory references distributed across the five senses. Temporality also plays a central role in destination construction, with substantial frequencies associated with temporal idealisation, temporal suspension, mythical temporality, and future orientation. Personification and anthropomorphisation are likewise widespread throughout the corpus. Concordance and manual analyses identified numerous instances in which destinations, landscapes, natural elements, traditions, and local products are attributed human agency, communicative abilities, personality traits, emotions, or symbolic social roles. Through these strategies, places are repeatedly represented as hosts that welcome visitors, storytellers that narrate local culture, guides that accompany tourists through the experience, and agents that reveal, preserve, or shape meanings.

Taken together, these findings suggest that the promotion of Italian regions on Instagram relies on the interaction of three closely interconnected narrative dimensions. Destinations are humanised through personification and anthropomorphisation, experienced through sensory and emotional immersion, and situated within complex temporal frameworks combining heritage, timelessness, mythical imagination, and future anticipation. Rather than operating independently, these dimensions frequently converge within the same textual segments, creating destination narratives that are simultaneously personal, experiential, and temporally layered.

6.1. The construction of destinations as narrative actors

Personification emerges as a distinctive narrative resource in the corpus. Qualitative examination of concordances reveals a systematic tendency to represent destinations, landscapes, natural elements, traditions, and local products not merely as physical settings but as active participants in the promotional narrative. Through the attribution of human actions, communicative abilities, personality traits, psychological qualities, and symbolic identities, places are transformed into narrative actors capable of interacting with potential visitors.

As discussed in the methodology, the corpus contains both personification and anthropomorphisation (Epley *et al.* 2007; Lakoff and Johnson 2003). While personification involves the attribution of human actions or communicative functions to non-human entities, anthropomorphisation represents a stronger form of humanisation in which places are endowed with personality traits, emotions, intentions, memory, identity, or symbolic roles. The analysis suggests that these resources operate along a continuum, moving from relatively simple forms of human agency to more elaborate constructions of destinations as characters within a narrative world.

A first level of humanisation is realised through personifying verbs that attribute human actions and communicative functions to destinations and natural elements. Three recurrent semantic dimensions can be identified: hospitality, communication, and agency. These dimensions frequently overlap and should not be understood as mutually exclusive categories.

Hospitality personification is realised through verbs such as ‘welcome’, ‘invite’, and ‘guide’, which construct destinations as hosts establishing a direct relationship with

visitors. Expressions such as ‘the lake welcomes you with its calm magic’, ‘quiet valleys invite you to unwind’, and ‘nature is always close by, ready for hikes, bike rides and encounters with culture and history’ portray places as actively receiving and accompanying tourists.

Communication personification attributes the ability to speak, narrate, or convey messages to non-human entities through verbs such as ‘tell’, ‘whisper’, and ‘speak’. Examples include ‘every dish tells a story’, ‘it’s a suspended moment where nature speaks and the soul responds’, and ‘stones whisper of art, lives and centuries of beauty’. Through these formulations, destinations become storytellers capable of transmitting cultural meanings, memories, and heritage.

Agency constitutes a further dimension of personification. In these cases, destinations and natural elements are represented as capable of acting upon their environment or producing effects. Expressions such as ‘the rugged peaks of the Lagorai shape a timeless landscape’ and ‘Renaissance façades, a travertine well crowned with griffins and lions, and the scent of *Vino Nobile* in the air envelop you in a warm embrace’ attribute agency to non-human entities and present destinations as active forces rather than passive settings. In several instances, agency overlaps with hospitality and communication, reinforcing the representation of places as active participants in the visitor experience.

A stronger degree of humanisation is realised through anthropomorphisation. Unlike simple personification, anthropomorphisation attributes psychological, relational, or social qualities typically associated with human beings. In the corpus, this tendency emerges in expressions that assign personality traits or social dispositions to destinations, such as ‘warm-hearted’, ‘welcoming’, ‘caring’, or ‘proud’. These formulations go beyond conventional tourism evaluation by representing places as possessing recognisable personalities and relational qualities.

