

Are You a #Globetrotter?

Experiencing Tourism on the Web

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Abstract

According to the Cambridge Dictionary, a globetrotter is a person who often travels to different countries. Even though this word dates to the early 19th century, it has only recently been adopted by social media users with reference to people who travel extensively.

New media and technologies are constantly changing socio/cultural panorama in different ways using new different tools for creating and conveying meanings to big audience. Social media communication plays a big role in de/constructing and re/constructing social practices, personal belief and needs affecting people knowledge, awareness and habits.

This paper aims at investigating to what extent tourism discourse has changed in relation to new forms of tourism and new platforms of communication like Instagram and TikTok. In the first part of this paper, tourism promotional discourse conducted on social media is examined from a multimodal and multimedial perspective to investigate how sign- and meaning-making processes have changed in the last few years abandoning the single multimodal sphere of printed brochures and maps and the monolingual dimension of written texts. The new ways of discussing and promoting tourism affects tourists' choices and experiences.

This change of course is investigated in the second part of the paper which focuses on social value that new forms of tourism are acquiring in connection with the linguistic and terminological influence that these new forms of promotion and popularization may have on tourists.

Keywords: Promotional discourse, Tourism, Website, Social media, Multimodal, Terminology, Interaction

1. Introduction

The advent of mass tourism marked a significant turning point in the history of travel. By the 1960s, tourism had shifted from being a luxury and privileged experience to becoming a part of lifestyle and identity. Holidays were increasingly promoted as essential for personal wellbeing, not merely as a form of leisure, but as a personal necessity. This evolution reflected broader cultural shifts, including new concepts of identity, the rise of mass consumption culture, and the growing emphasis on self-fulfilment (see Zuelow, 2015).

Over the past few decades, the tourism industry has experienced remarkable growth on national and international levels. No longer seen solely as a vehicle for cultural exchange and economic development, tourism has evolved into a complex sector encompassing a wide array of subcategories, designed to meet the diverse needs and interests of modern travelers. The shift toward diverse travel experiences reflects a rethinking of the tourist's role, emphasizing deeper engagement over traditional leisure experiences. Emerging forms like ecotourism, slow travel, medical, adventure, and culinary tourism highlight a change in how tourism is conceptualized and practiced, moving from quantity to quality, from passive observation to co-creation and immersive experience.

This evolution has been accompanied by profound changes in the ways tourism is promoted and consumed. Traditional promotional tools, such as printed brochures, have gradually been replaced or supported by digital forms of communication, particularly popular among younger generations. The widespread use of the web and social media platforms has significantly transformed the nature of both private and public communication (Van Dijck, 2013:7), influencing individuals' habits, expectations, and decision-making processes including those related to travel.

Tourism-related content has become increasingly frequent on social media, shaping how destinations are perceived and chosen.

Short video platforms (SVPs), in particular, have emerged as a powerful tool in this context, offering a unique form of tourism marketing that merges entertainment with persuasive communication (Qiu et al., 2024).

Publicly available data suggests that younger TikTok users show a greater interest in travel than older demographics; generation Z (born 1995–2009) and generation Y (Millennials, born 1981–1994) represent a significant portion of the tourism consumer market, using social media to search for travel information and make plans (Liu et al., 2024).

The aim of this paper is to explore how tourism promotional discourse has shifted from traditional print materials to digital and multimodal formats, giving particular attention to the role of websites and social media platforms in this transformation.

This study examines the quality and features of tourism-related content across travel platforms such as TripAdvisor and GetYourGuide and social media platforms like Instagram and TikTok.

This paper investigates the multimodal dimension of tourism promotion and reflects on emerging terminological and cultural issues surrounding the use of social media. By doing so,

it aims to offer practical insights into the evolving nature of tourism promotional communication in the digital age.

2. Theoretical and Methodological Background

The landscape of tourism has been profoundly transformed by the digital era, with traditional travel planning forms being often replaced by online platforms. Today, users rely on digital sources not only for booking services but also for getting information and inspiration. Social media, booking platforms, and review sites have become central to the tourism experience, changing both the way tourism is consumed and the way it is communicated.

Several studies have recently been conducted on the role that new social media platforms have played in tourism promotion and on the potential tourists that use these platforms. Drawing on Fishbein and Ajzen (1977), Liu et al. (2024: 5) explore the behavioral aspect of tourism field stating that “[b]ehavioral intention, as a prediction of individuals’ future behavior, reflects an individual’s expectations and inclinations towards specific behaviors in particular circumstances”. Recent studies have highlighted the growing impact of short videos as an emerging trend in shaping user behavioral intentions such as Qiu et al. (2024) that have focused on the role of short video platforms (SVPs) and social media influencers in affecting tourists’ interest toward specific destinations. In this article the authors highlight the significance of short video platforms (SVPs) in introducing travel destinations and facilitating user interaction. Interaction on social media involves communicating, sharing content, such as images, words, music, and videos. Users on SVPs create and post content that may influence users’ travel intentions also based on their quality and credibility.

Online activities have become a major aspect of daily life, especially for digital natives, whose experiences, knowledge, beliefs and identities are deeply shaped by the digital environment. The web is also the frame for new kinds of celebrities: web celebrities, whose fame is largely based on their ability to draw and sustain attention online, rather than on any particular skill or talent (Codeluppi, 2021). Social media influencers (SMIs) are opinion leaders who have “the power to affect a person, thing or course of events” (Brown & Hayes, 2008: 49) on platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, YouTube, TikTok: to be considered influencers, web celebrities rely on having an audience that engages with the content they share.

The idea of using social media as supporting platform for tourist activities is also connected to the possibility of accessing content in a very easy and user-friendly way. The tendency for social media users to search for tourism-related information on platforms like Instagram and TikTok can also be explained in terms of Technology Acceptance Model (TAM) developed by Davis (1989). Davis argues that an individual’s behavioral intention to adopt a technology is influenced by perceived usefulness (PU) which is “the degree to which a person believes that using a particular system would enhance his or her job performance”, and perceived ease of use (PEOU) which is “the degree to which a person believes that using a particular system would be free of effort” (Davis, 1989 :320).

Davis' TAM (1989) is the starting point for Liu et al. (2024) who investigate how TikTok's short video platform "influences tourism-related behavioral intentions" combined with AI novelties like personalized recommendation and content optimization.

This perspective aligns with the idea that reading and imagining a place become integral parts of the travel process itself (Köchling, 2021). Köchling's study shows that experiential marketing strategies on online platforms can enhance tourists' pre-travel experiences by actively shaping expectations and engagement before physical travel occurs. Users are not passive consumers of information; rather, they participate in an anticipatory journey, where affective responses and imagined experiences guide future travel decisions.

This anticipatory dimension can also be explained through the lens of affective forecasting (Wilson & Gilbert, 2005), which highlights humans' ability in predicting their future emotional responses. Online travel content, including images, videos, and user reviews, contributes to shaping these anticipatory emotions, influencing not only what users intend to do but also how they expect to feel during the trip. In other words, digital platforms do more than provide information—they cultivate imagined experiences that affect decision-making and shape expectations prior to departure.

