

Tourist photographs about the Spanish cultural heritage narrated in Game of Thrones¹

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Abstract. Due to the great success of Game of Thrones, numerous historical and cultural spaces in Spain have gained worldwide recognition. Tourists whose photographs capture unique settings found in the television series, project specific narrative spaces, and attempt to express the affective responses previously induced by their viewing experience. 452 images were projected to 214 spectators on Spanish heritage and cultural spaces that appear in Game of Thrones published on Instagram #juegosdetronosespaña and #juegodetronos. The results show that the affective dimension of the images alone does not explain their success on Instagram, suggesting that these images have a specific connotative structure that conveys messages that evoke feelings and memories at a symbolic level. Also, that the most successful specific visual compositions on Instagram are identified in denotative terms and the image attributes associated with these affective feelings. The concluded data has practical implications for destination management organizations (DMOs) and cultural managers.

Keywords: Photographic composition; destination image; connotative images; Instagram.

[es] Fotografías turísticas sobre el patrimonio cultural español narrado en Juego de Tronos

Resumen. Debido al gran éxito de Juego de Tronos, numerosos espacios históricos y culturales en España han ganado reconocimiento mundial. Turistas cuyas fotografías capturan escenarios únicos que se encuentran en la serie de televisión, proyectan espacios narrativos específicos e intentan expresar las respuestas afectivas inducidas previamente por su experiencia visual. Se proyectaron 452 imágenes a 214 espectadores sobre espacios patrimoniales y culturales españoles que aparecen en Juego de Tronos publicadas en Instagram #juegosdetronosespaña y #juegodetronos. Los resultados evidencian que la dimensión afectiva de las imágenes por sí sola no explica su éxito en Instagram, lo que sugiere que estas imágenes tienen una estructura connotativa específica que transmiten mensajes que evocan senti-

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mientos y recuerdos a nivel simbólico. También, que las composiciones visuales específicas de mayor éxito en Instagram se identifican en términos denotativos y los atributos de imagen asociados a estos sentimientos afectivos. Los datos concluidos tienen implicaciones prácticas para las organizaciones de gestión de destinos (OGD) y gestores culturales.

Palabras Clave: Composición fotográfica; Imagen de destino; imágenes connotativas; Instagram.

Summary: 1. Introduction. 2. Emotion induced by the destination image. 3. Method. 3.1. Variables and measurement scales. 4. Results. 5. Discussion. References.

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1. Introduction

There has been extensive scientific research conducted on tourist destination images and their relationship with the media (Llodrà-Riera et al., 2015; Martín-Santana et al., 2017; Dewi, 2016; Terzidou et al., 2018; Pan et al., 2014; Wang et al., 2019; Chen et al., 2021; Chi and Qu, 2008; Marine-Roig and Ferrer-Rosell, 2018; Kim and Yoon, 2003; Nieto-Ferrando et al., 2021, Gómez-Morales et al., 2022). The tourist destination image is a concept constructed through the tourist's rational and emotional interpretation and is thus the product of the relationship between reason and emotion (Baloglu and McCleary, 1999; Baloglu and Brinberg, 1997). According to Baloglu and McCleary (1999, p. 892) the destination image is not only the result of marketing, communication, or promotion activities on a cognitive level, as there is also an affective level that is necessary to understand models interrelating brand and tourist destination. The image thus has two dimensions: affective (feelings) and cognitive (beliefs). The affective image is related to an individual's emotional response to a place or product, while the cognitive image represents the individual's knowledge about the place or the product features (O'Neill and Jasper, 1992). Personal factors related to cognitive (Hosany et al., 2007, p. 64) and affective processes (Qu et al., 2011, p. 467) are valid variables for analyzing traveler behavior and intentions to visit locations previously viewed in images created by other users. Previous research has shown that the affective evaluation of a destination was a significant indicator for a return visit, but that the cognitive dimension was not significant (Cai et al., 2004).

Tourism is a unique visual experience (MacKay and Fesenmaier, 1997) that is essentially about "consuming places" (Haldrup and Larsen, 2003, p. 24) with a unique and socially organized gaze (Urry and Larsen, 2011). Destination images create "supreme emotional moments" that make them extremely important for tourist management and marketing (Pan et al., 2014, p. 59).

The visual representation of a pleasant and desirable tourist destination will always be magical and unique (Saayman, 2007) indicating "the importance of identifying which image attributes are associated with these affective feelings" (Pan et al., 2014, p. 59).

