

Theoretical-empirical Articles

# Content Marketing and Digital Engagement in Amazonian Sustainable Tourism

## Marketing de Contenidos en Instagram y su impacto en el eWOM en el Turismo Sostenible Amazónico



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### ABSTRACT

**Objective:** to analyze how different elements of content marketing on Instagram influence eWOM (measured through likes and comments) for sustainable hotels in the Amazon. **Theoretical approach:** the study is grounded in media richness theory and uses and gratifications theory to examine the effectiveness of social media content marketing strategies. **Method:** a content analysis of 1,000 Instagram posts from ten sustainable Amazon hotels was conducted, followed by a negative binomial regression model. **Results:** videos generate more engagement than images, validating media richness theory. Strategies focused on biodiversity and relaxation facilities are effective in generating likes, while informative and sustainability-related content encourages more comments. Cultural content showed an unexpected negative impact on engagement. **Conclusion:** the study contributes to the literature by providing specific recommendations on content marketing optimization in the unique context of sustainable Amazon tourism, an underexplored area in digital marketing research. The findings validate media richness and uses and gratifications theories in this specific context.

**Keywords:** Amazon; content marketing; eWOM; Instagram; sustainable tourism.

### RESUMEN

**Objetivos:** analizar cómo diferentes elementos del marketing de contenidos en Instagram influyen en el eWOM (medido a través de *likes* y comentarios) para hoteles sostenibles en la Amazonía. **Marco teórico:** el estudio se fundamenta en la teoría de la riqueza de medios y la teoría de usos y gratificaciones para examinar la efectividad de las estrategias de marketing de contenidos en redes sociales. **Método:** se realizó un análisis de contenido de 1,000 publicaciones de Instagram de diez hoteles sostenibles amazónicos, seguido de un modelo de regresión binomial negativa. **Resultado:** los videos generan más *engagement* que las imágenes, validando la teoría de la riqueza de medios. Las estrategias enfocadas en biodiversidad e instalaciones de descanso son efectivas para generar *likes*, mientras que el contenido informativo y sobre sostenibilidad fomenta más comentarios. El contenido cultural mostró un impacto negativo inesperado en el *engagement*. **Conclusiones:** el estudio contribuye a la literatura al proporcionar recomendaciones específicas sobre la optimización del marketing de contenidos en el contexto único del turismo sostenible amazónico, un área poco explorada en investigaciones sobre marketing digital. Los hallazgos validan las teorías de riqueza de medios y usos y gratificaciones en este contexto específico.

**Palabras clave:** Amazonia; marketing de contenidos; eWOM; Instagram; turismo sostenible.

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## INTRODUCTION

The Amazon region, home to the world's largest rainforest, has become a focus of global attention not only for its ecological importance but also for its growing tourism relevance (Valois & Cartaxo, 2022). This vast ecosystem offers unique experiences for travelers seeking to immerse themselves in pristine nature, explore indigenous cultures, and contribute to environmental conservation (Albert et al., 2023). In this context, sustainable tourism positions itself as a crucial economic alternative for regional development, aligning with global conservation trends and the demands of an increasingly environmentally conscious tourism market (Oliveira et al., 2023). Amazonian rural hotels, glamping sites, and eco-lodges play a crucial role as promoters of sustainable tourism and regional bioeconomy (Bachi & Carvalho-Ribeiro, 2023), offering not only accommodation but also environmental education, conservation, and community development (Samori et al., 2023). However, their success and sustainability depend on their ability to attract and retain tourists, which in the digital age implies a strong online presence and effective marketing strategies.

Content marketing (CM) on social media, especially on visual platforms like Instagram, is essential for promoting the Amazon's natural and cultural attractions (Kilipiri et al., 2023). However, in a highly competitive market saturated with information, it is vital to understand which content strategies generate more engagement and promote electronic word of mouth (eWOM)<sup>1</sup>, which manifests through actions such as liking, commenting on, or sharing content. eWOM drastically influences tourist behavior, favoring purchase intention, perception of credibility and brand trust, willingness to seek additional information, reduction of perceived risk, and even willingness to pay a higher price (Asnawati et al., 2022). This occurs because currently, reviews from previous travelers on platforms like Booking and social media play a crucial role in travel planning and accommodation selection (Aprilia & Kusumawati, 2021).

Despite the relevance of eWOM for sustainable tourism, there is a research gap regarding the influence of CM on this phenomenon, particularly in the specific context of the Amazon (Shahbaznezhad et al., 2021). Although previous studies have examined the impact of CM on sustainable tourism in other regions of the world (for example, Lemmi & Deri, 2020 in the European Alps, and Deville et al., 2022 en Australia), in Australia), the Amazon presents unique challenges and opportunities that justify a specific study. This

gap is particularly significant considering that social media and digital media constitute, in practice, the only communication channel available to these establishments in their effort to establish links with potential clients globally (Silva et al., 2023).

To address the identified gap, this study seeks to identify the most effective CM strategies for generating eWOM in sustainable hotels in the Amazon, focusing on four key variables that influence consumer behavior on digital platforms: message format, use of spokespersons, message appeal, and content strategy. Specifically, the study focuses on analyzing 1,000 posts disseminated by rural hotels from different countries that make up the Amazon region (Brazil, Colombia, Peru, Bolivia, and Ecuador), with high interaction on Instagram (more than 100,000 followers). The choice of Instagram as the analysis platform is justified by its visual nature, which makes it particularly suitable for promoting tourist destinations, and its popularity among young travelers, a key segment for sustainable tourism (Lee et al., 2022). Furthermore, the selection of these ten hotels from different Amazonian countries seeks to provide a heterogeneous sample of sustainable tourism in the region. These establishments were chosen for their demonstrated commitment to sustainable practices and their digital success on Instagram, making them ideal case studies for examining effective CM strategies.