Existing studies have mainly explored the behavioral impact of social media on tourists' intentions and the marketing effectiveness of specific platforms and influencers. However, little attention has been paid to multimodality, which has been treated as a secondary feature rather than a central object of analysis. Moreover, most studies focus on a single platform or a single communicative dimension, paying limited attention to how linguistic, visual, interactive, and ideological resources work together to construct tourism meanings across different digital environments.

The primary goal of the present research is to investigate to what extent digital content has transformed, and in some cases replaced, traditional forms of tourism promotion and information dissemination. By focusing on contemporary online sources, particularly websites and social media platforms, this study explores how new modes of discourse shape tourists' perceptions, choices, and behaviors. To achieve this, the research combines a multimodal approach to a critical discourse analysis framework (CDA), to examine the construction and circulation of meaning in tourism promotional context.

Drawing on van Dijk (2001), Meyer (2001:20) notes that discourse is seen as "a communicative event, including conversational interaction, written text, as well as associated gestures, facework, typographical layout, images and any other 'semiotic' or multi-media dimension of signification." Within this perspective, discourse is not only what is said or shown, but how and why it is communicated.

The evolution of tourism discourse in the digital environment has been traced through the analysis of various platforms, including well-established websites such as Tripadvisor and GetYourGuide, as well as social media such as Instagram and TikTok. These platforms have not only affected the ways in which tourism information is produced and consumed but have also transformed the relationship between producers and audiences. Drawing on Fairclough's

model of discourse analysis (2003) and the multimodal framework developed by Kress and van Leeuwen (2006), the study investigates the linguistic and semiotic resources used in online tourism discourse.

Specifically, attention is given to the multimodal nature of digital tourism communication, where meaning is constructed through the interaction of textual, visual, and interactive elements.

From a multimodal perspective, the research examines:

- discourse design: how verbal and non-verbal elements (images, layout, icons, color schemes, hashtags) combine to communicate messages;
- information types: the kind of information conveyed and the communicative function it fulfills;
- linguistic features: including register variation, the use of Anglicisms, and terminology issues particularly within the context of Language for Specific Purposes (LSP) in tourism.

A key focus of this research is the growing influence of SVPs, particularly TikTok and Instagram, in shaping contemporary tourism discourse. These platforms have introduced new communicative practices in which users, often acting as content creators, blend entertainment with information in highly engaging, multimodal formats. Using a critical social semiotics perspective (Halliday, 2004; Kress and van Leeuwen, 2006; Kress, 2010), this study explores the socio-linguistic implications of tourism discourse in the online environment, focusing how meaning is made and negotiated through SVPs, and how language choices reflect particular social changes and address specific demographics. In doing so, the analysis includes:

- production and consumption dynamics: what kinds of users are imagined by the platforms and by specific content? How do the pages or profiles construct a relationship with their audiences?
- socio-cultural practices: what types of social and cultural models are represented? Who is attracted by these models, and what are the implications in terms of language, culture, and ideology?

The present study adopts an integrated theoretical and methodological framework aimed to understand how tourists' expectations and inclinations are shaped by digital platforms, how online content, including videos, images, and reviews, cultivates anticipatory experiences and emotional expectations prior to physical travel, and how perceived usefulness of these platforms influence user engagement with tourism content.

Methodologically, the study employs a qualitative, multimodal approach grounded in critical discourse analysis (Fairclough, 2003) and social semiotics (Kress & van Leeuwen, 2006; Halliday, 2004). This allows for the examination of how meaning is constructed and negotiated across textual, visual, and interactive elements on platforms such as TikTok, Instagram, Tripadvisor, and GetYourGuide. The research adopts a qualitative approach involving close

analysis of words, images, videos, and other multimodal elements to uncover how meaning is constructed and interpreted. By integrating linguistic and visual analysis, the study identifies key features of tourism discourse on social media exploring how these contribute to the effectiveness of the promotional message. From a social semiotics perspective, it aims to demonstrate how platforms like Instagram and TikTok do not merely reflect travel trends but actively participate in shaping travel practices, ideologies, and consumer behaviors.

By comparing websites and short-video platforms such as TikTok and Instagram, alongside established tourism platforms such as Tripadvisor and GetYourGuide, this research moves beyond evaluating promotional effectiveness to examine how multimodal resources shape tourists' expectations, construct destination imaginaries, and negotiate relationships between platforms and audiences. In doing so, it contributes to a more comprehensive understanding of contemporary tourism discourse as a complex multimodal, socio-cultural, and ideological practice in the digital age.

3. A Multimodal Lens on Tourism Promotional Discourse on the Web

Tourism discourse encompasses both professional and promotional forms of communication, each serving distinct but often overlapping functions.

Tourism promotional discourse goes beyond simple description or service provision, merging factual information with appealing elements to persuade and influence potential tourists by constructing attractive and idealized representations of destinations. It is characterized by a hybrid use of language that blends informative, affective, and persuasive elements (Dann, 1996; Maci et al, 2018.). This hybrid discourse combines informative, emotional, and promotional functions, reflecting both the commercial and symbolic dimensions of tourism (Francesconi, 2014). The persuasive effect of tourism promotion is closely linked to the rhetorical organization of tourism advertisements that, through the strategic sequencing of information guides readers from initial attraction to a final decision or action (see Maci. 2020).

Brochures, along with travel guides, itineraries, and leaflets, have been widely used as key tools in the tourism industry. These materials assist travelers in choosing destinations, learning about local culture, traditions, food, geography, and attractions. However, with the rise of digital technology, printed brochures have increasingly been replaced by digital resources, particularly among younger audiences. Websites and social media platforms now offer dynamic, easily accessible information that supports every stage of the tourist's decision-making process.

This section investigates the extent to which tourism discourse has evolved in response to new forms of digital communication. Tourism promotional discourse online will be analyzed through a multimodal lens, exploring how meaning-making practices have shifted away from the static, monolingual formats of printed brochures and maps to the digital and interactive one. This paves the way for exploring how these changes significantly influence the perception, discussion, and overall experience of tourists and destinations.

3.1 *Tourism Discourse on Websites*

In recent years, the rise of online travel platforms has transformed the way tourism discourse is produced, consumed, and experienced. Websites such as TripAdvisor and GetYourGuide exemplify how digital spaces reshape the traditional roles of travel agencies by offering platforms that are not only rich in information but also strategically designed to influence perceptions and behaviors through multimodal discourse.

Unlike traditional travel brochures or guidebooks, modern tourism websites facilitate interactive, personalized, and visually immersive engagement with destinations. This shift reflects a broader transition from static, text-heavy promotion to multimodal, participatory discourse. Online resources combine text, image, sound, video, even in the form of user-generated content, thereby creating an online space where travel is both imagined and planned before it physically occurs.

This section examines two popular websites, namely TripAdvisor and GetYourGuide (GYG), focusing on their structure, content, and communicative strategies. The study was conducted by browsing different cities and countries to investigate how information and design are combined across these platforms.

