Research Article RJ-44

Researches on Multidisciplinary Approaches 2026 (2) ISSN:2791-9099

Evaluating DMO Instagram Performance Metrics and Thematic User Feedback

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Abstract

While prior social media destination marketing research predominantly relies on surface-level quantitative metrics, frequently overlooking the qualitative richness of textual feedback, this study adopts a dialogic perspective to examine destination communication. The primary purpose of this research is to investigate the strategic adaptation of a regional destination marketing organization (Antalya Promotion Foundation) to the short-form video (Reels) format, and to systematically evaluate the resulting audience dialogue to uncover operational deficits. By analyzing 633 posts and 2,390 user comments published between 2023 and 2025, the study bridges the gap between institutional representational strategies and authentic user responses. Descriptive and thematic analyses reveal that Reels generated approximately 4.5 times more likes and three times more comments than static posts, highlighting a definitive structural shift in the organization's communication strategy. Although promotional content concentrated heavily on cultural heritage and natural landscapes, brief affective and civic posts elicited the highest overall engagement. Furthermore, textual analysis demonstrates that while user responses were overwhelmingly short and affect-driven, a critical minority of negative and interrogative comments yielded disproportionate managerial value. These longer-form responses exposed concrete communication gaps, such as missing geographic metadata, and highlighted real-world operational concerns regarding environmental degradation, over-development, and heritage neglect. Ultimately, this research offers a practical framework for destination communicators to extract actionable operational insights from short-form social media feedback.

Keywords: Destination Marketing Organization, Content Analysis, Thematic Analysis, Social Media Engagement.

JEL Codes: L83, M31, R58, Z33

Citation: Kılıçarslan, D. (2026). Evaluating DMO Instagram performance metrics and thematic user feedback. *Researches on Multidisciplinary Approaches (ROMAYA Journal)*, 2026(2).

Submission Date : 25.05.2026
Acceptance Date : 10.07.2026

1. Introduction

Tourism communication has shifted rapidly over the past five years. The platforms on which destination images circulate are no longer dominated by the static photograph or the long text post. Reels, the short vertical video format that Instagram aggressively prioritised from 2022 onwards, have become central to how attention circulates on the platform. Travellers increasingly use short video formats for trip inspiration in ways that resemble search behaviour rather than passive consumption (Han, Zhang, Xu, Law, & Zhang, 2022). Destination Marketing Organisations (DMOs) and destination promotion foundations have had to adapt to this turn. The peer reviewed literature consistently advises DMOs to balance institutional voice with user generated content, use platform native formats, and treat engagement as a participatory activity rather than a broadcast channel (Hays, Page, & Buhalis, 2013; Mariani, Di Felice, & Mura, 2016).

However, a persistent research gap remains regarding regional and provincial DMOs. While overarching national campaigns successfully deploy experience oriented visual narratives across global networks (Keleş, Ergün, & Taşpınar, 2024), provincial promotional accounts frequently suffer from unoptimized content structures and weak interaction rates (Çorman & Duman, 2025). Within the mechanics of digital engagement, while a simple like represents a low effort behavior, user comments signify a much deeper level of interactive commitment and qualitative feedback. Since Litvin, Goldsmith and Pan's (2008) influential characterisation of electronic word of mouth (eWOM) as a highly influential communication channel, tourism research has increasingly treated the comment thread as a vital space where users convert visual inspiration into trip planning requests and surface stakeholder concerns (Munar & Jacobsen, 2014). Despite their analytical importance, these comment streams on regional foundation feeds in the Reels era remain comparatively understudied, leaving a blind spot in our understanding of digital destination marketing.

Antalya provides a highly informative and critical case for exploring this dynamic. The province hosted a record 17.28 million visitors in 2024, a volume that places it among the leading Mediterranean coastal destinations globally (Tosun & Şimşek, 2025). At the same time, the region faces the exact environmental, infrastructural, and heritage management pressures documented in recent overtourism literature for the wider Mediterranean basin (Mihalic, 2020; Çelik & Çevirgen, 2024). Despite this global prominence and the increasing operational pressures, the academic literature on how the region's principal promotion body communicates its image and how audiences actively respond to that communication remains thin (Kılıçarslan & Albayrak, 2020).

This study addresses that gap with a focused aim to analyse both sides of the dialogic exchange between an institutional account and its audience during the platform transition to short vertical video. Examining the Instagram feed of the Antalya Promotion Foundation (ATAV) between January 2023 and December 2025, the dataset covers 633 posts and 2,390 user comments. The article asks three targeted questions: First, how has the volume and format mix of the account's posting evolved, and how do Reels and static posts compare in engagement? Second, what content themes does the account foreground, and how do they distribute across the format types? Third, what does the user comment stream reveal about the dialogue between institutional voice and audience expectation, particularly regarding destination shortcomings and information gaps?

The intended contribution of this study is threefold. Empirically, it offers a rare longitudinal reading of a regional DMO's Instagram practice during the algorithmic shift to short vertical video, capturing the direct collision between institutional storytelling and user generated feedback. Methodologically, it demonstrates a transparent and replicable coding procedure that distinguishes substantive stakeholder critique from atmospheric and affirmation-oriented content. Practically, it provides destination communicators with a concrete managerial framework to isolate user critiques and information requests from the affective majority, enabling them to detect operational deficits and address critical communication gaps under the constraints of modern digital platforms.

2. Conceptual Framework

2.1. Social Media as a Strategic Tool for Destination Marketing Organisations

Social media comprises a group of Internet applications, built on the technological and ideological foundations of Web 2.0, that enable the creation and exchange of user-generated content (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010). For destination marketing organisations, these applications are no longer an auxiliary promotional channel but a core instrument of destination branding and competitiveness. Platform presence shapes destination brand image, supports stakeholder engagement, and contributes to wider national tourism objectives by extending a destination's reach into the everyday media environments of prospective visitors. The strategic value of an account therefore lies less in the volume of content it broadcasts than in how that content builds image, sustains relationships with audiences, and supports marketing goals. The evidence on institutional practice, however, spans two decades and points consistently in one direction. Buhalis and Law (2008) noted early that information and communication techno-

logies were shifting destination image production away from official organisations toward visitors and content creators. Yet Hays, Page and Buhalis (2013) found that national tourism organisations used these platforms mainly for one-way broadcasting rather than genuine participation, and Leung, Law, Van Hoof and Buhalis (2013) confirmed that supplier-side strategies lagged well behind consumer behaviour. Uşaklı, Koç and Sönmez (2017) similarly observed that European destination marketing organisations treated social media primarily as a marketing tool and showed very low response rates to user inquiries. The pattern recurs even under pressure: during the COVID-19 crisis, the Instagram communication of major European DMOs concentrated on stable, image-affirming themes such as culture, history and art, while genuine two-way engagement with audiences remained limited (Mele, Filieri, & De Carlo, 2023). Iglesias-Sánchez et al. (2020) argued that Instagram nonetheless functions as a co-creation space in which official accounts and user-generated photography jointly build a destination's image, and Mariani et al. (2016) showed that posting volume and content diversity affect engagement in complex ways. Together these studies expose a critical gap. Sub-national Mediterranean foundations remain under-examined relative to national or regional European organisations, and few studies systematically combine the analysis of institutional posts with the audience comments they attract. The present framework treats posts and comments as one integrated communicative system.