Anthropomorphisation is also realised through the attribution of interiority, namely the suggestion that places possess an inner life, memory, identity, or emotional depth. Across the corpus, destinations are repeatedly described as having a soul, preserving memories, carrying histories, or embodying a distinctive identity. Expressions such as ‘Lake Caldonazzo reveals its calm soul’, ‘Trentino travels the world, carrying the taste of its territory’, and ‘the land breathes rich with stories’ attribute forms of consciousness, memory, or vitality to non-human entities. Unlike personification, which attributes human actions, these formulations imply the existence of an internal psychological or symbolic dimension. Destinations are therefore represented not only as acting and communicating, but also as remembering, feeling, and possessing a unique sense of self.

The strongest form of anthropomorphisation occurs through metaphorical identifications in which places, natural elements, or cultural entities are symbolically recategorised as human or quasi-human figures. Destinations may appear as hosts, companions, storytellers, guardians, protagonists, queens, giants, sentinels, or living beings. Examples include ‘ancient trees stand as giants of the forest’, ‘the Dolomites are silent sentinels of the region’, and ‘glaciers are memory keepers, climate sentinels, and symbols of the Alps’. In these cases, the place is not merely represented as acting like a person but is redefined as a character within the destination narrative itself.

Overall, personification and anthropomorphisation contribute to the transformation of destinations from passive geographical settings into narrative actors. Through the attribution of actions, communicative functions, personality traits, memory, interiority, and symbolic identities, places acquire voice, agency, and character. These strategies support emotional engagement and narrative immersion by constructing destinations as hosts that welcome visitors, storytellers that transmit heritage, and characters that inhabit

coherent destination story worlds. The result is a form of destination representation in which places are not simply visited or observed but encountered as living presences endowed with agency, identity, and narrative significance.

6.2. *Experiential immersion and narrative transportation*

Experiential immersion emerges as one of the most prominent narrative dimensions in the corpus. Qualitative examination of the data reveals a recurrent tendency to position readers not as external observers of destinations but as participants within projected tourism experiences. Rather than merely describing places and attractions, Instagram captions frequently construct experiential scenarios that encourage readers to imagine themselves interacting with the destination. In this sense, experiential immersion functions as a narrative resource that supports narrative transportation and facilitates imaginative participation in the destination world.

A first mechanism supporting experiential immersion is projected participation. The extensive use of second-person forms ('you', 'your', and 'yourself', 985 occurrences) constructs a direct relationship between destination and reader and repeatedly positions the latter within the projected experience. Audience involvement is further reinforced through the use of imperative constructions (250 occurrences). However, qualitative analysis suggests that imperative forms do not contribute equally to experiential immersion. Verbs such as 'imagine' (13 occurrences), 'step' (12 occurrences), and 'follow' (16 occurrences) explicitly encourage readers to mentally enter an experiential scenario and assume the role of participants within it. Expressions such as 'just follow its walls and let yourself be guided by the beauty of autumn', 'step inside a South Tyrolean carpentry', and 'imagine pools under majestic mountain peaks, sauna sessions with breathtaking views, and treatments inspired by nature's finest' invite readers to construct detailed mental representations and imagine themselves physically present within the destination. By contrast, more conventional tourism imperatives such as 'discover' (39 occurrences), 'experience' (16 occurrences), 'enjoy' (12 occurrences), and 'come' (15 occurrences) often function primarily as promotional calls to action and contribute less directly to experiential projection. Experiential immersion therefore depends not simply on imperative frequency but on the ability of specific linguistic constructions to position readers within imagined situations and activities.

A second mechanism concerns sensory immersion. Across the corpus, readers are repeatedly invited to see, hear, taste, smell, touch, and experience destinations through language. Frequent perception verbs include 'feel' (75 occurrences), 'look' (32 occurrences), 'taste' (30 occurrences), 'admire' (19 occurrences), 'see' (16 occurrences), 'listen' (10 occurrences), 'observe' (6 occurrences), 'hear' (6 occurrences), and 'smell' (6 occurrences). Unlike descriptive nouns and adjectives, these verbs place readers in the role of experiencers and encourage them to imagine themselves actively perceiving the destination. Through such constructions, destinations are presented not simply as objects of observation but as environments to be experienced through the senses of the prospective visitor.