3.1.1 TripAdvisor

TripAdvisor operates primarily as a consultative and informational platform, functioning like a digital travel agency where users can get information about destinations, read reviews, and explore recommendations. However, unlike traditional travel agencies, it does not directly organize trips (e.g., booking tickets or tours); its strength lies in the collection of user-generated content, the structured thematic arrangement of information and the intuitive and user-friendly interface that facilitates navigation. The platform reaches a substantial audience, with an estimated 97.7 million total visits in January 2026, reflecting its global influence. From a business perspective, TripAdvisor generated \$1.891 billion in revenue in FY 2025, up from \$1.835 billion in FY 2024, underscoring its continued economic significance in the digital tourism sector. (Note 1)

Each destination page (e.g., *Wales: All You Need to Know Before You Go*) is divided into clearly defined sections which are ‘hotels’, ‘things to do’, ‘restaurants’, ‘flights’, ‘holiday rentals’, ‘cruises’, ‘car hire’ and ‘forums’.

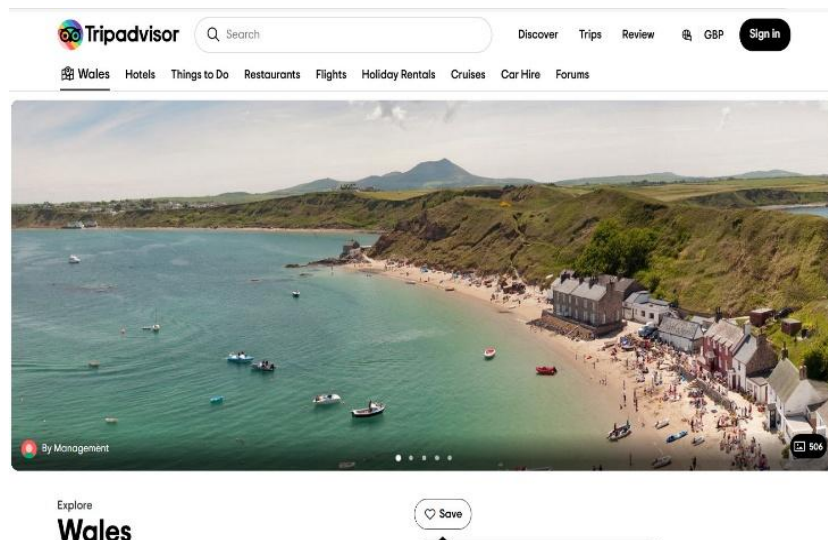


Figure 1. Wales: All You Need to Know Before You Go (2025) - Tripadvisor, last accessed 10.08.2025

In addition to this practical organization in sections, the website provides further subsections that allow users to navigate tourism content thematically or practically, based on their interests or demographic (e.g., families, young travelers, groups). Users may filter content based on specific needs, preferences, or travel intentions.

Browse collections

Get ideas on what to do, see, and eat



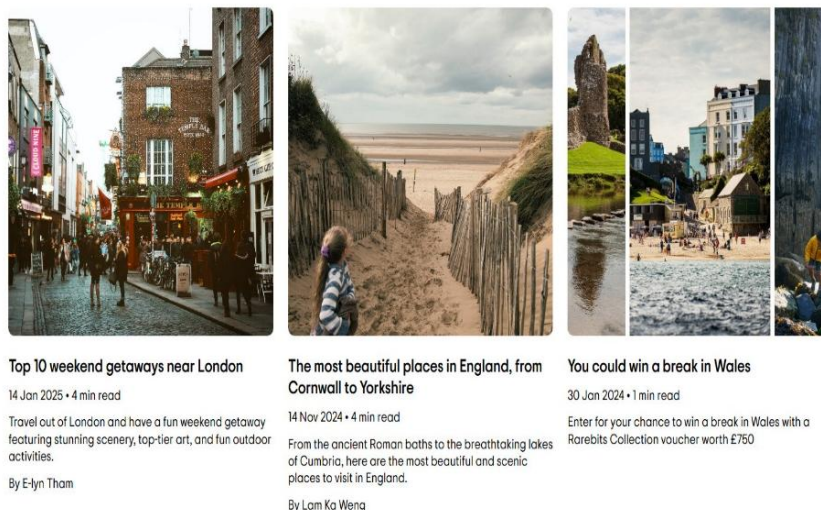
Figure 2. TripAdvisor Wales subcategories: family, nightlife, gems, travelers' choice, Wales: All You Need to Know Before You Go (2025) - Tripadvisor, last accessed 10.08.2025

Such segmentation reflects an effort to personalize the browsing experience, presenting travel not as a universal concept but as something that can be tailored to individual identities and consumption patterns.

An additional layer of engagement is offered through the inclusion of 'related stories', which add a narrative dimension to the platform's discourse. These short articles and

recommendations serve not only to inform but also to immerse users in a narrative-driven version of the destination, aligning with the idea of tourism as a form of storytelling and cultural imagination. This narrative framing positions the user not merely as a consumer of services, but as a potential protagonist in a journey that is already partially scripted through text and image.

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Figure 3. TripAdvisor Wales related stories, Wales: All You Need to Know Before You Go (2025) - Tripadvisor, last accessed 11.08.2025

Although TripAdvisor is not primarily designed to organize activities in a practical sense, it facilitates travel planning integrating e-commerce functionalities into the user experience to optimize the planning process.

For example, looking for Wales can be redirected to other pages and websites to:

- find a flight, checking availability, comparing prices and eventually booking;
- book holiday rentals, including short- and long-term accommodations such as apartments;
- look for cruise options (e.g. multi-day, all-inclusive travel experiences).

These services are embedded within the site's broader tourism discourse, maintaining the same visual and textual design; however, here the purpose shifts from simply informing to facilitating transactions, highlighting TripAdvisor's role as an intermediary platform within the larger digital tourism economy.

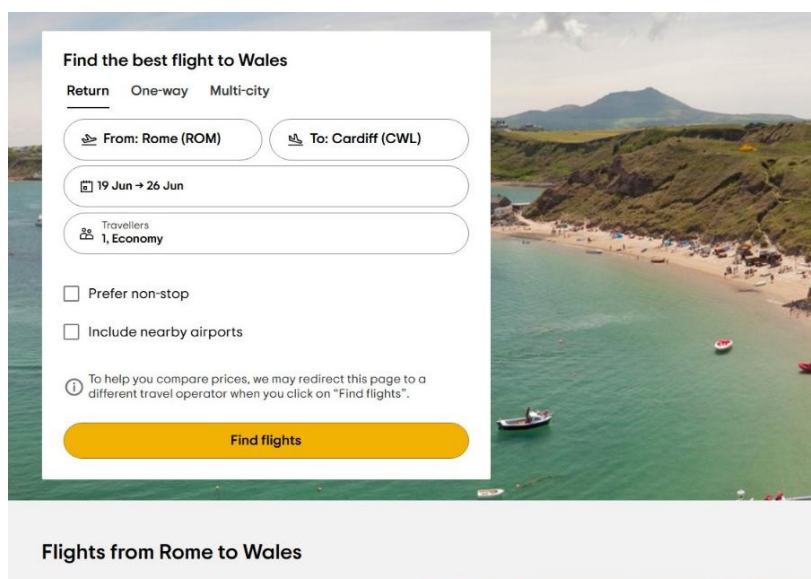


Figure 4. Tripadvisor, Wales flights, £81 Cheap Flights to Wales 2025 - Tripadvisor last accessed 9.10.2025

Finally, customer reviews add a layer of credibility and practical advice that can affirm or challenge the promotional narrative. Reviews often highlight real-world tips, potential drawbacks, or insights that official descriptions omit, thereby influencing how future travelers interpret the destination.