2.2. The Short-Form Video Turn and the Reels Format

This integrated system is increasingly driven by short-form video. Instagram's introduction of Reels in 2020, and the platform's aggressive prioritisation of the format in its discovery surfaces from 2022 onward, reshaped how accounts achieve organic reach. Recent research treats short-form travel video as a central force in the attention economy. Han et al. (2022) showed that audience involvement in such videos creates stronger affective destination images and higher travel intention, while Tussyadiah and Fesenmaier (2009) established earlier that online videos mediate tourist experiences by triggering fantasies and granting mental access to places. Building on this, Du, Liechty, Santos and Park (2022) found that short-form videos on platforms such as TikTok encourage an immersive, first-person experience unlike traditional photo blogs, and Reels inherit and intensify these features. Recent international evidence further shows that engagement with tourism short video is shaped jointly by the content, social, and technical features of the video rather than by subject matter alone (Deng, Niu, Xiong, Yang, & Xu, 2026; Li & An, 2025; Zhang & Wang, 2025). For destination foundations, then, choosing to publish a Reel rather than a static photograph is no longer a stylistic choice. It is a strategic decision about algorithmic distribution and audience reach.

2.3. User Comments as a Two-Tier Communicative System: Dialogue, Social Proof, and Social Capital

The shift toward video also affects how audiences co-produce destination images. Gartner (1994) originally separated induced promotional agents from organic information sources, but the rise of user-generated content blurred this line. Cox, Burgess, Sellitto and Buultjens (2009) found that travellers often trusted user content more than official promotional material during trip planning, and Marine-Roig (2019) later argued that traveller-generated content acts as a continuous, unsolicited organic image-formation agent that corrects curated promotional images. Iglesias-Sánchez et al. (2020) demonstrated this on Instagram, where official accounts and tourist photographs form a continuous feedback loop. Comment threads under institutional posts are a distinct form of user content: they share a common visual stimulus, accumulate in real time, and are read by both the institution and future viewers. Munar and Jacobsen (2014) noted that users contribute to social media mostly for altruistic or community-building reasons rather than marketing goals, so comment threads naturally contain more expressive reactions than factual information, requiring researchers to look carefully for analytically useful content.

These expressive reactions and informational exchanges function as a modern form of word-of-mouth. Litvin, Goldsmith and Pan (2008) defined electronic word-of-mouth as asynchronous, many-to-many, and persistent, and later confirmed that mobile electronic word-of-mouth heavily influences traveller decisions (Litvin, Goldsmith, & Pan, 2018). On Instagram, comments left under a Reel remain accessible and frame the post for future audiences, and they serve several distinct functions. They provide affective endorsement through brief responses that boost algorithmic circulation. They also serve an informational purpose: Xiang and Gretzel (2010) showed that social platforms are primary search tools for travellers, and viewers inspired by a Reel often turn to the comments to find missing practical details such as locations or prices. Most importantly, comments act as a stakeholder voice, as residents and informed visitors use these threads to raise real-world concerns about litter, over-development, or neglected heritage. Such critical comments are usually rare but carry the highest practical value for destination management, and studies that examine only total comment counts tend to miss this func-

tional difference. Following Marine-Roig (2019), this study specifically targets the informational and critical comment streams to extract destination insights that can inform management decisions.

These functional differences can be read through three complementary theoretical lenses that together frame the present study. First, dialogic communication theory distinguishes monologic, one-way information transmission from genuine two-way dialogue between an organisation and its publics (Kent & Taylor, 2002). On this view, an institutional account that broadcasts polished destination imagery without responding to the questions and concerns raised beneath it operates monologically, even when its posts attract high volumes of reaction. The comment thread is precisely where the audience attempts dialogue, and the institution's response or non-response determines whether that opening is realised.

Second, the dominant affective majority of comments is best understood through social proof. People infer the value of a destination in part from the visible approval of others, and short, emoji-based endorsements both express and reinforce this collective signal (Cialdini & Goldstein, 2004). Such reactions accumulate quickly, circulate the post further, and frame it for later viewers, but they carry little substantive information.

Third, the small minority of longer informational and critical comments reflects an investment of social capital. Informed residents and repeat visitors draw on local knowledge and a sense of civic stake to supply directions, correct curated images, or flag environmental and heritage concerns (Nahapiet & Ghoshal, 1998). These contributions are costly to produce and rare, but they carry disproportionate value for the institution. Read together, these perspectives frame the destination comment ecology as a two-tier system: a social-proof-driven affective majority that public metrics capture well, and a social-capital-driven informational and critical minority that those metrics obscure but that a dialogic organisation is best positioned to act upon.

2.4. Measuring Engagement: The Limits of Sentiment and Reaction Metrics

Extracting these insights requires overcoming significant measurement challenges. Mariani, Di Felice and Mura (2016) argued that public metrics such as likes and comments capture only a fraction of audience behaviour, and the algorithmic distribution of Reels has further separated post engagement from actual audience interest, since public counts now reflect both the algorithm's distribution choices and the audience's reaction. Automated sentiment analysis complicates matters further, because tools built to classify emotions often misread the short, emoji-heavy responses typical of tourism accounts. Lou, Zhang, Li, Qian and Ji (2020) found that emojis mostly amplify positive feelings and rarely express critical or questioning thoughts. More recent evidence sharpens this point: analysing destination public opinion through text mining, Huo, Yao, Wang, Wu, Li and Yu (2025) show that discrete emotions such as anger and love are the strongest drivers of engagement, yet a higher proportion of emoji use actually weakens the effect of these emotional drivers rather than encoding critical or interrogative content. A standard sentiment analysis will therefore produce an artificially positive picture, overcounting simple affective reactions while missing the longer, text-based negative and interrogative comments. These literatures collectively shape the present study. The goal is to understand how a regional Mediterranean foundation adapted to Reels and how its audience responded. By treating posts and comments as one system and separating comments by their actual function, this study foregrounds the small but information-rich subset of feedback that simple metric counts overlook.

3. Method

3.1. Data

Data were retrieved from the public Antalya Promotion Foundation's Instagram account (@antalyatanitimvakfi) and the associated public comment streams. The data collection process commenced in August 2025 and continued through the end of January 2026, encompassing all posts published between 1 January 2023 and 31 December 2025. The 2023-2025 window was selected to capture the transitional period during which Instagram shifted decisively toward short-form video. Reels were introduced in 2020 and were aggressively prioritised in the platform's discovery surfaces from 2022 onward, a turn that recent tourism research treats as a structural change in how destination content reaches audiences (Deng, Niu, Xiong, Yang, & Xu, 2026; Li & An, 2026). The three-year window therefore brackets the period in which this prioritisation took full effect, allowing longitudinal observation of how the Foundation restructured its posting practice in response to a platform-level change rather than to authorial preference. The initial dataset contained 633 posts and 2,888 raw comments. A multi-step cleaning pass removed 286 comments that were duplicates or account self-comments repeating the post caption, along with 212 comments written in languages other than Turkish or English. The restriction to Turkish and English was deliberate and rested on three connected considerations. First, these two languages account for the overwhelming majority of the account's audience, comprising domestic visitors and the international English-speaking segment that dominates inbound tourism to Antalya. Second, the

reliable coding of sentiment, nuance, and idiom in user comments requires native or near-native command of the language, which the single coder possessed in Turkish and English but not in the other languages present in the raw data. Third, comments in those other languages were in any case too few to support reliable thematic coding and would have required additional native-speaker coders to preserve coding validity. This restriction is revisited among the study's limitations. The final user-comment dataset contained 2,390 comments.

For each post, the following attributes were recorded: URL, like count at retrieval, comment count at retrieval, full hashtag string, caption, and format type (Reel or static), inferred from the URL stem (/reel/ vs /p/). For cross-tabulation purposes, post URLs and comment texts were stored considering the publication year of the parent post.

3.2. Case Selection

The Antalya Promotion Foundation was selected as a critical case because Antalya is the leading Turkish coastal destination, hosting more than 17 million international arrivals in 2024 (Tosun & Şimşek, 2025). The Foundation is one of the few institutional DMOs in Türkiye that has continuously operated a dedicated Instagram presence since the platform's mainstream adoption. Its public profile and the substantive variety of content posted across both Reels and static formats make it especially well suited to a descriptive-thematic mapping of how a Mediterranean coastal DMO has adapted to the platform's short-form video turn. This selection follows a critical-case logic, in which a single, information-rich case is chosen because it permits close observation of a phenomenon that would be diluted in a broad sample (Yin, 2018). The Foundation is well suited to this logic: Antalya is Türkiye's leading coastal destination, hosting more than 17 million visitors in 2024 (Tosun & Şimşek, 2025), one of the most visited destination in the world (Euromonitor International, 2025), and the Foundation is one of the few Turkish DMOs to have operated a continuous, dedicated Instagram presence across the entire Reels transition.