Gartner (1993) has shown that the destination image is based more on tourist perceptions than on the objective reality of the destination itself; similarly, Gallarza et al., (2002) argue that the tourist destination image is a subjective concept, as it is

conceived as an internalization of tourist perceptions. Tourists relate to the culture, people, and environment of a location through visual discourse, constructed on the basis of a personal affective experience. These visual narratives can be described as tangible tools that allow us to identify the feelings of travelers about a particular tourist destination.

The relationship between audiovisual fiction, tourism, and the media in general will inevitably become more important in an increasingly mediatized and globalized world due to the reach of social media. Social media platforms and the internet in general are the main sources used by tourists to plan future trips or to remember places they have visited. Tourists today are less influenced by marketing approaches that use one-way communication and have shifted their attention to platforms like TripAdvisor (Okazaki et al., 2017, p. 115). According to a study by Booking.com (2019), 28% of travelers around the world choose accommodation that is attractive so that they can photograph it and share the pictures on social media. In these images, travelers are always looking for inspiration, individuality, and visibility. Social media are transforming the way that travelers and tourists look for, find, and read information on tourism providers and destinations. Travelers can now share their travel experiences on Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, or Instagram (Sigala et al., 2012).

The use of the destination image for promotional purposes has been consolidated in the last decade thanks to the development of social media. Destination images, posted on different online platforms and applications, are used by tourism providers, travel agents, and marketing managers to publicize tourist destinations. Some studies suggest that the internet complements the traditional channels for viewing tourist destination images (Beerli and Martin, 2004), while others define online spaces as the main sources of information (Hyun and O'Keefe, 2012). Another line of research focuses on the capacity for dissemination of these destination images exclusively on social media (Llodrà-Riera et al., 2015, p. 320), making it possible for a large number of users, including tourists and residents, to post images for other tourists to view whenever and wherever they want.

Social media make it easy for tourism providers and local marketing organizations to target their content directly at tourists (WTT 2011). Various studies have explored how tourists use online sites to obtain information that can be decisive for their choices of future tourist destinations (Munar, 2011; Llodrà-Riera et al., 2015). The fast-paced growth of online platforms and the rise of social media have changed the way destination images are distributed (Christodoulides et al., 2012), resulting in an approach that is more specialized and more quickly and effectively geared toward the user.

Social media content makes it possible for users to travel virtually to destinations appearing in films and series, and to access reviews by other users who have visited those destinations, so that they can integrate the experiences of other tourists and adapt them to their own criteria. In turn, once they travel to the destination themselves, these users will share their own information, emotions, and experiences online (Jacobsen and Munar, 2012, p. 43). Users give more credence to content generated by other users than they do to information provided by tourism organizations (Munar, 2011, p. 298). Tourists thus become prosumers of tourist destination images on their personal social media accounts, where they post images (photos and videos) in which they themselves, as well as their families and friends, are the protagonists. These tourists develop their own mental constructions or representations of the des-

mination images, adapting their content and personal attributes to their own beliefs, ideas, attitudes, and motivations (Beerli and Martin, 2004, p. 663). One of the social media platforms they use to do this is Instagram, a platform especially noted for the predominance of the visual component.

2. Emotion induced by the destination image

As noted above, tourists take an active role in the creation of destination images on their personal social media accounts. The information shared online has a significant influence on the process whereby people develop their own destination images (Lim et al., 2012). According to Chronis (2012), tourists act as story-builders whose main objective is to construct a historical narrative or a narrative of place based on the selection and integration of available sources, which means that before visiting a location the tourist can get involved in the story of the film or series, cultivating empathy with the narrative and its characters (Frost, 2010, p. 724).

The personal discovery of a tourist site is expressed first on the affective level, in a response that conditions subsequent knowledge about the location for potential future visitors. This is why it is important to understand the affective processes that tourists attribute to a location (Sherman et al., 1997) and which dimensions of the tourist destination images trigger these feelings (Pan et al., 2014). An effective destination image depends on its capacity to elicit emotions (Peirce and Ritchie, 2007, p. 76) and a visitor's emotional response to a tourist site is reflected in mental images (O'Neill and Jasper, 1992). The authors of visual images select the narrative space and choose a compositional point of view to reflect their own mental images (Osborne, 2000), sometimes in keeping with scenes from their favorite films or series.