From a design perspective, TripAdvisor employs a highly structured and multimodal interface that integrates multiple semiotic resources: still images, brief textual overviews, maps, and symbols. Despite offering content in multiple languages and covering diverse global destinations, TripAdvisor maintains a uniform layout and interface design across the site ensuring website's consistency and user-friendliness. Destinations, regardless of their uniqueness or sociocultural context, are visually and structurally presented in similar ways, through comparable typographic layouts, menu structures, and visual hierarchies.

The visual content, primarily static images of landscapes, accommodations, food, and landmarks, plays a central role in constructing and representing the destination. These images not only depict the place but also suggest how it should be felt, consumed, and remembered. They rarely portray problematic aspects of travel, instead curating an idealized and aestheticized version of reality and transforming destinations into experiences that are ready for consumption.

In sum, TripAdvisor's discourse mediates the travel experience before it begins. Through structured information, narrative framing, and curated design, the platform enables users to imagine, assess, and even emotionally invest in a destination prior to arrival.

3.1.2 GetYourGuide

In contrast to platforms primarily oriented toward information-sharing such as TripAdvisor, GetYourGuide (GYG) is oriented toward the practical organization of travel. GetYourGuide, which recorded around 36.92 million visits in February 2026, (Note 2) is a German-based

online marketplace which operates not merely as a digital guide but as a fully integrated marketplace where tourism experiences are not only presented but directly purchased, integrating browsing and booking functionalities. Users are not redirected to external providers but can complete the entire decision-making and purchasing process within a single interface. This creates a highly controlled digital environment in which visibility and accessibility are not neutral but strategically organized. This dual function significantly reshapes the role of the platform within contemporary tourism ecosystems. Rather than simply mediating access to information, GYG actively structures the conditions under which experiences are discovered, evaluated, and consumed. In this sense, it functions simultaneously as a guide, a curator, and a commercial intermediary. GetYourGuide has significantly reshaped how travelers organize their trips by functioning as a comprehensive platform for booking travel activities. Unlike traditional travel agencies, which often require physical presence or direct interaction, GYG operates fully online, providing tourists with the possibility of purchasing tickets and scheduling activities well in advance. In this sense GYG serves not only as an information source but as a practical organizing tool.

GetYourGuide offers an integrated purchasing experience allowing users to plan their itinerary in advance. Tourists can explore a wide array of activities and attractions, ranging from cultural tours to adventurous excursions, and reserve their tickets directly on the site. This feature simplifies the travel planning process by consolidating choices and transactions within a single, user-friendly site.

A notable aspect of GetYourGuide is its user-friendly design, offering customizable options like language and currency to suit different user needs. A consistent layout across all destinations and languages also helps users navigate easily and feel familiar with the site, regardless of where they are going.

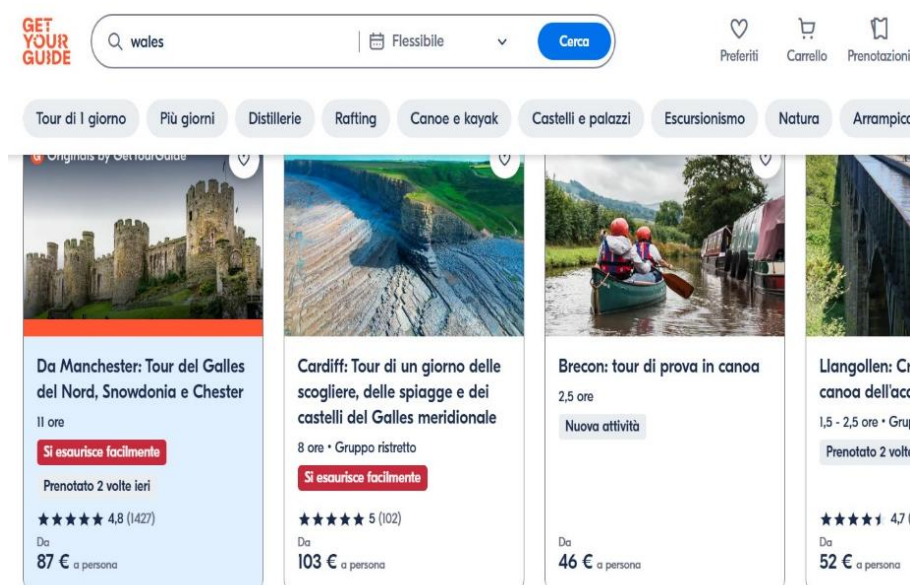


Figure 5. GYG Wales activities, Prenota tour, escursioni e attività online | GetYourGuide, last accessed 09.10.2025

GetYourGuide's activities vary in duration and scope, ranging from short, few-hour activities to full-day excursions and multi-day trips. This diversity caters to different travel styles needs, enabling users to customize their itineraries according to their available time and interests. Additionally, the platform often suggests related attractions, encouraging further exploration and extending the traveler's engagement with the destination.

When a traveler selects an activity, the platform provides comprehensive information crucial for decision-making. This includes detailed descriptions of the activity itself, the itinerary, meeting points, pricing, availability by date, and practical details such as what to bring and what is included in the experience. By delivering such thorough content, GYG functions as a digital concierge, equipping users with the knowledge necessary to make informed choices tailored to their preferences and schedules.

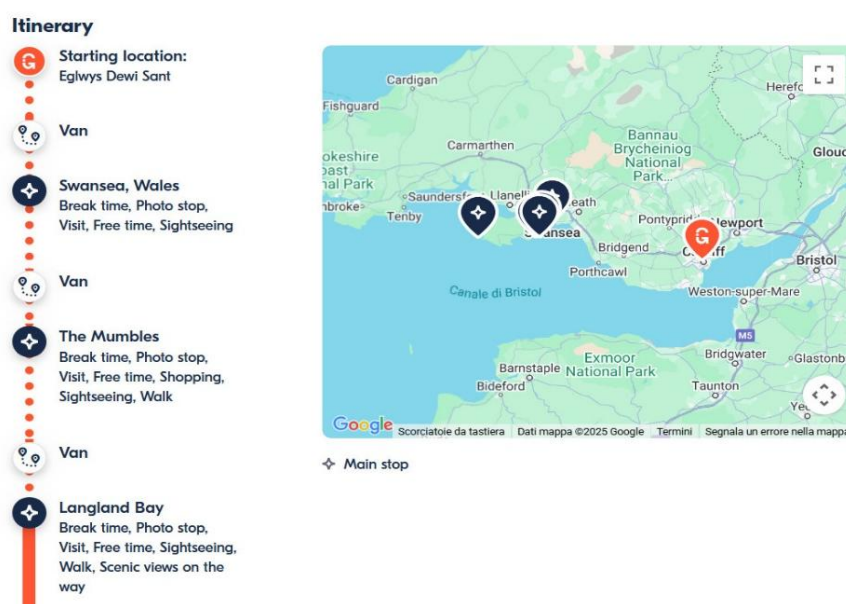


Figure 6. GYG – Wales itineraries, From Cardiff: Golden Gower Coast, Swansea & Mumbles Day Tour | GetYourGuide, last accessed 09.10.2025

The platform's incorporation of user reviews and ratings provides authentic accounts of activities. Similarly to TripAdvisor, this peer-generated content complements the promotional discourse of the platform, creating a dialogic space where official descriptions and customer voices intersect, fostering trust and ultimately enriching the decision-making process.