Antalya's prominence as a physical destination is not automatically matched by visibility in digital destination marketing, which is precisely why the case merits scrutiny. At the time of data collection, the account held about 22,300 followers, a level that places it among the more active Turkish provincial promotion accounts. Comparative benchmarking of Turkish DMO social media performance has shown wide variation in reach and interaction across provincial accounts (Kılıçarslan & Albayrak, 2020), and the present case allows a close look at how one leading destination's foundation performs within that landscape.

3.3. Analytical Approach

The analytical procedure was structured into two primary phases: thematic categorization of the visual and textual content, and descriptive quantification of the engagement metrics. Detailed qualitative coding protocols for the posts and user comments are provided in Sections 3.4 and 3.5, respectively. The quantitative procedures used to aggregate and compare these thematic insights are outlined in Section 3.6.

3.4. Thematic Coding of Posted Content

This study employs a qualitative content analysis research design. Qualitative content analysis is widely utilized as a research method for the subjective interpretation of the content of text data through the systematic classification process of coding and identifying themes or patterns (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005). In accordance with the fundamental principles of this approach, the primary objective was to make replicable and valid inferences from the collected data to their specific contexts of use (Krippendorff, 2018). To ensure the reliability and validity of the research findings, a rigorous and systematic coding procedure was implemented across the entire dataset. The hashtags and captions of all 633 posts were read inductively to derive a set of mutually exclusive content themes.

Following the conventional (inductive) approach to qualitative content analysis (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005), in which categories are derived from the data rather than imposed from prior theory, the hashtags and captions of all 633 posts were read inductively to derive a set of mutually exclusive content themes. A first reading of the most-used hashtags and a stratified inspection of 200 captions yielded ten candidate themes: Cultural Heritage, Sea & Beach, Nature & Landscape, Adventure & Outdoor Sports, Events & Festivals, Foundation & Corporate Activities, Civic & Awareness Days, Gastronomy, Aesthetic & Lifestyle, and a residual Other & General category.

To ensure thematic robustness and avoid analytical over-fragmentation during the final analysis, the initial ten candidate categories were consolidated into six definitive themes. Specifically, Sea & Beach and Nature & Landscape were merged into a unified Natural Landscapes theme, reflecting their shared focus on the region's physical geography. Events & Festivals and Foundation & Corporate Activities were combined into Event Announcements, as both functionally represent institutional and scheduled occurrences. Civic & Awareness Days was relabeled as Civic & Commemorative Days. The Aesthetic & Lifestyle category, which predominantly featured phatic communication and generalized destination fondness, was refined into Greetings & City Affec-

tion. Finally, the Gastronomy category yielded only two standalone posts; recognizing its intrinsic connection to local culture, these were subsumed under the Cultural Heritage theme. Posts initially placed in the residual Other & General category were subjected to a careful secondary analysis and subsequently redistributed into the appropriate definitive themes.

A deterministic rule-based classifier was then built that combined a curated keyword list and case-insensitive regular expressions for each theme, with Turkish diacritical normalisation applied before pattern matching. To ensure consistent treatment of posts spanning more than one theme, the rules were applied in a hierarchical priority order, with civic/awareness, corporate and event categories tested before destination-product categories (Heritage, Sea, Nature). A random subset of 100 posts was then re-read manually for validation. The proportion of agreement between the rule-based label and the human re-read label was 89%, which is in line with acceptable inter-coder reliability for exploratory content analysis (Krippendorff, 2018).

3.5. Thematic Coding of User Comments

Comments were coded through a multi-stage thematic analysis grounded in Braun and Clarke's (2006) framework for inductive pattern identification. The procedure prioritized analytical fit with the research questions over fine-grained taxonomic distinction and proceeded in five sequential phases.

Initially, as detailed in the data collection phase, cleaning procedures filtered the raw extract of 2,888 entries down to a final dataset of 2,390 valid, user-authored comments in Turkish and English. Following this, the full filtered dataset was read in chronological batches, with inductive codes generated in response to recurrent content patterns. This first pass produced 23 fine-grained codes including, for example, aesthetic appreciation, civic and religious greetings, peer tagging, gratitude to the account, inquiry about directions or costs, comparative regional knowledge, heritage protection concern, litter and cleanliness concern, and spam or self-promotion. Codes were generated in English while the comment text remained in its original language.

For the subsequent consolidation phase, following the principle that thematic frameworks should serve interpretation rather than fragment it, the 23 fine-grained codes were consolidated into four categories: Positive (affirmative, appreciative, supportive, or celebratory orientation), Neutral (non-affective utterances such as information sharing, peer tagging, comparative observations, and miscellaneous statements), Negative (complaints, concerns, or critical observations), and Question (explicit requests for information). The classification combines two logics. The three valence categories, Positive, Neutral, and Negative, follow the polarity schemes widely used in tourism sentiment analysis. The fourth category, Question, is not a valence category but a functional one. An information request is not reducible to positive, neutral, or negative sentiment, yet it is central to the exchange studied here, because it marks the point at which a viewer moves from affective reaction toward trip-planning and turns to the account for information it did not supply. Treating Question as a distinct category is therefore motivated by the dialogic and information-search framing of the study (Kent & Taylor, 2002; Xiang & Gretzel, 2010) rather than by sentiment polarity alone, and it allows the analysis to separate low-effort endorsement from the higher-effort informational and critical contributions that carry managerial value.

A short decision rubric guided the consolidation. Comments expressing emotional appreciation, praise, civic pride, gratitude, nostalgia, poetic affection, or visit intent were coded as Positive. Comments providing factual information, tagging another user without an affective marker, sharing local knowledge, offering comparative regional observations, or comprising multilingual fragments without clear sentiment valence were coded as Neutral. Comments articulating dissatisfaction, identifying problems, or proposing improvements were coded as Negative. Comments structured as direct requests for information, including telegraphic noun-only requests such as "Konum" (Location), were coded as Question regardless of whether they contained explicit question marks.

During this process, several recurring patterns required explicit decision rules. Mixed-orientation comments were coded by the dominant orientation indicated by the comment's central claim. Informational replies that supplied visit-related details such as entrance fees, museum-card prices, road conditions, or historical facts were coded as Neutral rather than Question, because they functioned as knowledge contributions rather than information requests. Comments with strong emotional valence about secondary subjects, such as a lament about cultural festival decline that referenced ticket costs in passing, were coded by the primary emotional orientation rather than by surface topical reference. Pure emoji responses with no text were coded as Positive when the emojis carried clear affective valence (hearts, fire, starry-eyed faces) and as Neutral when they were ambiguous or purely symbolic.

Given that Negative and Question comments together accounted for a small percentage of the data yet carried disproportionate practical value for destination management, both categories were re-examined and disaggregated into constituent sub-themes through close reading of every constituent comment. Negative comments yielded seven sub-themes: Litter and cleanliness, Heritage protection and

cultural neglect, Over-development and construction, Infrastructure and services, Overcrowding and overtourism, Costs and affordability, and Constructive critique with concrete suggestions. Question comments yielded six sub-themes: Location identification (the dominant form), Directions and access, Costs and fees and tours, Activities and permissions, Feature identification, and a small residual of other questions.

In parallel with thematic coding, each comment was processed through automated text analysis to extract structural features: word count, character count, presence of at least one Unicode emoji character, presence of at least one question mark, and presence of at least one @-mention to a non-account user. These features were used to characterize the formal properties of comments within each sentiment category and to compare the verbal investment and reactive register across categories.