Thus, this manuscript is structured as follows: First, the present introduction. Subsequently, a literature review is developed covering key concepts and theories. Next, the methodology used is detailed, including sample selection, data collection, and analysis techniques. Then, the study results are presented, examining the impact of each independent variable (message format, interactivity, use of spokespersons, message appeal, and content strategy) on eWOM. The discussion section interprets these results in the context of existing literature and the particularities of Amazon tourism. Finally, conclusions are offered summarizing the main findings, theoretical and practical implications of the study are discussed, and research limitations are acknowledged along with suggestions for future studies in this field.

## THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

### Content marketing and its impact on eWOM in sustainable tourism

Content marketing (CM) has become a fundamental strategy in the digital era, especially in the tourism sector. This approach focuses on creating and

distributing valuable, relevant, and consistent content to attract a clearly defined audience (Priya & Annapoorni, 2022). In the context of sustainable tourism, CM plays a crucial role by allowing establishments to convey the unique essence of their experiences, highlighting aspects such as authenticity, connection with nature, and cultural immersion (Deb et al., 2024).

The impact of CM on eWOM can be significant, especially in the context of sustainable tourism, since, unlike conventional tourism, it implies a greater commitment to environmental conservation and the well-being of local communities. For example, Erawan and Krairit (2020), found that tourists visiting sustainable destinations are more likely to share content related to biodiversity conservation and sustainable accommodation practices on their social networks compared to tourists visiting conventional destinations. This type of eWOM not only influences the decisions of other potential travelers but also contributes to raising awareness about the importance of sustainable tourism. Moreover, by providing quality content, tourism establishments can generate positive conversations among consumers, thus increasing brand visibility and credibility (Kwok et al., 2019). In sustainable tourism, where travelers' decision-making is often based on experiences shared by others, the eWOM resulting from CM can be decisive for business success (Amiri Sardari et al., 2024).

CM comprises different strategies that can be employed to improve and make advertising more attractive. The message format, for example, whether text, image, or video, can affect how users interact with posts (Shahbaznezhad et al., 2021). The use of spokespersons, such as celebrities or influencers, can amplify the message's reach and credibility (Andrade et al., 2021). Message appeal, whether emotional, informative, transactional, or social, can resonate with different audiences (Tafesse, 2015). Finally, content strategy, which determines the themes and approaches used, can align with the specific motivations of travelers interested in sustainable tourism (Molina et al., 2020). In the following sections, each of these CM strategies and their influence on eWOM are explained in detail.

## Message format

Message format on social media refers to how information is presented, which can include text, images, infographics, videos, and other multimedia elements. These formats vary in their ability to transmit rich and complex information, which can influence how users perceive and share content online (Uribe et al., 2022). Media richness theory (MRT), proposed by

Lengel and Daft (1984), posits that communication media differ in their capacity to transmit rich and complex information. Richer media are those that allow more immediate, personal, and multidimensional communication, facilitating the transmission of non-verbal cues, rapid feedback, and a personalized approach. In the context of social media, richer formats, such as videos or interactive infographics, offer an immersive and multisensory experience compared to simple formats like plain text or basic images (Shahbaznezhad et al., 2021). Although MRT was originally developed in 1986, it has evolved and adapted to explain communication in digital media. Recent research continues to use this theory as a framework for understanding the effectiveness of different content formats on social media (Chandrasekaran & Kumar, 2021; Shahbaznezhad et al., 2021).

Banerjee and Verma (2024), for example, found that social media posts with vivid and interactive content generated higher engagement. Similarly, Lee et al. (2022) observed that richer and more interactive messages were more likely to be shared. Richer formats can foster a higher volume of eWOM for several reasons. First, they better capture users' attention and keep them interested for longer periods. Additionally, information presented in a richer and more visual way can be easier to understand and remember, increasing the likelihood that users will share it (Zhu et al., 2023). Content in rich formats may also be perceived as having higher quality or value, motivating users to share it to enhance their own social status or provide valuable information to their connections (Dovbush, 2022). Rich formats like videos can evoke strong emotions and create a deep connection with the content, driving the desire to share. Furthermore, these formats can efficiently transmit complex information, making them more suitable for a variety of topics and audiences, thus expanding their potential for dissemination (Hussain et al., 2022). Considering the above, the following research hypothesis is proposed:

H1. Posts presented in richer formats foster a higher volume of eWOM

## Spokespersons

Use of spokespersons in marketing communications (MC) is a widely employed strategy to enhance the credibility and persuasiveness of advertising. In the context of the hotel industry, specifically in the case of sustainable hotels, the employment of spokespersons can be particularly relevant to foster eWOM among tourists. The source credibility model,

initially developed by [Hovland et al. \(1953\)](#), provides a theoretical framework to explain how spokespersons influence consumer perception and behavior. This model posits that the effectiveness of a persuasive message largely depends on the perceived credibility of the message's source ([Dominic et al., 2023](#)). Source credibility mainly comprises two factors: expertise and trustworthiness. In the context of sustainable hotels, the spokesperson's expertise refers to their perceived knowledge regarding sustainable practices in the hotel industry. On the other hand, trustworthiness relates to the perception that the spokesperson is honest and has genuine intentions in promoting sustainable practices ([Nguyen et al., 2023](#)). [Ohanian \(1991\)](#) expanded this model by adding attractiveness as a third component of source credibility, which can be particularly relevant in the context of social media, as a more attractive spokesperson may capture attention and engage viewers ([Nguyen et al., 2023](#)).