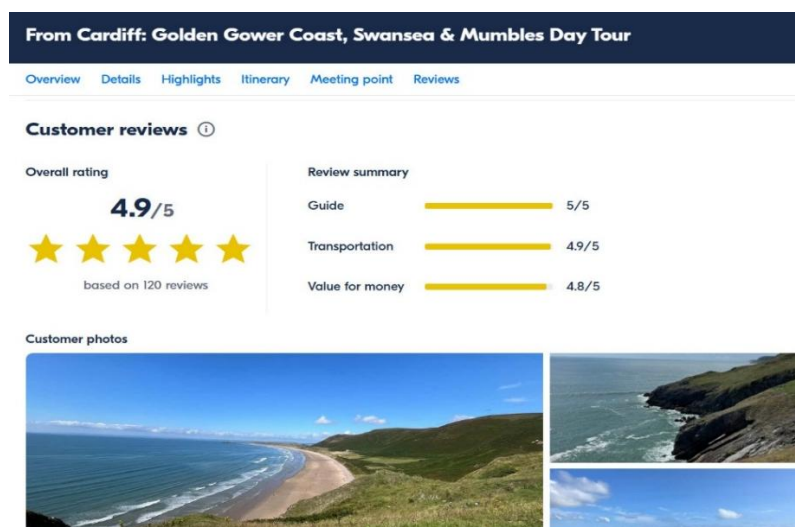


Figure 7. GYG Wales customer reviews, From Cardiff: Golden Gower Coast, Swansea & Mumbles Day Tour | GetYourGuide, last accessed 09.10.2025

From a multimodal perspective, GetYourGuide shares similarities with platforms like TripAdvisor in its use of still images and verbally given information. The strategic use of colors, lighting, and layout acts as a semiotic resource, guiding users' emotional and cognitive responses. Such design choices are not merely aesthetic but contribute to constructing an attractive narrative around the destination and its experiences. Moreover, the platform's user interface emphasizes clarity, simplicity, and user-friendliness, with easy navigation and logical sequencing of information that facilitate the overall user experience. With its multimodal design, integration of user-generated content, and practical planning tools, GYG not only mediates the way tourists' access and interpret information but actively shapes the process by which they construct and enact their travel experiences.

In terms of content, the platform curates a wide range of activities, yet the prominence of specific experiences is shaped by internal logics that systematically privilege certain activities or experiences over others, resulting in promotional bias that works through several mechanisms. First, algorithmic systems rank and prioritize activities, often favoring those with higher engagement, better reviews, or stronger commercial partnerships. Second, in terms of visibility, certain experiences are foregrounded through featured placements, labels such as "top-rated" or "Top 10", and visually appealing imagery that captures users' attention. Third, the platform employs persuasive and affective language, framing activities as "unique", "authentic", or "must-do", thereby shaping users' perceptions of value and desirability.

Nevertheless, GetYourGuide provides detailed guidance regarding participation, explicitly indicating who an activity is suitable for and, in some cases, who may be excluded. Information such as age restrictions, physical requirements, accessibility limitations, or suitability for specific audiences (e.g., families, couples, or adventure seekers) contributes to framing experiences in targeted ways. While this may enhance usability and clarity, it also reinforces selective positioning, aligning activities with predefined consumer profiles and further structuring user choices.

These dynamics have significant market implications. By controlling both the visibility and accessibility of tourism offerings, GetYourGuide plays an active role in shaping competition among providers. Experiences that benefit from higher ranking and enhanced visibility are more likely to attract bookings, thereby consolidating their market position. Conversely, less visible or less optimized offerings risk marginalization, regardless of their intrinsic quality. This creates a feedback loop in which success on the platform becomes self-reinforcing. At the same time, the platform contributes to the broader commodification of tourism. Experiences and places are standardized, categorized, and presented as comparable products, often reduced to key attributes such as duration, price, and ratings. This makes it easier for users to choose activities, but it also turns real-world experiences into standardized products designed for online display and purchase. In this way, GetYourGuide shows how digital platforms do more than connect buyers and sellers, they actively shape the market, decide which places and activities gain value, influence how places are experienced, and influence how tourism is produced and consumed.

However, even with promotional bias and the standardization of experiences, users commonly experience a sense of agency in planning their travels. The cooperation of different digital services, such as websites like GYG, car rental websites, and accommodation booking platforms reflects the increasing digitization and personalization of tourism, where travelers exercise greater control over their itineraries and experiences. The transformation from printed brochures to interactive websites marks a significant shift in tourism discourse. Platforms like TripAdvisor and GetYourGuide show how tourism communication has become multimodal, participatory, and digital. Both platforms rely on user-generated content, visual storytelling, and strategic design to engage users emotionally and rationally. However, while TripAdvisor functions as a consultative, community-based resource, GetYourGuide offers practical tools for trip organization and immediate action.

3.2 Tourism Discourse on Social Media: Instagram and TikTok as Digital Travel Guides

In the contemporary digital tourism landscape, social media platforms such as Instagram and TikTok have emerged as powerful, informal tools for travelers. While platforms like GetYourGuide (GYG) and TripAdvisor offer structured, often static content focused on bookings, itineraries, and reviews, Instagram and TikTok present tourism through dynamic, user-generated narratives. The content on these platforms serves a distinct purpose: it inspires and informs rather than directly organizing travel, shaping tourists' perceptions, expectations, and choices.

Unlike TripAdvisor or GYG, where content is typically composed of still images, short descriptions, and booking options, TikTok is grounded in audiovisual storytelling, introducing short-form videos enriched by sound, music, text overlays, and dynamic images. Such a shift has a direct semiotic impact: it enables a multisensory and immersive engagement with a destination.

When a user searches for a destination like Wales on TikTok, the platform generates a feed of diverse video content based on algorithmic relevance. This includes travel vlogs, short guides, road trip itineraries, and tour operator promotions. These videos offer potential tourists a

variety of visual perspectives, often layered with narrative voiceovers, subtitles, trending music, or humorous commentary which resonate with younger, digitally native audiences.

Under the *Top* category, content on TikTok is sorted by publication date and engagement, typically highlighting seasonal attractions, short trips, or so-called “hidden gems.” Posts might include:

- “7 Places to Visit in Wales This Summer” – a quick, visually rich highlight reel.
- “3 Days in Wales” – a promotional video by a tour operator, showcasing an itinerary.
- “Road Trips Through Snowdonia” – an immersive, first-person view from a car window.