Finally, regarding reliability and validation, coding was conducted by a single researcher with multiple validation passes over the dataset. Inter-rater reliability statistics were not calculated, consistent with the exploratory and descriptive orientation of the study. Thematic coherence was instead assessed through iterative refinement. When codes proved difficult to maintain as distinct, they were consolidated. When residual categories grew too heterogeneous, they were re-examined for finer structure. The final taxonomy was reached when additional reading produced no new sub-themes and existing categories accounted for all observed content. To ensure consistency over time, intra-rater reliability was maintained by recoding a random subset of 100 comments two weeks after the initial coding phase, which confirmed the stability of the thematic boundaries.

3.6. Analytical Procedures

Quantitative analyses were performed entirely in Microsoft Excel and were restricted to simple descriptive statistics. Counts and proportions were computed with standard spreadsheet functions. Cross-tabulations between year, format, and content theme were assembled as pivot-style matrices. All summary figures, including annual posting volume, mean and median engagement by format, and content-theme mix evolution, were generated from these descriptive tables. No inferential test, parametric or non-parametric, was applied. Comparisons between formats, themes, and years are presented as differences in central tendency and proportion, and the strength of those differences is assessed by reading the engagement hierarchy rather than by hypothesis testing. The qualitative analysis carries the interpretive weight of the study. It organises both the posts and the audience's comments into themes and reads each theme against the others.

3.7. Ethical Considerations

All analysed content is publicly available on Instagram. No usernames or profile pictures were stored, illustrative comment quotations are de-identified and lightly paraphrased in translation, and no attempt is made to link comments to specific individuals. The account analysed is institutional rather than personal.

4. Findings

The findings are presented in two sections. The first section provides a descriptive overview of the account's posting activity, format, content, and audience behavior using basic statistics like frequencies, proportions, and measures of central tendency. The second section forms the interpretive core of the study. It details the thematic categorization of both the posts and the user comments, providing representative captions and quotes to illustrate each theme.

4.1. Posting Activity, Format Migration, and Engagement

Between 2023 and 2025, ATAV published 633 posts on Instagram. Annual distribution reveals declining post volume (2023: n = 319; 2024: n = 219; 2025: n = 95), reflecting either reduced content production capacity or strategic consolidation. Despite the decline in volume, mean likes per post rose steadily across the period, while mean comments peaked in 2024 and then eased in 2025. 2023 posts averaged 82.9 likes and 7.5 comments, compared with 214.4 likes and 17.3 comments in 2024, and 289.0 likes and 12.0 comments in 2025 (Table 1).

Table 1. Annual Descriptive Statistics for ATAV Instagram Posts

Year	Posts	Reels %	Mean Likes	Median Likes	Mean Comments	Mean Hashtags
2023	319	62.40%	82.9	0	7.5	10.8
2024	219	97.70%	214.4	184	17.3	12.4
2025	95	92.60%	289	146	12	4.7
Total	**633**	**79.10%**	**159.3**	**46**	**11.5**	**10.4**

The median of zero likes for static posts indicates a significant proportion received negligible engagement, likely attributable to Instagram's algorithmic deprioritization of non-Reels content. Mean hashtags per post rose slightly from 10.8 in 2023 to 12.4 in 2024, then fell sharply to 4.7 in 2025. The net movement across the period, and in particular the steep drop in the final year, is consistent with changing Instagram practice, as the platform's algorithm increasingly prioritises engagement metrics over hashtag-based discovery.

4.2. Post Content Themes

Thematic categorization of post content identified six consolidated themes (Table 2). The two dominant categories were Natural Landscapes (41.9%, n = 265) and Cultural Heritage (37.0%, n = 234). Together, these accounted for 78.8% of all posts, establishing nature and heritage as the DMO's core representational pillars.

Table 2. Post Theme Distribution with Engagement Metrics

Theme	n	%	Mean Likes	Mean Comments
Natural Landscapes	265	41.9	174.3	14
Cultural Heritage	234	37	106.8	8.5
Greetings & City Affection	74	11.7	254.6	8.3
Adventure & Outdoor Sports	30	4.7	153.7	24.3
Civic & Commemorative Days	25	3.9	242.4	9.8
Event Announcements	5	0.8	28.6	1.8

Natural Landscapes (41.9%, n = 265) consolidated coastal scenes (beaches, coves, Mediterranean vistas), mountainous terrain, canyons, waterfalls, caves, and endemic flora and fauna. This category also incorporates sweeping overhead cinematography and broader scenic highlights. The breadth of this category reflects Antalya's geographical diversity beyond beach tourism stereotypes. Example captions included:

"Let's watch Delik Deniz, considered one of Türkiye's most interesting and mysterious coves"; "Good morning with Antalya's rebellious children, the Yılkı wild horses"; "Olympos Saffron, one of 250 endemic plant species found only in Antalya"; "Let the drone's wings dance in the sky, but never forget to respect nature's freedom".

Cultural Heritage (37.0%, n = 234) encompassed ancient cities (Olympos, Phaselis, Perge, Termessos), archaeological museums, historical landmarks, and heritage sites. This category emphasized Antalya's deep historical layering, positioning the destination as more than a coastal resort. Representative captions included:

"Historic Mermerli Beach is located in the heart of Antalya"; "About Tahtalı Mountain, Mount Solyma, and Olympos Cable Car"; "Apollo Temple, Side".

Greetings & City Affection (11.7%, n = 74) comprised posts expressing generalized destination fondness without specific content focus. These posts function as phatic communication, maintaining account presence and affective connection with followers. Examples:

"Good morning"; "Is there anything more beautiful (shows a view of the city)"; "Fascinating city Antalya (shows a view of the city)"; "I hope... #VisitAntalya".

Adventure & Outdoor Sports (4.7%, n = 30) showed active engagement with nature through rafting, paragliding, hiking, diving, and cable car experiences. This theme generated the highest mean comment counts of any category. Examples:

"Gelidonya Lighthouse in the land of sage, located on the historic Lycian Way"; "Maden Cove, under the protection of Beydağları Coastal National Park Kemer District"; "I've never seen a more beautiful place, you absolutely must go"; "Olympos Teleferik 2365m, Kemer/Antalya".

Civic & Commemorative Days (3.9%, n = 25) marked national holidays, religious holidays, and seasonal greetings. These posts attracted high mean likes (242.4), reflecting audience response to shared symbolic occasions. Examples:

"Turkish Stars were watched with enthusiasm in Antalya"; "Happy April 23 National Sovereignty and Children's Day"; "Happy 100th anniversary of our Republic"; "We remember with respect and longing".

Event Announcements (0.8%, n = 5) covered organized cultural occasions, festivals, and foundation/institutional updates. Examples included:

"4th International Antalya Yörük Turkmen Festival"; "The Mediterranean Film Festival has begun"; "İlhan Koman's 'Toward the Mediterranean' Exhibition Opened at AKS".