Experiential immersion is further reinforced through sensory scenography, namely the construction of vivid multisensory environments within which readers are invited to situate themselves. Visual description constitutes the most prominent component of this process. Rather than functioning as evidence of narrativity in itself, visual language contributes to the creation of experiential settings that support imaginative participation. Frequent items include 'view/s' (157 occurrences), 'light' (95 occurrences), and 'landscape' (85 occurrences), together with evaluative visual descriptors such as

'breathtaking' (81 occurrences), 'spectacular' (26 occurrences), and 'picturesque' (7 occurrences). Colour-related language is equally prominent, with 'golden' (66 occurrences), 'white' (52 occurrences), 'green' (35 occurrences), 'red' (32 occurrences), 'gold' (26 occurrences), and 'blue' (13 occurrences) among the most frequent items. References to golden sunsets, blue skies, turquoise waters, and landscapes painted in seasonal colours contribute to the construction of vivid mental imagery and provide the sensory backdrop against which projected experiences are imagined.

The corpus also demonstrates that experiential immersion extends beyond vision. Hearing-related resources are frequently used to construct atmospheric environments through references to 'silence' (78 occurrences), 'quiet' (73 occurrences), 'silent' (34 occurrences), 'rhythm' (35 occurrences), 'sound' (25 occurrences), and 'whisper/s' (23 occurrences). These elements contribute to representations of tourism as an escape from the noise and pressures of everyday life. Interestingly, some lexical items operate simultaneously across multiple narrative dimensions. For example, 'whisper' functions not only as an auditory marker but also as a personifying device when landscapes, villages, monuments, or historical artefacts are represented as capable of communicating stories, memories, and cultural meanings.

Touch and bodily sensation are similarly prominent through items such as 'feel' (75 occurrences), 'warm' (67 occurrences), 'breathe' (44 occurrences), 'crisp' (37 occurrences), 'immerse' (33 occurrences), and 'soft' (32 occurrences), which foreground embodied interaction with the destination. References to warmth, crisp air, bodily comfort, and immersion in the landscape encourage readers to imagine physical engagement with the destination and contribute to representations of tourism as a restorative experience.

Taste-related language, including 'taste' (53 occurrences), 'flavour/s' (42 occurrences), 'sweet' (15 occurrences), and 'savour' (7 occurrences), frequently links sensory experience to local identity, tradition, and cultural heritage. Rather than functioning merely as references to food, gustatory descriptions often contribute to the representation of destinations through their culinary practices and local products.

Smell-related vocabulary is less frequent but often highly evocative, appearing in expressions such as 'the scent of pine and earth' and 'follow the scent of Christmas', where olfactory cues contribute to the construction of atmosphere and authenticity. Importantly, these sensory resources rarely operate in isolation. Instead, they combine to create experiential scenarios in which readers are invited to imagine themselves moving through landscapes, hearing sounds, breathing scents, tasting local products, and physically inhabiting the destination.

A further dimension of experiential immersion is affective framing. The corpus repeatedly encourages readers to adopt particular emotional orientations toward destinations through a combination of emotional, affective, evaluative, and figurative resources. Genuine emotions are represented through items such as 'joy/joyful' (16 occurrences) and 'excitement/exciting' (18 occurrences). Affective states include 'peaceful/peace' (85 occurrences), 'relaxation/relax/relaxed' (28 occurrences), and similar expressions associated with tranquillity, restoration, and well-being. Evaluative resources such as 'unique' (97 occurrences), 'authentic' (57 occurrences), and 'unforgettable' (45 occurrences) contribute to positive destination appraisal, while figurative expressions such as 'magic' (93 occurrences) and 'magical' (44 occurrences) intensify the imaginative and symbolic dimensions of destination representation. Rather than describing emotional reactions directly, however, the corpus typically evokes them indirectly through sensory and experiential scenarios. Wonder, tranquillity, inspiration, and excitement emerge through descriptions of landscapes, traditions, gastronomy, and seasonal atmospheres, thereby reinforcing readers' emotional engagement with the destination.

Experiential immersion in the corpus is realised through the interaction of projected participation, sensory immersion, and affective framing. Readers are repeatedly invited not only to observe destinations but also to imagine themselves inhabiting them through sensory, emotional, and embodied experiences. Through this combination of narrative resources, Instagram captions move beyond simple place description and contribute to the construction of projected experiential worlds in which readers can imaginatively participate before physical travel takes place. These resources therefore support narrative transportation and enhance the experiential dimension of destination representation.