Previous research has demonstrated the effectiveness of spokespersons in various marketing contexts. For instance [Ahmadi et al. \(2023\)](#) found that using celebrities as spokespersons was more effective for products with high psychological or social risk. In the case of sustainable hotels, where consumers may perceive a risk associated with the authenticity of sustainable practices, a credible spokesperson can alleviate these concerns. In the digital realm, [Djafarova y Rushworth \(2020\)](#) observed that social media influencers, acting as spokespersons, significantly impacted young consumers' purchasing decisions. This suggests that spokespersons can influence not only perceptions but also behaviors related to eWOM.

In this context, it is relevant to mention the growing role of micro-influencers in sustainable tourism. Defined as individuals with between 1,000 and 100,000 social media followers, micro-influencers are often perceived as more authentic and relatable than traditional celebrities ([Gupta & Mahajan, 2020](#)). However, this authenticity may be threatened by the perception of 'greenwashing' practices, which could compromise both the credibility of the spokesperson and the sustainable hotel they promote ([Pimonenko et al., 2020](#)). Given this scenario, the use of well-selected spokespersons presents itself as an especially beneficial strategy for sustainable hotels. Firstly, these spokespersons can explain and validate the hotel's complex sustainable practices, making them more accessible and understandable to the general public. Furthermore, since sustainability often evokes emotions and personal values, a trustworthy and attractive spokesperson can establish a stronger

emotional connection with the audience ([Shi, 2023](#)). This emotional connection, in turn, may encourage consumers to share the information with their networks, fostering eWOM. Finally, in a digital era where authenticity is highly valued, a suitable spokesperson can humanize the hotel's brand, making its messages about sustainability appear more genuine and less like a mere marketing strategy ([Lu, 2023](#)). Based on these arguments, the following research hypothesis is proposed:

H2. Use of spokespersons in posts shared by sustainable hotels promotes eWOM.

### Message appeal

In the context of social media, message appeal refers to the content approach organizations adopt in advertising. This content can generally be categorized as informative, entertainment, transactional, or social ([Wu & Wang, 2011](#)). Informative content aims to educate the audience, providing data, news, or knowledge about the hotel, its sustainable practices, or the region in which it operates ([Shahbaznezhad et al., 2021](#)). For example, posts might include information on local biodiversity or the hotel's conservation efforts. Entertainment content is designed to amuse and captivate the audience; for instance, in Amazonian lodgings, messages might feature videos of wildlife or stunning landscape images ([Tanaltay et al., 2024](#)). Transactional content focuses on driving direct sales or bookings, offering promotions, discounts, or special packages ([Wahid et al., 2023](#)). Lastly, social content seeks to foster interaction and community engagement, such as contests, open-ended questions, or guest stories ([Santiago & Serralha, 2022](#)). Each type of content seeks to fulfill different user needs and generate distinct responses, which can influence how consumers interact with the brand and share information about it. For instance, informative content can fulfill the need for knowledge, while entertainment content may satisfy the need for escapism or aesthetic pleasure ([Ferrer-Rosell et al., 2020](#)).

Uses and gratifications theory (U&G) can be used to understand how message appeal can influence audience behavior. Developed by [Katz et al. \(1973\)](#), this theory suggests that individuals actively select and use media to meet specific needs and gain gratification. In the context of social media, U&G theory has been applied to explain why people use certain platforms and how they interact with the content they encounter there ([Whiting & Williams, 2013](#)). Users actively seek content

that provides them with information, entertainment, social interaction, or transactional benefits. When they find content that meets these needs, they are more likely to engage with it, share it, and generate eWOM.

Sustainable hotels in the Amazon region, by sharing content on social media, are participating in a competitive media environment. The effectiveness of their messages in generating eWOM depends on their ability to align with the motivations and expectations of their audience. For instance, informative content about sustainable practices can attract users interested in ecotourism, while entertainment content, such as appealing images or videos of biodiversity, can appeal to users' hedonic needs. U&G theory also suggests that users are active in their media consumption and, therefore, more likely to share and comment on content they perceive as valuable or gratifying (Aydin et al., 2021). This is particularly relevant for eWOM, as it implies that users not only passively consume hotel content but also evaluate it and potentially redistribute it within their own networks.

However, the relationship between message appeal and eWOM is not necessarily linear or uniform. Factors such as perceived source credibility, the personal relevance of content to the user, and the sociocultural context in which the message is received can moderate this relationship. Additionally, the effectiveness of message appeal may vary according to the demographic and psychographic segment of the audience (Schultz, 2017; Winter et al., 2021). For example, some research has found that millennials may feel more motivated toward entertainment content on social media (Moore, 2012). Considering these theoretical aspects and the complex nature of the interaction between message appeal and user behavior online, the following non-directional hypothesis is proposed:

H3. Message appeal in posts shared by sustainable hotels in the Amazon region influences eWOM.

## Content strategy

Content strategy refers to the planned and systematic approach organizations take to create valuable and relevant content for their audience. This strategy determines what type of information is shared and how it is presented to attract, retain, and convert a specific audience (Aydin et al., 2021). In the case of sustainable hotels in the Amazon, an initial qualitative analysis

identified various content strategies used, including: sustainability and conservation, which focuses on the hotel's ecological practices and environmental commitment; biodiversity and wildlife, highlighting the rich fauna and flora of the Amazon region; culture, emphasizing local traditions and customs; adventure/sport, promoting exciting activities like hiking or rafting; gastronomy and bar, showcasing the culinary and beverage offerings; facilities/rest, presenting the accommodation's amenities and relaxation areas; events, promoting special activities or conferences; service focus, emphasizing personalized attention and hospitality; family activities, displaying family entertainment options, such as children's activities; testimonials, sharing experiences from satisfied guests; and other diverse content types. It is worth noting that these content strategies are not mutually exclusive and are often used in an integrated manner to create a cohesive and appealing narrative. For instance, a sustainable hotel in the Amazon might combine content about biodiversity with information on its conservation practices, thus creating a more comprehensive story about its commitment to sustainability.