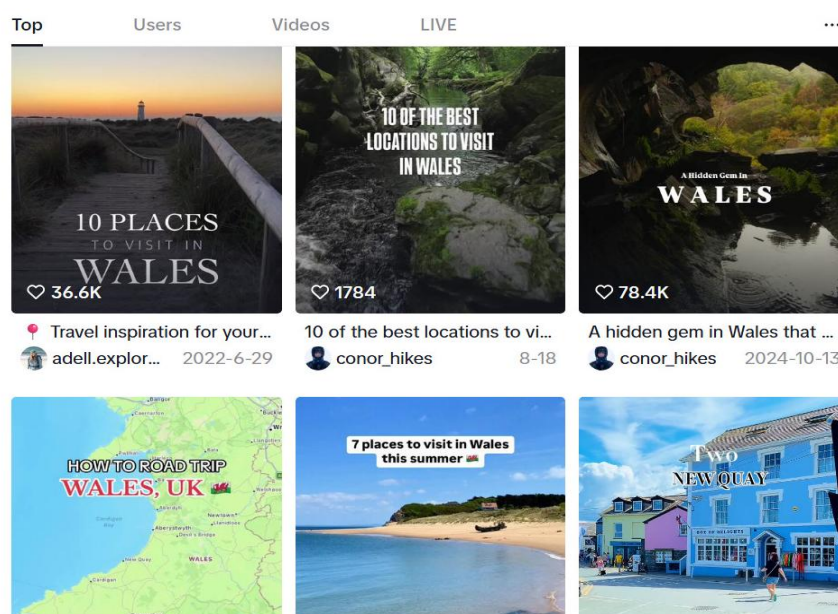


Figure 8. TikTok posts based on personal algorithm, last accessed 10.10.2025

Other categories such as *Users* provide access to creators’ profiles, many of whom are travel influencers, local experts, or official pages like football teams’ profiles, and tourism organizations. Bios, links, follower counts, and engagement metrics of these profiles often help users assess credibility and authority in an environment saturated with content. Engagement (likes, comments, shares) becomes a metric of trustworthiness, indirectly substituting for the more formal systems of reviews found on sites like TripAdvisor.

Under the *Videos* section, users encounter a broader array of content not necessarily organized by popularity or date. Here, one might find language tutorials, insights into local customs, reviews of accommodations, or videos on cultural differences. This type of content reveals the interlinguistic and intercultural nature of social media travel discourse: multiple voices, perspectives, and discourses co-exist, offering a more democratic and participatory approach to tourism representation.

Similarly to TikTok, Instagram has evolved into a powerful tool for travel inspiration, functioning as a dynamic visual platform that informs, entertains, and emotionally engages prospective travelers. Although it shares some functional overlap with TikTok (e.g., Reels, Stories), Instagram's interface is still rooted in static images and pictures, often accompanied by captions, hashtags, and geotags.

Instagram's role as a digital travel guide lies in its ability to communicate aspirational experiences through carefully constructed imagery. These images, enhanced through filters and editing tools, not only inform but also seduce. Travel influencers and independent travelers use Instagram to show aestheticized representations of place, which often function as visual endorsements. Instagram thus plays a central role in constructing the idea of destination, contributing to a performative aspect of travel, where destinations are consumed through social approval and digital storytelling.

Looking for “*Wales*” on Instagram shows content under the two categories “For You” and Reels, including a variety of tourism-related posts. These include:

“Amazing things to do in Wales”

“Road trips through Snowdonia”

“Best of Wales” compilations

Short itineraries promoted by tour operators

Highlight reels of top attractions, hidden gems, or seasonal recommendations



Figure 9. Instagram posts based on personal algorithm, last accessed 10.10.2025

Despite Instagram can be primarily identified as a photo-sharing platform, the dominance of video content in travel posts reflects an ongoing shift towards audiovisual storytelling as the preferred discourse for destination promotion. Creators, both amateur and professional, often use music, trending audio, and visual effects to enhance their posts, creating immersive previews of the travel experience.

From a design and communication standpoint, Instagram is inherently multimodal. Travel-related posts make strategic use of various semiotic resources to convey meaning and shape perception, including:

- still images of landscapes, landmarks, food, or accommodations;
- dynamic videos (Reels and Stories) showcasing itineraries and local experiences;
- music and soundscapes, used to evoke mood or highlight cultural atmosphere;
- text overlays and captions that provide information, context, or humour;
- emojis, hashtags, and geotags that make posts reach broader digital tourism networks.

This combination of semiotic systems creates a layered communicative experience, where affective appeal and informative content work in tandem. Posts are designed to be shared, saved, or bookmarked, reinforcing the platform's role as an interactive and consultative travel guide.

A defining feature of TikTok and Instagram is the algorithmic personalization of content. Based on users' behaviors, such as who they follow, what they like, how they comment or save posts, Instagram suggests additional accounts, posts, and stories through the Explore page, Reels, or sponsored content in users' feeds. On the other hand, TikTok has a more direct approach, with users directly exposed to new content even without following specific accounts. Algorithmic personalization means that the more a user interacts with tourism-related content, the more such content will be recommended. This triggers a mechanism where users are gradually immersed in a sequence of travel content based on their previous engagements.

This algorithm-driven experience differs significantly from the linear presentation of content on conventional websites. On social media, tourism discourse becomes non-linear, targeted and personalized, guided by user behavior rather than the platform's fixed structure.

Individualized travel feeds may vary significantly from user to user. However, despite differences in content, the format of posts tends to follow familiar templates that combine visual and audio elements like high-resolution visuals, fast cuts in videos, and upbeat music. This contributes to a visual homogeneity, where even culturally diverse destinations are filtered through similar modes of presentation.

Instagram and TikTok function as dynamic, participatory travel guides, where tourism businesses accounts and individual users all contribute to shaping the destination's online narrative. This collaborative model fosters a multiplicity of voices, combining polished promotional content with spontaneous, behind-the-scenes perspectives that resonate with authenticity, relatability, and emotional engagement.

Through multimodal storytelling, algorithmic personalization, and peer-to-peer knowledge sharing, social media blur the boundaries between marketing, storytelling, and social interaction

It is important to recognize that Instagram and TikTok are not primarily designed for tourism; users may find tourism-related content among a broad spectrum of other user-generated material. Nonetheless, compared to still images, the dynamic nature of videos offers potential tourists a more immersive way to grasp the characteristics of a destination, providing a broader perspective than a single photograph can convey. Through these platforms users engage in a kind of digital pre-experience, where watching, reading, and imagining become integral parts of the travel process itself. This blurs the line between traditional tourism and digital tourism, offering a digital pre-experience that suggests that the journey begins long before physical departure.

4. A Linguistic Perspective

The language of tourism has been classified as a specialized language by many scholars (Gotti, 2006; Nigro, 2006; Francesconi, 2014) consistent with Sager's (1990: 105) definition of special languages as "semiotic systems based on and derived from the general language." Despite its professional scope, tourism terminology remains under-researched, due in part to the field's interdisciplinary and fluid nature (Carrió-Pastor & Candel-Mora, 2017). As Agorni (2012) observes, tourism lacks a fully autonomous terminological system. Despite the variety of domains and activities involved in this field, tourism language has been defined as a type of specialized discourse, especially in its professional dimension.