Numerous studies have explored the destination image and its affective levels (Kim and Yoon, 2003; Chen and Tsai, 2007; Li et al., 2010; Chi and Qu, 2008; Lian and Yu, 2019; Zhang et al., 2020). However, the literature has given scant attention to the analysis of the types of visual images that trigger different types of feelings (Pan et al., 2014, p. 59). The results of such analysis could be used by tourism promoters to identify the kinds of visual images capable of creating a particular image in the minds of potential tourists (Croy, 2010) in order to optimize their tourism promotion strategies. The visual images created on tourist trips offer an especially important opportunity to analyze the lived experience of travelers based on their affective feelings. The huge quantity of visual images posted on different social media platforms are a good example of this, as the image of a destination involves emotional perceptions and feelings that tourists store in their memories (Cai, 2002, p. 723).

This study explores how the affective dimension of the destination is constructed through posts of photographs of Spanish locations featured in the series *Game of Thrones*. The complexity of its storyline and its diversity of characters make this series ideal for detailed discussion on social media platforms. Many viewers of the series used social media to analyze what was happening in each episode in real time. Moreover, the numerous parodies, analyses, and commentaries offered on each episode contributed to the exponential growth of the series. According to *The Hollywood Reporter*, the events unfolding from one episode to the next are shared among friends and other followers of the series and social media offers the ideal forum for

this. During the broadcast of each episode there were thousands of people commenting in real time on what was happening (Couch, 2014).

An original contribution of this study is its analysis of the affective processes of images (O'Neill and Jasper, 1992) on Instagram, whose narrative construction is based mainly on images created by users. It also proposes a methodological process to identify the formation of the destination's affective image and the compositional structure of the images that were most successful with users, i.e., images that were most effective for capturing the travel experience.

This study is situated conceptually and methodologically between academic research on tourism and analytical studies of the visual image. The objective of this interdisciplinary approach is to bring the perspectives of the two fields of study closer together and make the analysis of tourist images compatible with the perception of these images. This approach has practical implications for Destination Management Organizations (DMOs), for marketing professionals, and especially for future research that could take the established field of tourism studies in a new direction where visual analysis becomes of key importance in academic discussion.

Specifically, our study seeks to test the following hypothesis and answer the research question:

H1: The affective components included in Spanish destination images related to the series *Game of Thrones* should contain symbolic or connotative aspects to enjoy success on Instagram.

RQ1: What are the compositional features of the visual images of Spanish tourist attractions associated with *Game of Thrones* that were the most successful on Instagram?

3. Method

The units of analysis for this research were obtained directly using the two most popular hashtags for *Game of Thrones* on Instagram in Spain: #juegodetronosespaña (N=201) and #juegodetronos (N=251), (N total= 452). Under these hashtags, fans of the series posted numerous images that they themselves had created at the Spanish locations that appear in the series. A survey was taken of N=218 observers who had watched and were familiar with the series *Game of Thrones*, ranging from 23 to 34 years of age (M=26.37 years old); 56% female and 44% male. Respondents were split into two groups: the first group, comprising N=104 observers, viewed 226 images extracted at random from the sample and subsequently answered the survey questions; the second group, comprising N= 114 observers, viewed the other 226 images.

The images were screened with information on their geographical location only. In the survey conducted, the observers provided responses related to the categories discussed in the next section, referring to the independent, dependent, moderating, and connotative variables, and the compositional values of the images. Information was also obtained on the age and gender of the respondents. The image viewing and survey completion took place on March 1 and 3, 2021. There were 4 people who did not complete the survey, which is why the total number of valid surveys was N= 214.

3.1. Variables and measurement scales

The Instagram images that served as units of analysis were obtained using the hashtags #juegodetronosespaña and #juegodetronos. Numerous images created for advertising purposes or to promote characters in the story were eliminated from the sample, as was a large number of images that had not been taken by Instagram users at the tourist sites that had served as filming locations. The final sample thus only included images taken by Instagram users at the different Spanish locations where *Game of Thrones* was filmed, such as the Santa María Cathedral in Girona, Plaza de España in Seville, the Gaztelugatxe hermitage in Biscay, the Royal Alcázar in Seville, Alcazaba of Almería, the Mosque-Cathedral and Roman bridge of Córdoba, the Bardenas Reales badlands in Navarre, the Castle of Zafra in Guadalajara, the Castle of Almodóvar del Río in Córdoba, the beach at Zumaia in Gipuzkoa, Mesa Roldán Watchtower in Cabo de Gata, El Chorrillo in Almería, and Peñíscola in Castellón, among other sites of architectural or natural beauty in Spain.