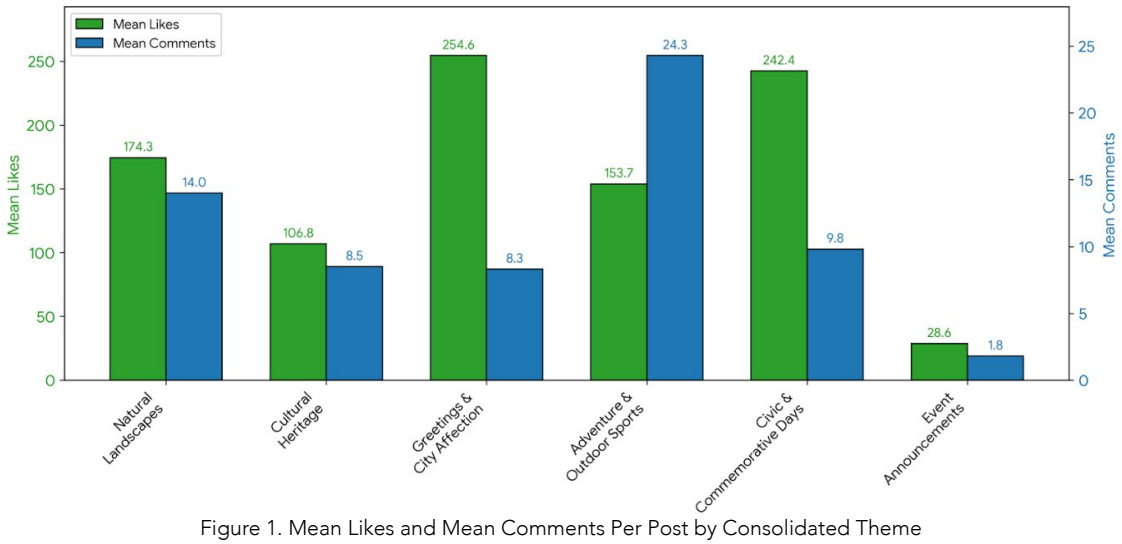

Figure 1. Mean Likes and Mean Comments Per Post by Consolidated Theme

Engagement patterns varied by theme (Figure 1). Adventure & Outdoor Sports posts achieved the highest mean comment count (24.3), suggesting this content prompted discussion or question-asking. Greetings & City Affection and Civic & Commemorative posts generated the highest mean likes (254.6 and 242.4 respectively), despite their lower posting frequency. Cultural Heritage, despite being the second largest category by volume, produced only moderate per-post engagement (mean 106.8 likes, 8.5 comments), potentially indicating audience saturation or the visual conventionality of archaeological content. In contrast, the largest category, Natural Landscapes, maintained robust engagement (mean 174.3 likes, 14.0 comments).

4.3. Comment Themes and Audience Interaction Patterns

Analysis of 2,390 user comments classified each contribution into one of four categories: Positive (affirmative, appreciative, or supportive responses), Neutral (non-affective utterances including knowledge sharing, peer tagging, and miscellaneous statements), Negative (concerns, complaints, and critical observations), and Question (explicit requests for information). This four-category schema was applied consistently across the dataset and provides a structural view of how audiences engaged with ATAV's content during the Reels era.

The distribution was strongly skewed toward positive responses (Figure 2). Positive comments accounted for 1,780 of the 2,390 total (74.5%), Neutral for 493 (20.6%), Question for 76 (3.2%), and Negative for only 41 (1.7%). This pattern indicates that ATAV's comment threads functioned overwhelmingly as a space for affective endorsement of destination imagery rather than as a forum for deliberation, inquiry, or critique. Together, Positive and Neutral categories comprised 95.1% of all engagement, with Question and Negative responses appearing only as minor undercurrents.

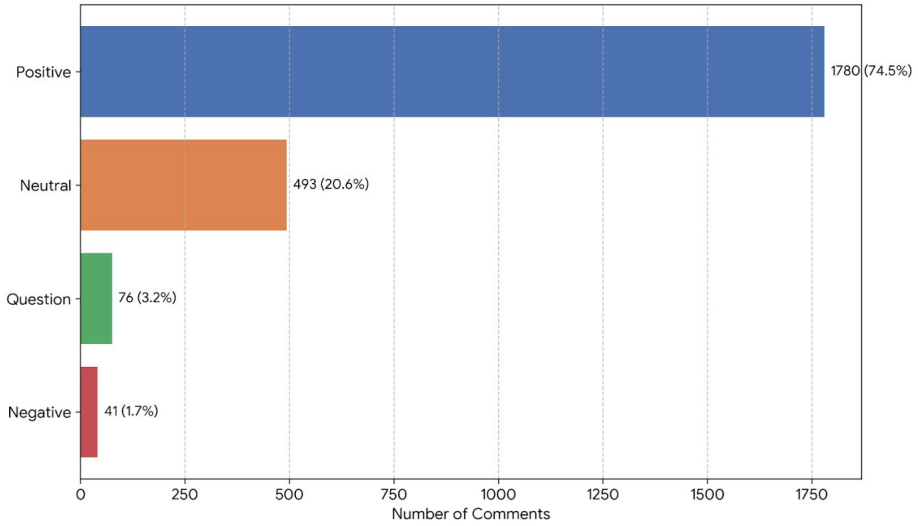

Figure 2. Sentiment Distribution of User Comments

Positive comments encompassed several behaviorally distinct expressions that share an affirmative orientation toward the destination: aesthetic appreciation (the dominant form, expressed through emojis and brief exclamations), gratitude directed at the account or its creators, civic pride statements during national or religious occasions, declarations of visit intent, and nostalgic or poetic affection. Typical Positive comments are short, emoji-heavy, and require minimal verbal investment. Pure positive emoji responses (sequences of heart, fire, or starry-eyed faces) accounted for the largest behavioral sub-pattern within this category. Examples include:

"Among the most beautiful photos I've seen in a long time, I want to frame it and hang it on the wall"; "My beloved hometown Antalya where I was born, fed, lived"; "After this reel I will definitely go see this place", and "Bless your efforts, glad you exist".

Neutral comments comprised a heterogeneous bundle of non-affective utterances. Peer tagging without sentiment ("@friend look at this"), knowledge-sharing replies that supply factual information about a depicted site, comparative observations placing Antalya's features within a broader Turkish geography, multilingual fragments, conversational exchanges between commenters, and spam or self-promotional posts all fell into this category. Neutral comments tended to be longer and more deliberative than Positive comments, often serving an informational or relational rather than affective function. Representative examples are:

"The marble columns of the Apollo temple were erected in 1993-1994"; "We also have these flowers in our village"; "This year the entrance fee is 50 Turkish lira, but the museum card works", and "Antalya Museum was founded in 1922 by teacher Süleyman Fikri Erten".

Question comments were direct requests for information, most commonly about where a depicted site is located, how to reach it, and what it costs to visit. Negative comments articulated concerns or critique across several recurrent issues (heritage protection, environmental degradation, infrastructure deficits, overdevelopment, overcrowding, costs, and constructive suggestions). Because of their qualitative importance for destination management, both categories are examined in detail in the following section.

As Table 3 shows, the four categories differ sharply in form: Positive comments are the shortest and most emoji-saturated, Neutral comments are intermediate and carry the highest peer-mention rate, Question comments are short and rarely punctuated as questions, and Negative comments are by far the longest and least emoji-dependent.

Table 3. Structural Characteristics of Comments by Sentiment Category

Sentiment	n	%	Mean Words	Mean Chars	% with Emoji	% with ?	% with @ mention
Positive	1,780	74.5	3	20.8	85.4	0.7	0.5
Neutral	493	20.6	8.4	58.5	38.2	4.6	12.5
Question	76	3.2	4.8	32.7	7.9	23.7	0
Negative	41	1.7	21.3	149.7	22	9.8	4.9

These structural differences carry analytical implications. Like-and-emoji metrics capture the Positive category effectively but provide little signal about the small proportion of the audience engaging in deliberative interaction. Question and Negative comments, despite their small share of the total, represent the audience subset that invested meaningful cognitive and verbal effort in their engagement. They are also the categories most likely to carry actionable information for destination management.

4.4. Negative and Question Themes: Sub-Thematic Analysis

Although Negative and Question comments together accounted for only 4.9% of the total (n = 117), their qualitative content addresses precisely the operational and informational domains that destination marketing organizations are best positioned to act upon. Each category was disaggregated into its constituent sub-themes through close reading of all constituent comments. Sub-themes are reported below with multiple representative examples.

4.4.1. Negative comments

Negative comments (n = 41) clustered into seven sub-themes spanning environmental, infrastructural, economic, and cultural concerns (Table 4). The largest sub-themes related to environmental and heritage conditions, while smaller sub-themes addressed development, infrastructure, crowding, and cost pressures.