Tourism discourse occupies a unique space within specialized languages, sharing features with professional communication, such as terminological precision, thematic coherence, and pragmatic clarity, while also embracing emotional appeal and aesthetic stylization. As Maurizio Gotti points out, tourism language caters to a dual audience: professionals in the industry and consumers. Professional communication (e.g. contracts) is intended for specialists and often include technical terms and industry-specific language. Promotional communication (e.g. brochures) is designed to reach a wide audience being characterized by clear, engaging language and avoidance of technical jargon to make the information easily understandable (Gotti, 2006). This duality contributes to a hybrid textual identity, where specialized terminology coexists with a less specialized language in promotional sphere. While promotional materials aim to persuade and attract, professional texts establish precision and high terminological specificity, frequently using institutional names, acronyms, and technical expressions related to policy, logistics, and service provision. Tourism terminology, however, encompasses the diverse components of the sector, including types of tourism (e.g., ecotourism, heritage tourism), accommodation and transportation options, tourist activities (e.g., guided tours, excursions), professional roles and organizations (e.g., tour operators, DMCs), institutional terminology (e.g., reservation systems, cancellation policies).

In promotional discourse, a prominent rhetorical strategy is the extensive use of evaluative language. Destinations are rarely described in neutral terms but are framed using superlatives, intensifiers, and emotionally charged adjectives (e.g., "unmissable," "exclusive," "breathtaking") which function to guide readers' emotional alignment with the destination. Moreover, words such as "tranquility," "authenticity," or "escape" depict abstract experiences,

detaching them from immediate physical reality and reinforcing emotionally evocative imagery.

Tourism promotional discourse frequently adopts direct engagement strategies, employing the second-person pronoun (“you”), imperatives (“Discover,” “Relax”), and modal verbs (“You can explore...”). These elements create a sense of simulated interaction, a dialogue between the text and the reader, that enhances personalization and immediacy, making promotional texts feel more intimate and persuasive. (Note 3)

The ongoing digital transformation of tourism has significantly influenced its language use, especially in online and promotional contexts. The emergence of new terminology and hybrid communication patterns often blends general language with terms borrowed from domains such as business, technology, and lifestyle. These hybrid forms reflect the interdisciplinary nature of tourism communication and the evolving linguistic practices shaped by digital media.

Tourism texts have adapted quickly to new media, from printed advertisements to today’s multimodal online environments, such as travel blogs, influencer posts, and user reviews. On social media platforms and websites multimodality influences the textual economy of tourism language. For instance, a caption beneath an image may summarize and amplify emotional content more effectively than a paragraph. Text is deliberately kept concise yet evocative, aligning with the broader aim of enhancing visual impact.

Social media platforms, particularly short video formats like TikTok and Instagram Reels, have introduced performative modes of communication that shape tourist expectations and influence travel intentions (see Liu et al., 2024). Influencers often adopt a persuasive and emotionally evocative style, relying heavily on visual-verbal cues and catchphrases that create affective connections with audiences. Their discourse tends to prioritize symbolic appeal over referential accuracy, fostering desire and emotional anticipation.

4.1 Tourism Terminology on the Web: Some Examples

An analysis of the different types of resources explored so far reveals how contemporary tourism communication online is shaped by specific linguistic and stylistic choices. These choices are made to suit the nature of the platform, the purpose of the communication, and the target audience. As a result, tourists today are exposed to a wide variety of tourism-related terminology, often without even realizing it. The language of tourism online is varied and deeply intertwined with both persuasive storytelling and practical information.

Promotional and persuasive language is especially common in activities descriptions online, influencer content, and social media posts. It is designed to attract attention and create emotional appeal, often using powerful adjectives and imperative verbs. Expressions such as: “discover hidden gems”, “experience the magic”, “unforgettable adventures”, and “breathtaking views” are typical of this style that aims to attract potential tourists. This category reflects the core of tourism promotional discourse: emotive language, vivid imagery, and action-oriented vocabulary (e.g., *travel, tour, explore, discover*).

On booking platforms and travel websites, the language becomes more functional. The focus shifts from inspiration to information, providing users with the essential details needed to organize a trip. Common terms include ‘reservation’, ‘payment methods’, ‘cancellation policy’, ‘guided tour’. These terms are part of the organizational and transactional vocabulary of tourism, used to ensure clarity and reliability in service delivery.

When presenting day plans, travel schedules, or group tours, more structured language appears. These terms are aimed at helping users visualize or follow the flow of a trip, such as ‘starting location’, ‘break time’, ‘photo stop’, ‘sightseeing’. This terminology helps map out the tourist experience in a clear and time-bound manner, often forming part of a detailed itinerary.

Certain platforms, like GetYourGuide, combine both promotional and technical elements in their descriptions. Inviting descriptions like “Enjoy a sunset cruise with local wine tasting” are given alongside necessary logistical and technical details such as “Admission fee included; pick-up and drop-off provided; optional gratuities”.

The function and style of tourism language also shift depending on the platform. On social media platforms like TikTok and Instagram, content is highly visual, fast-paced, and emotionally charged. These platforms prioritize storytelling, aesthetics, and personal expression. As a result, language here includes less terminology units and tends to be performative, and often vague, aimed more at creating mood and desire than conveying concrete facts.

On professional websites, such as GetYourGuide, the language is typically more standardized and informative. These sites still use persuasive language, but this is paired with clear terminology related to bookings, pricing, access, and service options.

As these examples show, tourism terminology is not static; it is adapted to serve different functions, depending on platform, purpose, and audience. Whether encouraging wanderlust through a TikTok video or providing booking details on a tour website, language remains a core element of how destinations are imagined, promoted, and experienced.

5. Discussion

A critical social semiotics perspective allowed us to examine how meaning is produced and interpreted across these various communication systems. It emphasizes the role of context, including the identities, cultures, and expectations of users, in shaping meaning. Communication modes, whether verbal, visual, or gestural, are embedded in broader social structures and cultural practices. To understand the social and cultural functions of tourism discourse, it is necessary to analyze how social circumstances systematically shape language (Halliday, 2004).

Content shared on social media platforms can be considered a modern form of word-of-mouth (WOM) communication. WOM is typically defined in marketing literature as “informal communications directed at other consumers about the ownership, usage, or characteristics of particular goods and services and/or their sellers” (Westbrook, 1987, p. 261). (Note 4) Having great relevance on social media, WOM in the tourism field is characterized by peer-to-peer

communication with the intention of sharing knowledge or persuading prospective travelers. In this context, positive emotional reactions correlate strongly with the intention to share. Emotional resonance is thus a crucial element in content virality and in influencing consumer behavior (Botha & Reyneke, 2013) (Note 5).