Attributes that form part of the affective component of the image were included as an independent variable (X), using a bipolar semantic differential scale of 4 items and 7 points: (X¹) boring-fun $\alpha = .81$; (X²) stressful-relaxing $\alpha = .79$; (X³) depressing-exciting $\alpha = .80$; and (X⁴) unpleasant-pleasant $\alpha = .82$, following the proposals for empirical studies by authors like O'Neill and Jasper (1992), Baloglu and McCleary (1999), Baloglu (2001), Kim and Richardson (2003), Beerli and Martin (2004). To rate the responses, a 5-point Likert scale was used, ranging from very negative (1) to very positive (5).

The dependent variable (Y) contains quantitative data on the success of the image posted on Instagram reporting the number of "likes" received, as a voluntary indication of approval by users. "Likes" are common currency on social media platforms, directly indicating the user's positive reaction to the content, and thus constituting an index of the popularity and success of the post (Tifentale and Manovich, 2018, p. 171) or indicating a personal appreciation of the images viewed.

The hypothesis for this study is based on the premise that affective feelings (independent variable) included in the destination images predict or condition the success of posts on Instagram (dependent variable), and that this relationship can be affected by the moderating variable (M) (connotative image). The statistical analysis is aimed at finding evidence of the effect or degree of impact of the moderating variable on the relationship between the affective feelings elicited by images and the success of those images on Instagram. To this end, three regression analyses have been conducted, of X on Y, M on Y, and finally, the XM interaction on Y. This last line of regression is the most important, as it indicates whether the M variable functions as a moderator of the effect of X on Y. This statistical process has been applied to each dimension of the bipolar semantic differential scale (X¹ to X⁴).

The moderating variable (M) analyzes the connotative images, those that carry a significant symbolic charge by using filters, effects, and compositions that can produce oneiric visual effects, for example, creating a magical, unreal, timeless fantasy atmosphere, showing forces of nature or gloomy, enigmatic, or mysterious architecture, among other possibilities, in keeping with the epic fantasy of *Game of Thrones*. Historic cities suggest a mixture of heritage and magic, which brings tourists closer to these destinations (Lovell, 2019, p. 462). The images can produce emotional effects arising from the arrangement of their iconic elements (Petersen, 2011) but they

can also evoke concepts, profiles, and atmospheres outside their own reality, with the aim of distorting the information to serve the ends of the sender (Yoka and Kourdis, 2014, p. 511).

The most common meanings ascribed to images exist on their denotative level, while the more symbolic, conceptual meanings are established on the connotative level, and connotations that arouse emotions are considered components of destination images (Mazanec, 2010). The connotative image is concerned more with abstract associations, ideas, and values than those conveyed through denotative descriptions (Barthes, 1977). The design and manipulation of images can sometimes underscore the symbolic or connotative quality of the image (Ng and Koller, 2013, p. 135). This symbolic level in the image occurs first of all due to a process of similarity to the settings in the series. According to its traditional definition, similarity is an organizing principle whereby individuals define objects through a comparison process (Tversky, 1977) and through a memory process (Lefkoff-Hagius and Mason, 1993).

The recently coined term “deliberate metaphor” (Steen, 2008, p. 213) serves to underscore concepts inherent in and particular to images. Because a deliberate metaphor generally involves something more concrete that represents a more abstract entity, it is useful for fulfilling the connotative function of images and conveying the conceptual meanings associated with them. In cases where the metaphor is the means of achieving this connotative process, this enhances the particular visual features that have the effect of making the receiver of the visual text recognize the symbolic meaning of an image that is also metaphorical (Ng and Koller, 2013, p. 141). The connotative purpose of the images, i.e., their connotative level of meaning, is associated with their capacity to capture the “unreal” with an under- or over-contextualized background, through their symbolic meanings, and these are conveyed through metaphor. The images from *Game of Thrones* analyzed on the connotative level (moderating variable) are the ones modified by the user through a process of similarity to the aesthetic of the series, the presence of the supernatural, the mythological fantasy world, magical atmospheres, dimly lit woods, and other iconographies that can be invoked in the viewer through the darkness and the musical leitmotifs (Wells-Lassagne, 2014, p. 17).