Table 4. Negative Sub-Themes with Representative Comments

Sub-theme	n	%	Representative comments
Litter & cleanliness	12	29	"I went last year, everywhere was trash, even the water was impassable due to garbage and filth." ; "Very beautiful, but they threw everything on the ground, those animals." ; "Such a shame, the same place is full of garbage now."
Heritage protection & cultural neglect	9	22	"A very beautiful and historic place but unfortunately very neglected. We don't know the value of what we have."; "I wish it were valued and brought to tourism." "Before being impoverished and before opera and ballet were dismissed, Aspendos festivals were held, free shuttles ran from the museum, we went so often, now there are no festivals and no values left."
Over-development & construction	8	20	"I hope you are not established to plunder the coasts like Muçev."; "The last cove of the people that x hotel wanted to buy but could not."; "They are pouring concrete on Phaselis, Antalyans, why aren't you there in protest?"
Infrastructure & services	4	9.8	"Don't bother hoping to camp or fish, the gendarmerie issues fines even to those who stop and look on the way past."; "Has the vehicle road been fixed? It was very bad last summer."
Overcrowding & overtourism	4	9.8	"I was there last week, unfortunately overcrowded."; "The peace and quiet you mention was ten years ago, now there's traffic, foreign crowds, and high cost of living."
Costs & affordability	2	4.9	"25% hike on electricity and natural gas." (general references to rising costs affecting tourism affordability)
Constructive critique / suggestions	2	4.9	"Why do you always show Side, there is another magnificent ancient city called Perge."; "There are many more places to visit in Demre: Çayağzı port, the museum, Saint Nicholas church, the healing waters, Sülüklü beach, Taşdibi beach, and our Üçağız coves."

Several patterns emerge from the negative sub-thematic distribution. First, environmental and physical-site concerns (Litter, Heritage Protection, Over-development) together comprised 70.7% of all negative comments (n = 29), pointing to a coherent stakeholder concern about the material condition and structural integrity of Antalya's tourism assets. Litter complaints typically referenced specific sites depicted in the post, indicating that commenters were drawing on lived experience to contradict the curated visual narrative. Heritage Protection comments lamented inadequate maintenance of archaeological sites and, in one case, the decline of major cultural events such as the Aspendos festivals. Over-development comments named specific construction projects (Phaselis concrete pouring, Rixos resort expansion) and even cited prior ministerial commitments, suggesting that informed local observers were monitoring coastal change in real time.

Second, Infrastructure and Overcrowding sub-themes (n = 8 combined) reflect frictions in the visitor experience: restrictive enforcement, road conditions, traffic, and the felt loss of the tranquil Antalya of earlier decades. These comments are diagnostically distinct from heritage concerns because they refer to present-day visit conditions rather than long-term site management.

Third, Constructive Critique comments (n = 2), though rare, represent the most directly actionable sub-theme. These commenters did not simply complain but proposed specific alternative content (other ancient cities such as Perge, less-shown coastal sites in Demre), implicitly positioning themselves as informed audience members invested in seeing Antalya's fuller tourism portfolio represented.

Negative comments also differed sharply from the rest of the data in form. Their mean length (21.3 words) is approximately seven times that of Positive comments, and they contained markedly fewer emojis (22.0% versus 85.4% for Positive). This points to a different communicative register: critics composed text, while supporters reacted with emojis. The implication is that any sentiment analysis relying on emoji density or short reaction patterns will systematically underweight the negative signal, which is encoded in longer, more deliberative prose.

4.4.2. Question comments

Question comments (n = 76) were disaggregated into six sub-themes (Table 5), reflecting the kinds of practical information that audiences sought from ATAV after being shown a destination image. The distribution was strongly skewed toward a single dominant request type: identification of where the depicted location is.

Table 5. Question Sub-Themes with Representative Comments

Sub-theme	n	%	Representative comments
Location identification	60	78.9	"Where is here?"; "Location please."; "Can I get the location?"; "Where exactly is this place?"; "Where in Antalya is this?"; "Location?"
Directions & access	8	10.5	"Good day, how can I get here?"; "Is the ancient city accessible by public transport?"; "Can you drive close to it?"; "How do we get there, is there a vehicle road?"; "How exactly do we get there, route directions?"
Costs, fees & tours	4	5.3	"For August, can I get price information for two nights, two adults?"; "How much is the entrance fee this year?"; "Hello, are there tours in Antalya for waterfalls or ancient cities?"
Activities & permissions	1	1.3	"Can you camp here?"
Feature identification	1	1.3	"Can you specify the names of the coves? Some sounded unfamiliar, it feels like I have missed some. Then again, there are so many coves, which ones do we even have time for?"
Other questions	2	2.6	"Where in Finike is this place, amazing."; "Where is this place exactly?"

Location identification dominated the Question category, accounting for 78.9% of all question comments (n = 60). The overwhelming majority of these were telegraphic in form, consisting of a single noun ('Location'), a short noun phrase ('Location please'), or a two-word interrogative ('Where here?'). This pattern is consistent with Instagram's Reels-era affordances, in which audiences scroll rapidly through visually compelling content without accompanying geographic metadata. When a Reel showcases an evocative cove, waterfall, or archaeological site without on-screen text or a tagged location, viewers default to the comments to recover this information. The fact that 60 such requests accumulated across the period indicates that ATAV's posts frequently failed to embed location information directly in the content itself.

Directions & access comments (n = 8) extended location-seeking into practical visit planning. Commenters asked whether sites could be reached by public transport, whether roads were drivable, and what route options existed. These comments often combined a location request with a logistical question, indicating that the visual prompt of the Reel had moved some viewers toward concrete trip-planning behavior.

Costs, fees & tours (n = 4) and Activities & permissions (n = 1) addressed the next tier of trip-planning concerns: entrance fees, accommodation rates, tour availability, and permissions for activities such as camping. Although small in number, these sub-themes represent the highest-intent audience segment, signaling readiness to convert visual interest into a visit. Feature identification (n = 1) and Other questions (n = 2) were residual categories with too few cases to support generalization.

Two structural features of Question comments warrant attention. First, only 23.7% contained an explicit question mark. This reflects a vernacular Instagram register in which noun-only requests substitute for fully formed interrogatives. Automated systems that identify questions through punctuation alone would therefore miss approximately three quarters of audience information requests on this account. Second, peer mentions in Question comments were absent (0.0%), confirming that questions are directed at the account or the community at large rather than at named individuals.

5. Discussion

The three-year window analysed here captures the DMO during a period of pronounced platform and format change. The findings reported in Section 4 lend themselves to interrelated interpretations, which are developed below in dialogue with the destination-marketing literature and with recent work on short-form video and overtourism.

Between 2023 and 2025, the share of Reels in the Foundation's output rose from 62.4% to 92.6%, while mean engagement per post climbed from 82.9 likes in 2023 to 289.0 in 2025. Reels generated roughly 4.5 times the likes and three times the comments of static posts. This trajectory is consistent with the broader literature on short-form travel video, which finds that the vertical, music-driven format of Reels and TikTok cultivates higher levels of audience involvement, stronger affective destination images and, in turn, greater travel intention (Han, Zhang, Xu, Law, & Zhang, 2022). This case extends these consumer-side findings to the producer side. Recent international evidence corroborates this producer-side reading. Machine-learning analyses of large short-video corpora show that engagement is shaped jointly by content, social, and technical features of the video rather than by topic alone (Deng, Niu, Xiong, Yang, & Xu, 2026; Li & An, 2025; Zhang & Wang, 2026), which helps explain why a wholesale shift to the Reels format, rather than any single content choice, coincided with the Foundation's

rising per-post engagement. A regional, modestly-resourced foundation realigned almost its entire output around a single format within three years, suggesting that algorithmic privileging of Reels in the platform's discovery surfaces functions less as one option among many and more as a precondition for organic reach. This algorithmic advantage is particularly crucial for regional destination accounts, which frequently suffer from low follower counts and weak interaction rates when relying on unoptimized, static content structures (Çorman & Duman, 2025). The reading is reinforced by the collapse of static-post engagement to a median of zero, which mirrors the platform-level dynamics that Mariani, Di Felice and Mura (2016) identified for Facebook a decade earlier, when visual content and post length began to drive engagement in non-linear ways. Hashtag volume declined sharply in parallel, pointing to a wider reconfiguration of discovery logics on Instagram in which tag-based search has been demoted in favour of recommendation algorithms operating on engagement metrics. Although this study cannot causally attribute changes in the organization's metrics to platform-level decisions, the convergence of declining hashtag use, rising Reels share and improving per-post engagement is congruent with what Buhalis and Law (2008) anticipated that information and communication technologies would continue to reshape destination marketing in ways that subordinate institutional control to platform infrastructure.