The digital tourism space engages a broad spectrum of users: from casual holidaymakers to digital nomads and travel professionals. These users are no longer passive recipients of promotional content; rather, they are active participants in shaping tourism discourse. User-generated content (UGC) plays a pivotal role in influencing travel decisions. Today's consumers are increasingly influenced by peer reviews and influencer content, which set expectations and inspire desire. Especially among younger generations, social media has become a trusted source for planning trips and activities, with perceived reliability of content playing a key role in decision-making.

Influencers occupy a central and highly influential role within digital tourism promotion. Their performative, highly stylized content contributes to the construction of idealized travel narratives. These narratives serve not just to depict places, but to frame how destinations are perceived, emotionally experienced, and socially valued. Influencers become cultural intermediaries, shaping how travel is imagined and consumed in the digital age. As a result, users often make their own travel choices, from destinations to activities, accommodations, and even modes of transportation, based on what they see in their social media feeds. Influencers amplify the customization process according to their field of interest. Some of them specialize in budget travel, others in luxury getaways, family-friendly destinations, or off-the-beaten-path adventures. Users can now tailor their travel experiences to match their personal interests, be it eco-tourism, cultural immersion, or adventure travel, often aided by algorithmic recommendations and targeted content. This notion of a "personalized feed" replicates the function once performed by traditional travel agents, offering experiences aligned with users' individual values, identities, and desires. However, unlike travel agents, influencers provide an ongoing, visualized, and emotionally resonant stream of content that operates in real time and in peer-driven contexts. Influencer-driven content often reflects a form of promotional bias, emphasizing particular experiences, activities, or destinations while marginalizing others, and sometimes specifying who the content is aimed at, for example, luxury travelers, budget tourists, or adventure seekers.

Furthermore, the integration of interactive elements, such as polls, Q&As, geotags, swipe-up links, and comment threads, fosters a sense of interpersonal connection and community engagement. Tourism texts are inherently multifunctional, they inform, entice, legitimize, and normalize particular representations of places, experiences, and cultural practices. Rather than being neutral, these texts are embedded with cultural values and ideological assumptions, making them powerful tools of social influence. Language in this context is not merely a vehicle for conveying information; it acts as a semiotic instrument capable of shaping perceptions and guiding the rationale behind those perceptions. Online content often reflects a form of promotional bias, emphasizing certain experiences, activities, or destinations while marginalizing others, and sometimes specifying who the content is aimed at, for example, luxury travelers, budget tourists, or adventure seekers. Language in this context is not merely a

vehicle for conveying information; it acts as a semiotic instrument capable of shaping perceptions and guiding the rationale behind those perceptions. Tourism discourse, therefore, plays a crucial role in how destinations are imagined, understood, and evaluated by potential travelers. (Note 6)

6. Conclusions

Platforms such as GetYourGuide, Booking.com, TripAdvisor, and social media apps like Instagram, TikTok, and YouTube have significantly transformed how people engage with tourism. Users can now compare, evaluate, and book activities and accommodations without intermediaries, contributing to a broader trend of self-organized travel. This shift reflects both technological empowerment and changing consumer behavior, as travelers increasingly seek autonomy, personalization, and digital convenience, favoring platforms that provide immediate access to user-generated insights and customizable options. At the same time, it is important to recognize that these platforms actively shape the market by deciding which experiences gain visibility and value, influencing the distribution of attention, economic opportunities, and the overall structuring of tourism supply. Through the combination of promotional bias, algorithmic curation, and diversified product communication, digital platforms not only facilitate travel planning but also guide consumer preferences, reinforce the platform economy, and mediate both supply and demand in contemporary tourism.

Social media platforms are increasingly seen as more trustworthy than traditional marketing sources, largely due to their participatory nature. The real-time sharing of content—photos, videos, reviews, itineraries—by everyday users contributes to a form of peer-based credibility. Travelers often perceive these shared experiences as more authentic than institutional or commercial promotions. This democratization of knowledge has reshaped the dynamics of trust in tourism discourse; users not only consume content but also contribute to a shared body of experiential knowledge. Platforms like Instagram foster interactive communities, where users exchange tips, answer questions, and post useful links.

While social media algorithms do filter content, they usually prioritize engagement (what the user likes or interacts with) rather than commercial priorities. This means the bias is more toward user interest rather than pushing specific paid products or services. Moreover, the continuous exposure to user-generated content makes modern tourists more informed, selective, and confident in their travel choices. Their understanding of cultural contexts, logistical planning, and destination-specific nuances often exceeds what is typically provided by traditional travel agencies or promotional materials. This is particularly evident in self-organized travel, which is especially common for domestic or international trips that do not demand in-depth cultural knowledge or complex logistical arrangements. However, peer-to-peer knowledge sharing carries both benefits and challenges. On one hand, it enables travelers to discover diverse, authentic, and niche experiences that may be overlooked by mainstream channels. On the other hand, the absence of formal regulation raises concerns not only about the accuracy of information but also about potential biases and the transparency of promotional content, particularly on official or commercial tourism pages.

This evolving landscape raises several questions that merit deeper academic investigation about the role of social media in travel learning and decision-making. To what extent do users rely on social media for educational and practical purposes related to tourism?

Another promising area is the construction of expertise in online communities. How is knowledge about destinations legitimized and circulated in these peer-to-peer networks? What linguistic or discursive strategies are used to establish authority in social media discussions on travel?

Given the hybrid and interdisciplinary nature of online tourism language, corpus-based research could examine terminology usage across platforms in different languages (e.g., English vs. Italian). This may highlight linguistic convergence or divergence, helping us understand whether digital tourism discourse is moving toward a more standardized or diversified form. Finally, the impact of social media exposure on emerging or less commercial destinations could be explored. Does increased visibility lead to sustainable tourism or over-tourism?

By addressing these questions, future research can offer critical insights into how digital technologies are reshaping not only the tourism industry but also the very way we think, speak, and act as travelers in a globally connected world.

The digitalization of tourism has not only redefined the way people plan and experience travel; it has also transformed the language, values, and power structures in tourism communication. By examining these transformations through socio-cultural and semiotic lenses, future research can provide meaningful insights into how digital technologies are reshaping what it means to travel, share, and connect in a globally networked world.

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Notes

Note 1. [TripAdvisor Statistics \(2026\): Traffic, Reviews, Revenue, Bookings & Key Facts](#) (last accessed 01.04.2026).

Note 2. [Getyourguide.com Website Traffic, Ranking, Analytics \[February 2026\]](#) (last access 01.04.2026)

Note 3. Francisca Suau-Jiménez, “Engagement of readers/customers in the discourse of e-tourism promotional genres”, in Carmen Sancho Guinda (ed. by), *Engagement in professional genres*, Amsterdam, John Benjamins Publishing Company 2019, pp. 341-358.

Note 4. In Kang J-A, Hong S, Hubbard GT. 2020.

Note 5. In Kang J-A, Hong S, Hubbard GT. 2020.

Note 6. See Maurizio Gotti, “The Language of Tourism as a Specialized Discourse”, in Palusci Oriana, Francesconi Sabrina (eds.), *Translating Tourism Linguistic / Cultural Representations*, Trento, Editrice Università degli Studi di Trento 2006, pp. 19.

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