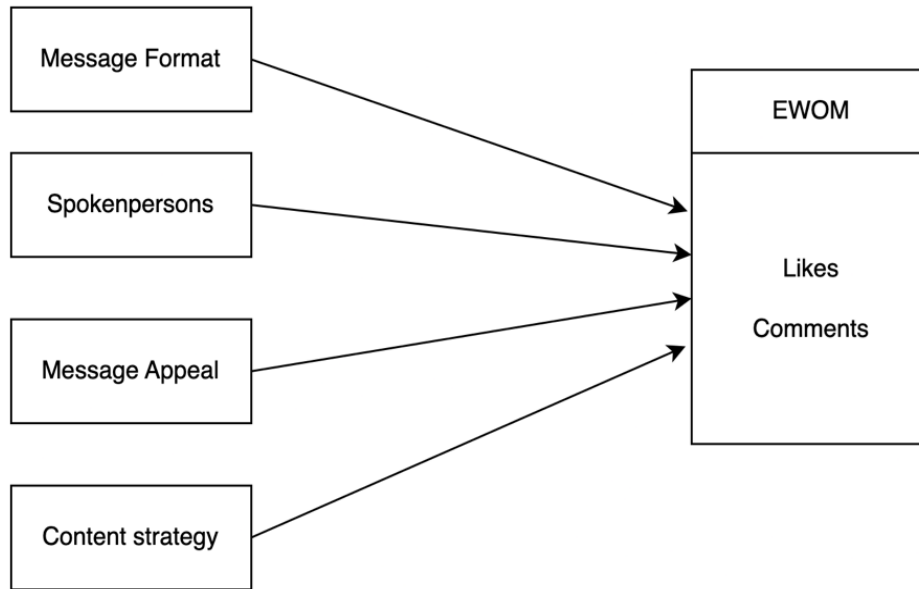
Furthermore, each of these strategies aims to highlight different aspects of the experience offered by the hotel and the Amazon region, appealing to various interests and motivations of tourists, whether it be their environmental concern, their desire for adventure, their interest in local culture, or their search for a luxury experience in a unique natural setting.

As with message appeal, U&G theory provides a robust theoretical framework for understanding how these strategies might influence eWOM, as this theoretical approach suggests that individuals actively select and use media to satisfy specific needs and obtain gratifications (Gamage et al., 2022). For example, a content strategy centered on biodiversity and wildlife can fulfill users' needs for knowledge and wonder, motivating them to share this content within their own networks. On the other hand, a strategy focused on sustainability may appeal to users' needs for self-expression and social awareness, prompting them to generate eWOM to demonstrate their personal values. The effectiveness of different content strategies can vary depending on the cultural context and the specific preferences of the target audience. In the case of sustainable tourism in the Amazon, it is crucial to consider the particularities of this market. For example, Mihailuk (2018) found that content related to biodiversity conservation generated

significantly more eWOM than other content strategies among tourists interested in rural and sustainable tourism; however, research in this area remains limited. Based on the above, the following non-directional hypothesis is proposed:

H4. Content strategy employed in posts by sustainable hotels influences eWOM.

The following figure (Figure 1) presents the research model:



**Figure 1.** Investigation Model

Source: Elaborated by the authors

## METHODS

### Sample description

Study sample consists of 10 hotels in the Amazon region, selected based on their high positioning on Instagram (over 10,000 followers) and their focus on sustainability. This selection includes geographic diversity across five countries: four hotels from Brazil (Hotel 1Lugar, Juma Amazon Lodge, Cristalino Lodge, Hotel Juma Opera), two from Ecuador (Macas Glamping and Kapawi), two from Peru (Irapay Amazon Lodge and Tree House Lodge), one from Colombia (Hotel Amazon), and one from Bolivia (Atarisi Lodge). The 100 most recent posts from each establishment were analyzed, resulting in a total of 1,000 Instagram posts. This methodology captured approximately four months of social media activity for most hotels, which, according to [Ashley Tuten \(2015\)](#), exceeds the optimal period for observing the diversity of digital marketing strategies in this type of study.

### Data collection

Content analysis was used to measure the independent variables related to Instagram posts, as this technique has been

widely applied in marketing and advertising to review messages in various formats ([Vlachvei & Notta, 2023](#)). To ensure objectivity, two independent coders — graduate students with experience in content marketing — were involved. These coders underwent a rigorous two-week training process, which included:

- (a) Theoretical sessions on the conceptual and operational definition of all variables in the research model.
- (b) Practical coding exercises with representative examples of each variable.
- (c) Group discussions to resolve doubts and unify coding criteria.
- (d) A pilot test with 50 posts not included in the final sample.

Additionally, an external validation of the coding process was conducted, involving two experts in digital marketing and hotel sustainability who reviewed and validated the established coding criteria.

Subsequently, the coders were asked to independently operationalize 20% of the total sample of posts (200 posts), and [Krippendorff's alpha coefficient \(2018\)](#) was calculated to measure inter-coder reliability. Satisfactory values above 0.8 were obtained for each variable, surpassing the recommended threshold and ensuring the reliability

of the coding. In cases where initial discrepancies were found, the coders and the principal investigator discussed them until reaching a consensus, thereby reinforcing the consistency of the coding process. Table 1 summarizes the coding details, including the analyzed variables and their respective reliability coefficients.