Although Cultural Heritage was the second largest content category, its per-post engagement was the lowest of the substantive themes. By contrast, Greetings & City Affection and Civic & Commemorative Days generated the highest mean likes, and Adventure & Outdoor Sports generated the highest mean comment count. This volume-engagement decoupling has important implications. The visible result of an institutional Instagram strategy is, in effect, the product of two not necessarily aligned variables: how often the institution chooses to post a category, and how strongly the audience reacts to it. Cultural Heritage emphasis sustains visibility through repetition, but it does not capture peak engagement. However, this institutional persistence strongly aligns with broader national tourism strategies. Recent visual content analysis of Türkiye's top destinations on the official 'GoTürkiye' portal reveals that historical and cultural heritage consistently functions as a primary branding mechanism to project a culturally rich image rather than just a coastal one (Keleş, Ergün, & Taşpınar, 2024). Thus, while heritage content is plentiful to serve this archival mandate, the phatic and affective categories, such as greetings, civic days, and expressions of city affection, produce sharper interaction spikes. This pattern resonates with Iglesias-Sánchez et al.'s (2020) comparative case study of Algarve and Costa del Sol, which showed that Instagram functions as a co-creation space in which the official account, hashtag streams and user-generated photography jointly assemble a destination's image. Where the Foundation's practice diverges is in the relative weight placed on cultural heritage content: while heritage content is plentiful, the audience's strongest reactions occur around brief, affective, often non-substantive posts. Hays, Page and Buhalis (2013) made the related observation that even when national tourism organisations recognised the strategic stakes of social media, their actual practice remained promotional rather than participatory. This case suggests that a sub-national organization displays the same asymmetry, with the partial exception of the Adventure & Outdoor Sports category, whose comparatively high comment count signals genuinely discussion-prompting content. The same pattern appears beyond the Turkish context. European DMOs analysed on Instagram likewise concentrated on culture, history and art, themes that project stability and depth, even as audience interaction clustered around more affective material (Mele, Filieri, & De Carlo, 2023). The volume-engagement decoupling observed here is therefore not idiosyncratic to Antalya but a recurring feature of how institutional accounts reconcile an archival branding mandate with the affective logic of the platform.

The structural characteristics of the four comment categories reveal an asymmetry that has direct methodological consequences. Positive comments were short, emoji-saturated and dominated the dataset. Negative comments were long, rarely contained emoji, and constituted only 1.7% of comments. Question comments were short and frequently stripped down to a single noun or phrase, with only 23.7% carrying an explicit question mark. In other words, affective endorsement is encoded reactively (a heart, a fire emoji, a two-word exclamation), whereas critique and inquiry require longer, text-based articulation. This has implications for the methodologies most often used to characterise audience engagement on tourism social media. Sentiment-analysis systems that rely on emoji density or short-token features are well-tuned to the Positive category but systematically underweight Negative and Question content, which is precisely where the value lies for destination managers. This limitation is now well documented: emoji-weighted pipelines over-read affective endorsement and under-read deliberative content, and a higher density of emoji can even mask the emotional and critical signal rather than reveal it (Huo et al., 2025; Lou, Zhang, Li, Qian, & Ji, 2020). Any audience-listening pipeline for a destination feed that weights short, reactive responses will produce a flattering but partial picture of the comment thread. Following Uşaklı, Koç and Sönmez (2017), the examined comment space appears to operate predominantly as a venue for affective endorsement and civic ritual, with only a small share

of comments doing more reflective work. The 4.9% of comments that articulated questions or concerns thus represent the audience subset whose contributions are most useful for action, and their numerical minority should not lead to interpretive neglect.

Within the Question category, location identification accounted for most comments. The overwhelmingly telegraphic register of these requests, including single nouns such as "Location" or short phrases like "Location please", indicates that viewers were defaulting to the comment thread to recover information that the post itself failed to embed. This is a measurable communication gap. Sixty discrete requests for location information imply that a non-trivial share of the Reels reached audiences who were interested enough to ask but were unable to identify the depicted site from the content. Xiang and Gretzel (2010) showed early on that audiences moving from inspiration to planning rely on social platforms as much as on search engines. The Reels-era affordances appear to have intensified this pattern. When an evocative cove or archaeological site is showcased in vertical video without an on-screen text overlay or a tagged geographic location, the comment thread becomes the de facto information channel. The DMO's feed frequently leaves viewers unable to convert visual interest into actionable trip-planning intent. This communicative gap extends to content omissions as well. For instance, the complete absence of gastronomy in the Foundation's feed overlooks a proven engagement driver. Analysis of the national 'GoTürkiye' account demonstrates that gastronomic posts generate significantly higher comment volumes and deeper user interaction compared to other visual categories (Ercan, 2021). To effectively manage recurring logistical inquiries and strategically enrich under-served themes like gastronomy without overwhelming small communication teams, regional foundations could increasingly leverage generative AI tools to optimize their text and visual content generation processes (Binbaşıoğlu, 2024).

Although Negative comments comprised a tiny fraction of the data, their qualitative content addresses precisely the operational and structural domains that destination marketing organisations are best positioned to act upon: litter, heritage protection, over-development, infrastructure, and overcrowding. Environmental and physical-site concerns together accounted for the majority of all Negative comments, indicating a coherent stakeholder concern about the material condition of Antalya's tourism assets. The substantive content of these comments aligns closely with documented overtourism dynamics in Mediterranean coastal destinations (Mihalic, 2020; Foronda-Robles, Galindo-Pérez-de-Azpillaga, & Armario-Pérez, 2025). Local commenters naming specific construction projects, specific environmental deteriorations, and institutional declines demonstrate the kind of informed stakeholder monitoring that Mihalic and Kuščer (2022) describe as the latent capacity of resident publics to surface destination-management failures in real time. The methodological corollary is that small Negative-comment shares should not be read as indicators of audience satisfaction. They should be read as filtered samples of considered critique. The Negative-comment cluster reads less as noise than as a continuous, low-volume but high-information channel through which informed audiences communicate useful content back to the institution.

Taken together, these patterns invite a theoretical reading. Through the lens of dialogic communication theory, they amount to more than a set of missed information opportunities. The Foundation's practice is predominantly monologic: it broadcasts curated imagery and, on the evidence of the comment threads, leaves the audience's questions and concerns unanswered (Kent & Taylor, 2002). The sixty unanswered location requests are the clearest symptom of this, but the logic extends to the critical comments as well. Each is an opening for dialogue that the account does not take up. The theoretical contribution of the case is thus to specify what the comment ecology offers and what a monologic practice forgoes: the affective majority, driven by social proof, sustains visibility but tells the institution little it does not already know, whereas the social-capital-bearing minority offers exactly the directional and diagnostic information that two-way engagement is designed to capture. An account that listens to and replies to this minority would convert a broadcast feed into a relational one without abandoning its promotional remit.