6.3. *Temporality*

Temporality constitutes one of the most salient narrative dimensions in the corpus. The quantitative analysis reveals a strong tendency towards temporal idealisation. The most frequent lexical items include ‘history/historic/historical’ (282 occurrences), ‘tradition/traditions/traditional’ (216 occurrences), ‘time’ (160 occurrences), ‘ancient’ (154 occurrences), ‘century/centuries-old’ (120 occurrences), and ‘heritage’ (46 occurrences).

These lexical choices construct destinations through references to continuity, authenticity, and cultural permanence. The past is consistently represented as valuable, reassuring, and worthy of preservation. Traditions are repeatedly described as being ‘passed down through generations’, ‘deeply rooted’, or ‘centuries old’, while local products and cultural practices are presented as tangible links between past and present. This pattern confirms previous observations that tourism discourse frequently idealises the past and associates it with notions of authenticity and cultural value.

The corpus also displays a significant tendency towards temporal suspension. Lexical items associated with slowness, stillness, and timelessness account for 406 occurrences. Particularly frequent are ‘slow/slower’ (83 occurrences), ‘still/stillness’ (88 occurrences), ‘timeless’ (65 occurrences), and ‘always’ (42 occurrences). These expressions construct destinations as spaces detached from ordinary temporal constraints. Visitors are invited to experience places where ‘time slows down’, where there is ‘all the time in the world’, or where they can ‘immerse themselves in timeless atmospheres’. Tourism is therefore represented as a temporary escape from the accelerated temporality of everyday life.

A further layer of temporal representation emerges through mythical temporality. This category includes frequent references to ‘magic’ (93 occurrences), ‘magical’ (44 occurrences), ‘enchancing’ (32 occurrences), ‘fairy-tale’ (24 occurrences), ‘enchanted’ (21 occurrences), ‘wonder’ (28 occurrences), ‘legendary’ (14 occurrences), and ‘mysterious’ (11 occurrences). Destinations are repeatedly described as places where ‘winter works its magic’, where visitors can enter ‘enchancing villages’, or where ‘wonder takes over’. Such representations move beyond historical authenticity and relocate destinations within symbolic and quasi-mythical temporal frameworks. Places are no longer presented simply as geographical locations but as settings associated with enchantment, transformation, and extraordinary experiences.

Future orientation is also consistently present. Frequent lexical items include ‘will’ (106 occurrences), ‘ready’ (107 occurrences), ‘waiting’ (24 occurrences), ‘next’ (42 occurrences), and ‘future’ (33 occurrences). These forms remind readers that tourism promotion ultimately concerns experiences that have not yet taken place. Destinations are represented as awaiting future encounters, while readers are encouraged to project

themselves into anticipated experiences through invitations, expectations, and imagined future participation.

Perhaps the most significant finding concerns the coexistence of different temporal orientations within the same texts. Numerous posts simultaneously combine references to historical continuity, present-tense descriptions, and future-oriented invitations. This tendency can be observed across different regional accounts. In South Tyrol, traditions and local expertise are described as being ‘passed down through generations’, while readers are invited to discover contemporary food, cultural, and outdoor experiences. Similar patterns emerge in Trentino, where glaciers are described as ‘silent witnesses of Earth’s history’ while simultaneously being presented as indicators of climate challenges ‘shaping our future’. In Veneto, a post on Treviso combines references to the ‘historic centre’ and to the harmonious intertwining of ‘history and festive atmosphere’ with the future-oriented expression ‘with Christmas just a few days away’ and the invitation to ‘immerse yourself in the enchantment of Treviso’. Lombardy provides a comparable example: ‘ancient villages, castles, and wineries’ are represented as awaiting visitors, while readers are invited to ‘discover the true essence of the land’ and asked whether they are ‘ready to experience autumn among the vineyards’. Across these examples, destinations are represented as rooted in an idealised past, experienced in the present, and projected towards desirable futures. The recurrence of these patterns across geographically and culturally different regions suggests that temporal hybridity is not restricted to individual communication styles but constitutes a broader feature of contemporary Italian tourism discourse.

Furthermore, the predominance of present-tense forms contributes to temporal suspension by presenting destinations, traditions, and cultural practices as stable and enduring features of the landscape rather than historically changing phenomena. Through the interaction of temporal idealisation, temporal suspension, mythical temporality, and future orientation, destinations acquire temporal depth and complexity. Rather than being anchored to a single temporal frame, they are represented as spaces where past, present, and future coexist, creating forms of narrativity that encourage visitors to perceive destinations as simultaneously rooted in heritage, experienced in the present moment, and open to future possibilities.