**Table 1.** Variable coding and reliability coefficients.

Variable	Coding	Krippendorff's alpha
eWOM	Comment count on the post (from 0 to $\infty$ )	1
	Like count on the post (from 0 to $\infty$ )	1
Message format	Image (0-1), video (0-1), other formats (infographics, maps, etc.) (0-1)	0.90
Spokespersons	Spokesperson presence (0-1)	0.82
Message appeal	Informational (0-1), entertainment (0-1), transactional (0-1), social (0-1)	0.87
Content strategy	Sustainability and conservation (0-1), biodiversity and wildlife (0-1), culture (0-1), adventure/sport (0-1), gastronomy and bar (0-1), facilities/rest (0-1), events (0-1), service focus (0-1), family activities (0-1), testimonials (0-1), other content (0-1)	0.81

Note. Elaborated by the authors.

## Empirical analysis

After operationalizing the Instagram posts and identifying the strategies employed by sustainable hotels in the Amazon, an empirical model was estimated to establish the influence of these posting strategies on eWOM metrics. First, it was evaluated whether the independent variables included in the research model met the multicollinearity assumption. Accordingly, an ordinary least squares (OLS) regression model was applied, followed by the variance inflation factor (VIF) test, which detects perfect collinearity issues. From this analysis, all variables met the recommended VIF values according to [Hair et al. \(2010\)](#) (between 0.02 and 4), except for the variables corresponding to formats (video and image), which exceeded the recommended threshold (18.11 and 17.98, respectively). Given the high negative correlation between the image and video variables, it was decided to retain only the image format variable in the model for several reasons. First, the relationship between the two is mutually exclusive, as in most of the posts analyzed, the presence of an image excluded the presence of a video and vice versa. Additionally, by including only the image format variable, it functions as a dichotomous variable that captures the presence of both images and videos: when image format takes a value of 1, it indicates the presence of an image, while a value of 0 implies the presence of a video or, in rare cases, the absence of both. This approach adds parsimony to the model, simplifying it without losing explanatory power, as the presence or

absence of image format implicitly provides information about video usage.

After verifying compliance with the multicollinearity assumption, the second step was to analyze the distribution of the dependent variables to determine the most appropriate regression model. Initially, smoothed density plots were examined, and Shapiro-Wilk tests were applied to assess whether the likes and comments variables followed a normal distribution. However, both processes indicated a lack of normality. This outcome was expected, as likes and comments are count variables, characterized by marked positive skewness and the presence of outliers, which are typical of count data on social media. These outliers were retained in the analysis because they represent real and potentially valuable interactions, with highly viral or popular posts being an integral part of the phenomenon under study.

Typically, count variables are modeled using Poisson regression, which is suitable for this type of data and inherently incorporates a logarithmic transformation. This transformation helps address nonlinearity and heteroscedasticity commonly present in count data. However, Poisson models sometimes struggle with data overdispersion. Thus, a good alternative is to apply negative binomial (NB)<sup>2</sup> regression models, which better handle overdispersion and improve coefficient estimation.

Given the nature of the data, both models (Poisson and NB) were applied, and the Akaike information criterion (AIC) and Bayesian information criterion (BIC)

were compared to determine which model provided a better fit. This comparison allowed for evaluating the suitability of each model in terms of its ability to handle overdispersion and accuracy in parameter estimation. The final model selection was based on the one with the lowest values for both criteria, indicating greater predictive efficiency and a better balance between model complexity and fit to the observed data. Table 2 below presents the AIC and BIC results obtained from the tested models.

**Table 2.** Statistical models with AIC and BIC results.

Model	AIC	BIC
Poisson (likes)	464,262.3	464,326.1
BN (likes)	12,749.12	12,817.83
Poisson (comments)	49,278.76	49,342.56
BN (comments)	5,029.20	5,097.91

Note. Elaborated by the authors.

As shown in Table 2, it is evident that the negative binomial (NB) regression model provides a better fit for both variables, given that the AIC and BIC values are significantly lower compared to those of the Poisson model. Therefore, it was decided to apply an NB regression model.

It is essential to highlight that count models, such as Poisson and negative binomial (NB), offer additional advantages compared to ordinary regression models, especially in their capacity to include exposure effects. These effects allow for adjusting the variability of the dependent variables based on external factors not directly considered in the models. In this study, the follower count of each sustainable hotel on Instagram was incorporated as an exposure effect. This inclusion allows us to evaluate how the follower base influences the effectiveness of digital marketing strategies, particularly in terms of likes and comments. Thus, the impact of each hotel's profile visibility and reach on generated interactions can be controlled, providing a more accurate analysis of the dependent variables' behavior. Accordingly, the following equation was applied:

$$\begin{aligned} \text{Log}(Y_j) = & \alpha + \beta_1 FM + \beta_2 UP + \beta_3 AO + \beta_4 AF + \beta_5 AE + \\ & \beta_6 ES + \beta_7 EB + \beta_8 EC + \beta_9 EA + \beta_{10} EID + \beta_{11} EV + \\ & \beta_{12} EF + \beta_{13} ET + \text{Log}(Fw) \end{aligned} \quad (1)$$

Where the logarithm of  $Y_j$  corresponds to the dependent variable, which can assume one of two values (likes and comments).  $\alpha$  acts as the constant term in the equation. FM indicates the image format, and UP refers to the use of spokespersons. AO encompasses other message appeals, including transactional and social appeals, which are combined due to their low frequency of occurrence. AF corresponds to informational appeal, while AE refers to entertainment appeal. Additionally, ES, EB, EC, EA, EID, EV, EF, and ET represent strategies related to sustainability, biodiversity, cultural, adventure or sports, facilities and rest, events, family, and testimonials, respectively. Finally, the term  $\text{log}(Fw)$  reflects exposure, which in this case corresponds to the number of followers on Instagram for each sustainable hotel profile.