The findings carry three managerial implications, which follow directly from the analysis rather than standing apart from it. The first concerns the information gap. The recurrent location requests show that geographic metadata is not reaching viewers at the moment of engagement. Embedding on-screen text that names the specific site and its district within Antalya, together with tagged Instagram locations, would close this gap at negligible cost and convert latent interest into trip-planning intent. A lightweight response protocol, even a templated reply that names the location and links to the foundation's own website, would extend this further and position the account as an information source rather than only an inspiration source, in line with Xiang and Gretzel's (2010) argument that the value of social media for tourism depends on how far institutional accounts integrate themselves into the audience's information search.

The second implication concerns the content mix. Heritage content carries the foundation's representational mandate and should not be reduced, but the volume-engagement decoupling suggests that a modestly larger share of the Adventure and Out-

door Sports content that drew the highest comment volume, and of brief affective content tied to civic and seasonal occasions, would compound visibility for the heritage and landscape categories that anchor the feed. The constructive-critique comments point the same way, calling for less repetition of well-known sites such as Side and Aspendos and more visibility for under-shown locations such as Perge and the Üçağız coves, which also aligns with the overtourism literature's emphasis on redistributing visitor flows away from saturated attractions (Mihalic, 2020; Mihalic & Kuščer, 2022).

The third implication concerns the critical minority. The negative comments name specific sites, projects, and institutional decisions, and if aggregated and routed to the relevant municipal and provincial counterparts they could function as a low-cost early-warning system for environmental and infrastructural concerns, moving the foundation toward the customer-service use of social media that Uşaklı, Koç and Sönmez (2017) found underdeveloped among European DMOs. Visible institutional engagement with cleanup, restoration, and conservation efforts would address this stakeholder critique without abandoning the promotional remit, reinforcing the foundation's legitimacy as a steward, and not only a promoter, of the destination's tourism assets.

6. Conclusion

This study examined the Instagram practice of the Antalya Promotion Foundation between January 2023 and December 2025, a window that coincides with Instagram's decisive shift toward Reels as its prioritised distribution format. Through descriptive and thematic analysis of 633 posts and 2,390 user comments, three findings stand out. First, ATAV's format mix migrated almost entirely to Reels, with engagement metrics rising in parallel and static-post engagement collapsing; format adaptation has been the dominant story of recent years for this regional foundation. Second, content emphasis on cultural heritage and natural landscapes sustains posting volume but does not capture the highest per-post engagement, which accrues to brief affective and civic content. Third, user comments are overwhelmingly positive and short, but a small share of question and negative comments carries disproportionate value for destination management, revealing both information gaps in the posts themselves (where is this place?) and operational concerns in the destination (litter, heritage neglect, over-development).

The contribution of this study encompasses empirical, theoretical, methodological, and practical dimensions. Empirically, the paper offers a rare three-year close reading of a regional promotion foundation's Instagram practice during the Reels transition, complementing the literature on national tourism organisations (Hays, Page, & Buhalis, 2013; Uşaklı, Koç, & Sönmez, 2017) and regional DMOs operating on Facebook (Mariani, Di Felice, & Mura, 2016; Kılıçarslan & Albayrak, 2020) with evidence from a sub-national foundation working with modest resources.

Theoretically, this study advances the current body of knowledge by proposing the 'two-tier destination comment ecology' framework, which explicitly conceptualizes how audiences interact with short-form travel content. Fundamentally, this research extends Kent and Taylor's (2002) dialogic communication theory and Uşaklı, Koç, and Sönmez's (2017) observations on DMO social media usage by demonstrating that institutional monologism persists even within highly interactive, algorithmically driven platforms like Instagram Reels. It reveals that the audience's dialogic response is structurally bifurcated into a social-proof-driven affective majority (Cialdini & Goldstein, 2004) and a social-capital-bearing critical minority (Nahapiet & Ghoshal, 1998).

Building upon this structural bifurcation, the framework further complements the foundational electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM) literature (Litvin, Goldsmith, & Pan, 2008, 2018; Marine-Roig, 2019) by theoretically untangling genuine user-generated eWOM from top-down institutional broadcasts. By drawing a firm theoretical boundary between authentic, organic feedback generated by actual users and the broader category of corporate electronic information sources, the study positions the critical comment stream as an unsolicited, bottom-up diagnostic tool that continuously negotiates the curated promotional narrative.

From a methodological standpoint, the study demonstrates a transparent, replicable coding procedure designed to separate low-effort affective endorsement from high-information critical and interrogative feedback, effectively distinguishing substantive content themes from atmospheric content. In doing so, this qualitative framework directly challenges the prevailing reliance on automated sentiment analysis in destination marketing (Huo et al., 2025; Lou et al., 2020; Mariani, Di Felice, & Mura, 2016). Traditional sentiment algorithms typically force user feedback into rigid positive, negative, or neutral polarities. By deliberately isolating 'Question' comments as a distinct, functional category rather than a sentiment valence, this study introduces a crucial methodological refinement. The findings demonstrate that standard automated systems, which frequently rely on explicit punctuation or emotional keywords, systematically fail to capture the telegraphic, noun-only information requests that signal a viewer's transition from passive affective consumption to active trip-planning intent. Consequently, the research argues that true theoretical and operational value lies in the qualitative depth of this functionally separated, marginalized feedback, rather than the algorithmic volume of positive affect.

On a practical level, by systematically isolating and analyzing actual user critiques and information requests, the research provides a concrete, actionable framework for destination management organizations (DMOs). Rather than treating the comment section merely as a repository for algorithmic engagement, destination communicators can leverage this social-capital-bearing minority as a low-cost, real-time early-warning system. This approach enables practitioners to detect and monitor real-world operational deficits, including environmental degradation, heritage neglect, and infrastructural frictions, and subsequently route these critical insights to relevant municipal and provincial stakeholders. Furthermore, by uncovering the prevalence of unanswered logistical inquiries (e.g., location identification and access directions), the study highlights a critical failure to convert visual inspiration into actual trip-planning intent. To overcome the restrictive, visual-first constraints of short-form social media, DMOs can implement lightweight response protocols and proactively embed clear geographic metadata or on-screen text overlays, thereby transitioning their digital presence from a purely promotional broadcast channel into a responsive, customer-service-oriented informational hub.

More broadly, the case illustrates a tension that is likely to intensify for Mediterranean coastal destinations. The same algorithmic surfaces that reward visually saturated short-form video also amplify the destination images that drive further arrivals, while the small minority of comments that articulate environmental and infrastructural critique constitute the clearest early warning the audience offers. How destination foundations weigh these two signals, the affective majority and the critical minority, is likely to shape the credibility of regional promotion in destinations under overtourism pressure.

7. Limitations and Directions for Future Research

Several limitations frame these findings, each pointing to a direction for future work. First, the study examines a single platform and a single institutional account; mapping destination communication across multiple platforms and accounts would give a fuller picture of a destination's digital footprint. Second, the analysis treats institutional posts and the comment threads beneath them, not the wider field of user-generated content that circulates about Antalya. The findings therefore speak to managed-account communication rather than to the full participatory, prosumption-driven ecology of the destination, and future research could pair account-level analysis with broader UGC and hashtag-stream data. Third, the account's predominantly one-way communication means the data capture audience attempts at dialogue but not the institution's responses; studies designed to observe response behaviour directly would test how far two-way engagement changes outcomes. Fourth, coding was conducted by a single researcher with intra-rater validation but without inter-rater reliability statistics, consistent with the study's exploratory orientation; multi-coder designs would strengthen reliability. Fifth, the comments carry no demographic markers, so local stakeholder concern cannot be cleanly separated from international visitor feedback. Sixth, the analysis is descriptive and does not support causal claims about platform effects. Finally, the restriction to Turkish and English comments, and the absence of interviews with the Foundation's social media managers, both bound the findings; pairing content analysis with manager interviews would illuminate the strategic decisions behind format migration and content choice.

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