As this is a moderation analysis using a qualitative variable, the moderating variable (M) has had to be rated using the values $-.50$ to define low visual effects, and $.50$ to describe an image with a lot of visual effects. The 214 observers had to choose between these two values.

To round out the analysis of destination images related to *Game of Thrones* posted on Instagram, the images have also been rated from a denotative perspective, for those images that convey the visual message with their compositional features. Visual compositional techniques offer valuable information on the mechanism behind the narrative effects of the images (Benini et al., 2019). There is extensive research on the mechanism of narrative effects based on their composition, with abundant evidence that visual images can communicate ideas beyond those described literally. The *Game of Thrones* campaign in Northern Ireland took advantage of literary and television material to hook fans of both texts, it is an effective case study to understand what is called ‘tourism induced by adaptation’ (Peaslee, 2021, p. 225)

They can also convey semantically significant descriptions through their stylistic properties (Messaris, 1997) related to the angle and scale of the shot, for example (Meyrowitz, 1998). These stylistic properties convey a specific meaning and sym-

bolic information with cognitively complex messages (Messaris, 1997). The stylistic properties of images will only be discerned by spectators under two conditions: (1) when there is a high level of engagement with the stimulus; and (2) when the spectator is sensitized to the message received, i.e., the stylistic properties of the images effectively communicate a specific meaning only if it is accessible in the spectator's memory (Peracchio and Meyers-Levy, 2005). The images analyzed for this study meet these requirements, as they are images viewed by users who share an interest in the topic, are familiar with the locations and settings, and have interacted voluntarily and personally with the message on Instagram.

The stylistic properties of the images analyzed include the shot scale, which can elicit an almost physiological response in the spectator, especially on the levels of excitement (De Cesarei and Codispoti, 2008) attention (Reeves et al., 1999), memory (Bellman et al., 2009), and emotions (De Cesarei and Codispoti, 2008). The scale has extraordinary potential to influence the way narratives are processed and experienced by spectators (Benini et al., 2019; Baranowski and Hecht, 2014) and also directs the spectator's attention toward specific areas of the image (Carroll and Seeley, 2013). For this study, the following photographic scales have been considered ($M=2.46$, $SD=.670$): close-up; medium shot; and long shot. Recent findings indicate that close-ups can increase a viewer's theory of mind response toward a character (Rooney and Bálint, 2018) eliciting greater empathy and emotionality (Cutting and Armstrong, 2016) so that the character's emotions are better understood by viewers. Long shots tend to include more characters and wider surroundings, making them more suitable for understanding how characters relate to each other and position themselves in the space, and also for increasing the reality effect of a message (Benini et al. 2019, p. 592).

The analysis of stylistic properties also included the different angles used to capture the images ($M=1.39$, $SD=4.89$). In high-angle shots the camera is positioned above eye level, placing the spectator in a situation of visual superiority. In low angle-shots the narrative dimension is inverted, with the camera below the eye level of the character photographed, giving the character greater narrative weight for the spectator. The influence of camera angle on the spectator's judgment and empathetic response has been the subject of extensive research for decades (Kraft, 1987; Mandell and Shaw, 1973), finding that when characters are photographed from a low camera angle, so that the spectator seems to be looking up at them from below, they are judged more positively (for example, as bigger, stronger, or bolder) than when the camera angle is high, so that the spectator seems to be looking down on the object or character (Meyers-Levy and Peracchio, 1992). When the character appears to be at the spectator's eye level, with a normal camera angle, the spectator's judgement falls in between the two extremes.

Participation on social media is measured by the number of interactions that the user of a social media site has with a post, which is the number of "likes and shares," actions, and comments given to that post (Larsson, 2016, p. 276). There are, of course, many ways to calculate the user's engagement with a social media platform. Taking into account the specific features of each platform, we used the formula for calculating engagement proposed by Chen et al., (2021, p. 3). The formula is as follows: $[(\text{Number of "likes"} + \text{number of comments} + \text{number of shares}) / \text{number of visits}] \times 100$.

For descriptive purposes, we included variables related to who appears in the image (no visitor, only one character, two, three, or more) $\alpha = .79$ ($M = 2.19$, $SD =$

.914) and the gender of the people featured in the image (male, female, or both) $\alpha = .80$ ($M = 1.58$, $SD = .690$). Finally, the visual effects used on the images were also analyzed (color filters, immersive image, split image, and unedited image) $\alpha = .81$ ($M = 2.52$, $SD = .843$). The statistical analysis was performed with SPSS (v.12.IBM) and the moderation using the Process macro v.3.5, with 10,000 bootstrap samples (Hayes, 2018).