## RESULTS

A total of 1,000 posts shared on Instagram by ten sustainable hotels in the Amazon region were analyzed, with 100 posts per hotel. Tables 3 and 4 present descriptive results for continuous and categorical variables. Regarding the continuous statistics, the Instagram profiles analyzed have an average of 53,816 followers with a standard deviation of 32,691. The average likes per post is 273.1, with high variability reflected in a standard deviation of 577.7, while comments average 21.57 but show even greater variability, with a standard deviation of 471.7.

As for the categorical variables, the image format is the most used, appearing in 83.3% of cases, while the video format is used in 16.7% of cases, and other formats in only 0.3%. This highly skewed distribution led to the exclusion of the 'other formats' category from the analysis. This decision was based on two key considerations. First, including a category with such a low frequency (0.3%) could introduce statistical noise in the models without providing substantial information. Second, the extremely limited number of cases in this category would not allow for robust statistical inferences.

Regarding the use of spokespersons, they appear in 45.8% of the posts. In terms of appeals, entertainment is the most common at 68.6%, followed by informational (6.3%), transactional (2%), and social (0.5%). This distribution led to the combination of transactional and social appeal into a single variable.

Finally, the most frequently used content strategies in the study are biodiversity, used in 62.2% of cases, and facilities and rest, appearing in 62.8%



of posts. In contrast, strategies focused on events and family activities are less common, present in 3.2% and 4.2% of cases, respectively. Other strategies include

sustainability (21.4%), cultural (13.3%), and adventure or sport (12.2%), reflecting diversity in the marketing approaches used to attract the audience.

**Table 3.** Descriptive statistics for continuous variables.

Variable	Mean	Std. Dev	Min	Max
Instagram followers	53,816	32,691	14,873	110,258
Likes	273.116	577.751	0	8,997
Comments	21.57	471.741	0	14,900

Note. Elaborated by the authors.

**Table 4.** Descriptive statistics for categorical variables.

Variable	Frequency	Relative frequency
Image format	833	83.30%
Video format	167	16.70%
Other formats	3	0.30%
Spokespersons	458	45.8%
Informational appeal	63	6.30%
Entertainment appeal	686	68.6%
Transactional appeal	20	2%
Social appeal	5	0.5%
Sustainability strategy	214	21.40%
Biodiversity strategy	622	62.2%
Cultural strategy	133	13.3%
Adventure-sport strategy	122	12.2%
Facilities-rest strategy	628	62.8%
Service-focused strategy	3	0.30%
Events strategy	32	3.2%
Family activities strategy	42	4.2%
Testimonial strategy	41	4.1%

Note. Elaborated by the authors.

After analyzing the descriptive results, negative binomial regression (NB) models were estimated for likes and comments (see Table 5). First, the model as a whole is significant, as the likelihood ratio (LR) statistic is significant at the 99% level. Additionally, the likelihood ratio test shows that overdispersion is adequately corrected by the NB model rather than the Poisson model, indicating that the NB model fits the dataset better.

Regarding the dependent variables included in the likes model, the image format showed a significant negative effect compared to videos ( $\beta = -0.913$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ), indicating a decrease in the number of likes when this format is used, supporting hypothesis H1. Strategies related to biodiversity ( $\beta = 0.459$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ) and facilities for rest ( $\beta = 0.475$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ) exhibited significant positive effects. On the other hand, the cultural strategy showed a significant negative effect ( $\beta = -0.277$ ,  $p < 0.05$ ). These results confirm H4.

The comments model revealed both similar and distinct patterns. The image format also had a significant negative effect ( $\beta = -0.602$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ), again supporting H1. However, significant positive effects were observed for informational appeal ( $\beta = 0.872$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ) and other appeals ( $\beta = 3.167$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ), supporting H3. Additionally, significant positive effects were found in the sustainability strategy ( $\beta = 0.113$ ,  $p < 0.05$ ), adventure and sports ( $\beta = 0.730$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ), facilities for rest ( $\beta = 0.946$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ) and testimonials ( $\beta = 0.590$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ) along with a significant negative effect for the cultural strategy, which remained the same as with likes ( $\beta = -0.522$ ,  $p < 0.05$ ). These results support hypothesis H4.

However, the lack of statistical significance in the spokesperson use variable in both the likes and comments models ( $\beta = 0.131$ ,  $p > 0.01$  y  $\beta = 0.066$ ,  $p > 0.01$ ), rejects hypothesis H2.

**Table 5.** Estimation of empirical models.

	Likes	Comments
Image Format	-0.913 (***)	-0.602 (***)
Video Format	0.131	0.066
Other formats	0.060	0.872 (***)
Spokespersons	0.014	0.013
Informational appeal	0.238	3.167 (***)
Entertainment appeal	0.061	0.113 (**)
Transactional appeal	0.459 (***)	0.155
Social appeal	-0.277 (**)	-0.522 (**)
Sustainability strategy	0.244	0.730 (***)
Biodiversity strategy	0.475 (***)	0.946 (***)
Cultural strategy	-0.154	-0.227
Adventure-sport strategy	0.053	0.092
Facilities-rest strategy	-0.074	0.590 (***)
Constant	1.821	-2.680
Followers	Exposure	Exposure
Pseudo R2	8,23%	11,35%
LR X2 (13)	170.35 (***)	633.49 (***)
LR test alpha	4.5e+05 (***)	3.4e+04 (***)

Nota. Elaborated by the authors. \*\*\*p < 0.01, \*\*p < 0.05, \*p < 0,1

## DISCUSSION

The analyses conducted in this research provide valuable insights into how social media MC strategies influence eWOM for sustainable hotels in the Amazon region. The analysis of 1,000 Instagram posts from ten sustainable hotels reveals interesting patterns in the effectiveness of different formats, appeals, and content strategies.