6.4. Interactions among narrative resources

Although personification, experiential immersion, and temporality have been analysed separately, the corpus demonstrates that these resources frequently operate simultaneously. Expressions such as ‘the lake welcomes you with its calm magic’, ‘quiet valleys invite you to unwind’, or ‘winter works its magic’ combine personification, audience involvement, emotional appeal, and mythical temporality within a single narrative unit. Their persuasive force therefore derives not from any single resource in isolation but from the interaction of multiple narrative dimensions. Through this interplay, destinations are represented as engaging narrative worlds, where places become active participants in the tourist experience, sensory and emotional involvement is encouraged, and temporal frameworks of heritage, timelessness, or anticipation contribute to the construction of destination meaning. In this sense, destination storytelling emerges from the cumulative effect of these interconnected narrative resources, which together enhance emotional engagement, reinforce place identity, and stimulate tourist desire.

7. Conclusion

This study investigated the narrative resources employed in the English-language Instagram promotion of Italian destinations by regional tourism boards. Drawing on narratology, tourism discourse studies, and destination marketing research, the analysis focused on three interconnected dimensions: personification and anthropomorphisation, experiential immersion, and temporality. Through a corpus-assisted discourse analytic approach combining quantitative and qualitative methods, the study examined how these resources contribute to the construction of destination representations in Italian social media communication.

The findings reveal that personification and anthropomorphisation play a central role in the narrative characterisation of destinations. Through the attribution of human agency, communicative abilities, personality traits, emotions, and symbolic social roles, destinations are represented as active entities rather than passive geographical settings. Places welcome visitors, reveal secrets, preserve memories, and invite participation, thereby acquiring forms of narrativity that make them appear more relatable, memorable, and socially meaningful.

Experiential immersion emerges as an equally important dimension. The corpus displays extensive use of audience-involvement markers, direct address, selected imperative constructions, sensory language, and emotional or evaluative vocabulary. Rather than merely describing destinations, these resources frequently encourage readers to imagine themselves within projected experiences and to engage with places through sensory and affective representations. Visual language is particularly prominent, reflecting the nature of Instagram communication, while references to hearing, touch, smell, and taste contribute to the construction of multisensory destination representations.

Temporality constitutes a further key narrative dimension. The analysis reveals recurring patterns of temporal idealisation, temporal suspension, mythical temporality, and future orientation. Destinations are represented as repositories of heritage and tradition, as spaces where time slows down or appears suspended, and as settings associated with enchantment, wonder, and anticipation. At the same time, tourism promotion remains inherently future-oriented, inviting readers to project themselves into experiences that have not yet taken place. The frequent coexistence of past-, present-, and future-oriented references suggests that temporal hybridity represents a characteristic feature of contemporary destination promotion.

The most significant contribution of the study may lie in demonstrating that these dimensions rarely operate independently. Personification, experiential immersion, and temporality frequently interact within the same promotional texts, creating representations in which destinations are simultaneously humanised, emotionally engaging, multisensory, and conducive to readers' imaginative participation, while also being embedded within layered temporal frameworks. The findings suggest that narrativity in tourism discourse does not necessarily depend on the presence of fully developed stories. Consistent with Abbott's notion of narrative units, narrativity may emerge through the accumulation and interaction of narrative resources that attribute agency to places, position readers within projected experiences, and organise destinations within meaningful temporal frameworks.

The study is subject to several limitations. The analysis focused exclusively on English-language Instagram posts published by Italian regional tourism boards over a six-month period and did not consider visual content or audience responses. Future research could extend the investigation to other social media platforms, compare English-language and Italian-language destination promotion, examine multimodal interactions between images and captions, and explore how different narrative resources influence audience

engagement and travel intentions. Comparative studies involving destinations from different countries would also help determine the extent to which the patterns identified here reflect broader tendencies in tourism communication or more specific characteristics of Italian destination branding.

Ultimately, the findings suggest that contemporary Italian destination promotion is increasingly concerned not simply with describing places but with constructing representations through which destinations acquire agency, invite imaginative participation, stimulate sensory and emotional engagement, and develop temporal depth. Through the interaction of personification, experiential immersion, and temporality, social media discourse encourages audiences to engage imaginatively with places before physically experiencing them, thereby contributing to the persuasive and symbolic power of destination communication.

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