4. Results

First of all, the analysis of attributes that form part of the affective component, as an independent variable, yielded some notably homogeneous values. The results of the bipolar semantic differential scale for the boring-fun dimension (X^1) were $M= 4.30$; $SD=.345$; for the stressful-relaxing dimension (X^2), they were $M= 4.10$; $SD= .492$; for depressing-exciting (X^3) they were $M= 4.29$; $SD=.387$; and for unpleasant-pleasant (X^4) they were $M=4.17$; $SD=.387$. The mean of variables X^1 to X^4 was $M= 4.21$.

No significant differences were found in relation to the age [$F(3, 452) = .09$, $p < .750$] (Corrected Typified Residuals: 0.8; Cramér’s V: 2.12) or gender of the participants [$X^2(3, 452) = 3.70$, $p < .348$] (Corrected Typified Residuals: 0.3; Cramér’s V: 1.65). These data support the randomization of the process. The analysis of unstandardized regression between independent (X) and dependent (Y) variables found that affective qualities alone do not explain the level of success or “likes” for posts on Instagram, (X^1-Y) $p < .725$, (X^2-Y) $p < .636$, (X^3-Y) $p < .480$ and (X^4-Y) $p < .517$, i.e., there was no significant correlation.

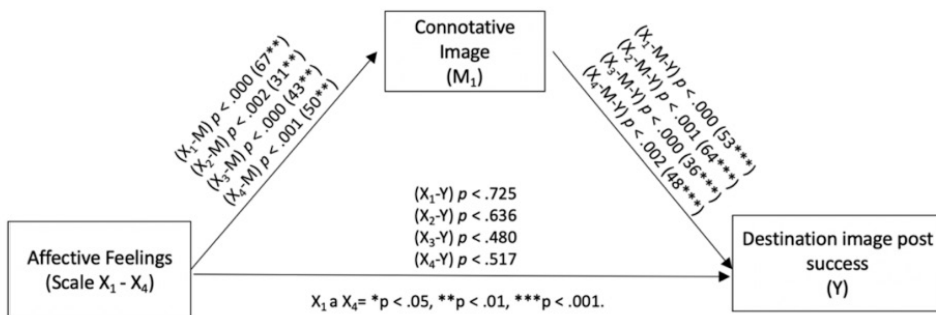


Figure 1. Conditional effect of affective feeling about photographs on Instagram (Own authoship)

According to Figure 1, these affective qualities are in turn significantly associated with the connotative values of the images, (X^1-M) $p < .000$, (X^2-M) $p < .002$, (X^3-M) $p < .000$ and (X^4-M) $p < .001$. Finally, the moderating variable (M) shows an intense causal relationship with the success of the post on Instagram, in all four affective dimensions (X^1-M-Y) $p < .000$, (X^2-M-Y) $p < .001$, (X^3-M-Y) $p < .000$ and (X^4-M-Y) $p < .002$, all with values above $p < .001$. The content of the moderating variable provides data on the mechanisms and processes that produce the effect, especially in relation to when and in what circumstances. The connotative component added to

the destination images obtained by the travelers themselves, in the form of compositional or color alterations—i.e., the use of aesthetics based on the series—has been found to be the explanatory variable for obtaining data on the reach of the images on Instagram. Based on these data and in response to hypothesis H1, it can be concluded that the moderating variable (M) is necessary to ensure the success of the Instagram posts analyzed based on their affective components.

In terms of visual composition, images taken from high angles are the most common (N=278; 60.6%), followed by low-angle shots (N=178; 39.4%), and a highly significant association was observed between this variable and the success of the images on Instagram [$X^2(217, 452) = 244.164, p < .009$] (Corrected Typified Residuals: 2.1; Cramér's V: 0.68). The most frequently used shot scale was the long shot (N=254; 56.2%), followed by the medium shot (N=153; 33.8%) and finally the close-up (N=45; 10%), and a significant correlation with the success of the post was found [$X^2(434, 452) = 502.191, p < .013$] (Corrected Typified Residuals: 2.6; Cramér's V: 0.82). The “likes” received by the images analyzed ranged from 6 to 16,200 (M= 563.44). Figure 2 indicates the “likes” received according to the narratives present in the images analyzed.