To begin with, the finding that the image format has a significant negative effect compared to videos, both for likes and comments, is particularly noteworthy. This result contradicts the common practice observed in the sample, where 83.3% of posts use images; however, it aligns perfectly with the media richness theory proposed by [Lengel and Daft \(1984\)](#) and previous research. In this regard, [Shahbaznezhad et al. \(2021\)](#) argue that richer formats, such as videos, offer a more immersive and multisensory experience, which could explain their greater effectiveness in generating eWOM. This finding suggests that sustainable hotels in the Amazon could benefit by increasing their use of video content, leveraging the visual and auditory richness of their unique surroundings to create more engaging experiences for their audience.

It is interesting to note that this result contrasts with the findings of [Aydin et al. \(2021\)](#) in his study of luxury hospitality facilities in Turkey using Facebook. In that context, content with images had a positive effect on

follower engagement. This difference could be attributed to the distinct expectations and behaviors of users on different social media platforms, as well as differences in the tourism context.

The significant positive impact of biodiversity and facilities/rest strategies on likes highlights the importance of these themes for the audience of sustainable hotels. This result aligns with U&G theory ([Katz et al., 1973](#)), suggesting that this type of content fulfills users' needs for knowledge about the unique nature of the region and for escapism or aesthetic pleasure. The effectiveness of these strategies may be attributed to their ability to highlight unique aspects of the Amazonian experience, combining fascination with biodiversity and the appeal of comfortable facilities in an exceptional natural environment. This focus on biodiversity and facilities/rest appears specific to the Amazon context. Other studies, such as [Ferrer-Rossel et al. \(2019\)](#) found that hotel customers in Spain tend to focus more on hotel services. This suggests that content strategy should be tailored to the specific context of the tourism destination.

Worth noting that the cultural strategy had a significant negative effect on both likes and comments, contrasting with the usual importance attributed to cultural authenticity in sustainable tourism ([Albert et al., 2023](#)). This may be due to the fact that the cultural content shared by the analyzed hotels is not visually appealing to Instagram users, who prioritize visual content; it may also lack relevance, as followers of these

hotels may be more interested in natural and comfort-related aspects than in cultural ones. Additionally, the complexity of cultural messaging may hinder its effective communication in a brief, visual format like Instagram, generating less interest. On the other hand, audience fatigue from this type of content may occur, and some representations may fail to meet expectations of authenticity or respect, potentially provoking negative reactions (Menon et al., 2019).

In the comments model, the significant positive effect of informational appeal and other appeals (including transactional and social) suggests that content providing useful information or inviting social interaction generates more dialogue. This finding aligns with U&G theory, indicating that this type of content fulfills users' needs for information and social connection (Whiting & Williams, 2013). Notably, the strategies of sustainability, adventure/sport, facilities/rest, and testimonials had significant positive effects on comments. This suggests that these themes not only capture the audience's attention but also motivate active participation in conversation. This finding aligns with Molina et al. (2020) in traditional tourism, who found that emotional messages tend to be more effective than informational messages in many cases. This suggests that, regardless of the platform, content that evokes emotions and promotes interaction encourages engagement.

The effectiveness of the sustainability strategy in generating comments is particularly relevant, given these hotels' focus on sustainable tourism. This result aligns with observations by Oliveira et al. (2023) regarding the growing demand for a more environmentally conscious tourism market. Additionally, the effectiveness of testimonials in generating comments underscores the importance of eWOM in the tourism sector. As noted by Asanwati et al. (2022), testimonials seem to act as catalysts for further eWOM, creating a positive feedback loop where shared experiences encourage others to share their own.

It should be noted that the use of spokespersons did not show a significant effect in either model, despite being present in 45.8% of posts. This finding contrasts with previous studies that have found positive effects of using celebrities or influencers on social media engagement (Andrade et al., 2021; Djafarova & Rushworth, 2020). From the perspective of the source credibility model (Hovland et al., 1953), this could suggest that, in the specific context of Amazonian sustainable hotels, the perceived credibility of spokespersons is not significantly contributing to message persuasion. Instead, the authenticity and natural appeal of the destination seem to be more important to the audience. It is also relevant to

consider that influencer authenticity may be compromised by perceptions of 'greenwashing' practices, which could undermine both the spokesperson's credibility and that of the sustainable hotel they promote (Pimonenko et al., 2020). This risk underscores the importance of transparent and consistent communication in content marketing strategies for sustainable tourism, where the authenticity of the message should align with the hotel's actual sustainability practices.

Finally, the difference in factors influencing likes and comments suggests varying levels of engagement. While strategies focused on biodiversity and facilities/rest generate more likes, a broader range of strategies and appeals is needed to prompt comments. This may indicate that likes reflect quick, superficial interaction, based on visual appeal or immediate emotion, while comments represent deeper engagement, requiring more time and cognitive effort from users.

For hotels, this finding implies that if the goal is to maximize visibility and garner more likes, content should focus on visually appealing aspects, such as biodiversity and facilities. On the other hand, if the aim is to promote deeper interaction, content should be more informative, addressing topics like sustainability, adventure, or testimonials, and include calls to action that encourage participation. A balanced strategy that combines both approaches may be the most effective, ensuring both visibility and an active, engaged community.

However, it is important to acknowledge certain limitations of the study. External variables, such as tourism seasonality or paid marketing campaigns, were not controlled for and may have influenced engagement levels. For instance, during peak season, increased travel planning might have led to a general rise in interaction, while paid campaigns could have artificially amplified the visibility of certain posts, potentially biasing the results. Recognizing these limitations highlights areas for further research to understand engagement dynamics more accurately.

## CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This study provides an in-depth look at the effectiveness of social media content marketing strategies for sustainable hotels in the Amazon region, offering valuable conclusions and practical recommendations for industry professionals.

One of the most significant findings is the superiority of video format over images in generating engagement, both in likes and comments, within

the analyzed sample. This finding contradicts the current prevailing practice of primarily using images. It is recommended as a top priority that Amazonian sustainable hotels increase their production and use of video content. Videos can more effectively capture the sensory richness of the Amazon experience, from jungle sounds to wildlife movement, creating a more immersive connection with the audience.

Another important conclusion is the effectiveness of biodiversity and facilities/rest strategies in generating likes. This suggests that followers of these hotels particularly value content that highlights the natural uniqueness of the Amazon and the comfort provided within this environment. It is recommended that hotels maintain a strong focus on these aspects in their social media content, seeking creative ways to present local biodiversity and hotel amenities attractively and authentically.

The negative effect of the cultural strategy on engagement is a finding that deserves special attention. This does not necessarily mean that cultural content should be abandoned, but rather that its presentation should be reconsidered. It is recommended that hotels experiment with more interactive and engaging ways to present cultural content, possibly integrating it more closely with nature and comfort experiences that have proven popular.

The effectiveness of informational content and other appeals (transactional and social) in generating comments suggests that the audience values useful information and interaction opportunities. It is recommended that hotels incorporate more educational content about the Amazon, its ecosystems, and sustainable practices, as well as create more opportunities for direct interaction with followers, such as open-ended questions or contests. The positive impact of sustainability, adventure/sport, and testimonial strategies on comments indicates that these themes resonate particularly well with the audience and foster conversation.

It is noteworthy that some variables, such as the use of spokespersons, did not show statistical significance in our study. This suggests that not all marketing strategies have the same impact on engagement, and hotels should focus their efforts on the tactics that proved most effective.

It is recommended that hotels adopt a more strategic and data-driven approach to their social media content marketing. To this end, it is essential to use analytical tools that allow for regular content performance monitoring and to establish clear key performance indicators (KPIs) to measure the success of different

types of posts. Additionally, conducting A/B tests will help optimize formats and messaging, maximizing their effectiveness. Finally, designing a content calendar that balances the various strategies identified as successful in this study will ensure a consistent and results-oriented approach.

Finally, it is crucial to recognize that these recommendations are based on a limited sample and a specific context. Hotels are encouraged to adapt these strategies to their particular situation, considering factors such as their specific location, target audience, and available resources. The implementation of these recommendations should be gradual and accompanied by constant monitoring to assess their effectiveness in each particular case.

## LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE RESEARCH DIRECTIONS

Although this study provides valuable insights into content marketing strategies for sustainable hotels in the Amazon, it is essential to recognize its limitations and consider future research directions. A significant limitation is the exclusive focus on Instagram. While Instagram is an important platform for visual marketing in tourism, other social networks such as Facebook, X, or TikTok may exhibit different dynamics. To address this limitation, future research could expand the scope of analysis. A comparative study including multiple social media platforms would provide a more holistic and representative view of digital marketing strategies in the sustainable tourism sector in the Amazon. Additionally, exploring how differences in demographic characteristics of users on each platform, as well as their specific functionalities, influence the effectiveness of content marketing strategies would be valuable. This broader approach would not only enrich the understanding of current practices but could also reveal unexplored opportunities for promoting sustainable hotels in the Amazon region.

Another limitation is the small sample size. However, it is important to note that the selected hotels are those with the highest engagement on Instagram, lending validity to the sample despite its size. Nonetheless, the results may not be fully representative of the entire Amazon region. Future studies could benefit from a larger and more diverse sample of hotels, as well as a longitudinal approach that captures seasonal variations in engagement.

Moreover, the study focused on quantitative eWOM metrics (likes and comments) but did not delve into a qualitative analysis of comment content or other forms of engagement, such as sharing or saving posts.

Future studies could incorporate automated sentiment analysis of comments, combined with interviews or focus groups, to gain deeper insights into tourists' perceptions. Additionally, considering additional engagement metrics would allow for a more comprehensive understanding of audience interaction with content. Although the study controlled for the follower count effect, it did not consider other potentially influential factors such as posting time, hashtag use, or posting frequency. These factors could be explored in future research to provide a more complete picture of the determinants of social media engagement.

A particularly interesting future research direction would be to examine how social media content marketing strategies translate into actual purchasing behaviors, such as hotel bookings or website visits. This would require integrating social media data with sales and web traffic data. Another potential research area is the impact of social media platform regulations and policies on content marketing strategies. For example, how changes in Instagram's algorithms affect the visibility and engagement of different types of content.

Finally, given the focus on sustainable tourism, it would be valuable to investigate how social media content influences tourists' sustainability perceptions and behaviors. This could involve studies that combine social media content analysis with surveys or interviews with tourists to explore how content marketing can promote more sustainable tourism practices. This line of

research could be conducted through a combination of social media content analysis and surveys administered to tourists following their interaction with content. These surveys would assess whether there was an increase in awareness or intention to adopt more sustainable behaviors. Additionally, in-depth interviews could be conducted to explore how content marketing can promote more sustainable tourism practices in the long term.

## NOTES

1. It refers to the exchange of opinions, recommendations, or comments about products or services through digital media, such as social networks, forums, or review platforms. This type of communication has a significant impact on consumers' perception and purchase decisions.
2. It is a statistical model used to analyze count data with overdispersion, meaning that the variability of the data exceeds what is expected under a Poisson distribution. This model is useful for predicting the frequency of events, such as the number of comments or reviews on digital platforms.

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