Comments labelled “A” are generic references written by Instagram users about the series, such as:

“Alcázar in Seville, a location shown in Game of Thrones.”

“San Juan de Gaztelugatxe. If you're a Game of Thrones fan... this place will surely be familiar to you.”

“Santa María Cathedral in Gerona. Lost again and again in the land of Game of Thrones.”

“Travelling around a little. Zafra Castle. Tower of Joy. Dorne.”

“A scene from #juegodetronos [Game of Thrones] was shot right on this balcony, as in the seventh season of the series the Almodóvar Castle became Highgarden, the kingdom of House Tyrell.”

Comments labelled “B” refer to invitations and recommendations made by users explicitly to visit the locations appearing in the series, such as:

“Come if you're a mega-fan of the series Game of Thrones. The places you'll see in Alcázar are unmistakable.”

“You have to visit the Almodóvar Castle. It was one of the settings of Game of Thrones in Spain. The extras wore clothing from House Tyrell and House Lannister”

“Don't miss Dragonstone, the ancestral seat of House Targaryen; it's real and it's in Spain. Perhaps one of the most iconic places in the series and most spectacular.”

“This should be your next trip. Never mind the 6-kilometre pathway to reach the freaky castle where Jon Snow of Game of Thrones was born.”

	Likes	Shares	Comment A	Comment B	Engagement
Scale					
Close-up	25467 (10)	19286 (13.9)	17987 (19)	18041 (16.9)	3.5%
Medium shot	86080 (33.8)	48424 (34.9)	29821 (31.5)	29784 (27.9)	8.7 %
Long shot	143127 (56.2)	71041 (51.2)	46863 (49.5)	58927 (55.2)	14.2 %
Angle					
High angle	154333 (60.6)	87968 (63.4)	56614 (59.8)	59995 (56.2)	9.3 %
Low angle	100342 (39.4)	50783 (36.6)	38058 (40.2)	46757 (43.8)	7.1%
Visual effects					
Chromatic filters	140835 (55.3)	78533 (56.6)	56141 (59.3)	60635 (56.8)	12.9%
Immersive image	22411 (8.8)	12626 (9.1)	11171 (11.8)	13130 (12.3)	4.3%
Split image	12479 (4.9)	9435 (6.8)	4828 (5.1)	6618 (6.2)	2.1%
Unedited image	78949 (31)	38156 (27.5)	22532 (23.8)	26367 (24.7)	7.9%

N (%)
 Total images, N=452
 Total likes, N= 764023
 Total shares, N= 416252
 Engagement: no. of likes + no. of comments+ no. of shares/no. of views x 100
 Comment A: References to series *Game of Thrones*, N=94673
 Comment B: Favorable references to place and invitation to visit it, N=106753

Figure 2. Success of different photographic compositions (Own autorship)

In response to the research question (RQ1), with respect to the scale (see Figures 3 and 4), long shots are the most widely accepted among Instagram users (N=143127; 56.2%). Moreover, images containing wide shots are the ones that have been shared the most (N=71041; 51.2%), that most often refer to the series *Game of Thrones* in their comments (N=46863; 49.5%), and that most often include invitations to visit the location shown (N=58927; 55.2%).



Figure 3. Scale Castle of Zafra (Campillo de Dueñas, Huadalajara) (Source Instagram: @adrilojea)



Figure 4. Scale Castle of Zafra (Campillo de Dueñas, Huadalajara) (Source: Picture from the film)

With respect to the angle of the images (see Figures 5 and 6), the images taken from a higher angle are the ones that have received the most “likes” (N=154333; 60.6%) and the ones that have been shared the most (N=87968; 63.4%). The majority of comments on high-angle shots have been comments making reference to the series (N=56614; 59.8%) and to the filming location (59995; 56.2%).



Figure 5. Angle Gaztelugatxe (Bermeo, Biscay) (Source Instagram: @albaviajandoporelmundo)



Figure 6. Angle Gazteligatxe (Bermeo, Biscay) (Source: Picture from the film)

The most successful visual effects among Instagram users are changes to the coloring of the image (N=140835; 55.3%), followed by shots that have been posted without any kind of editing (N=78949; 31%). Images edited with polarizing filters, ultraviolet light, color filters or shading are the ones that have been shared the most (N=78533; 56.6%) and that have received the most comments A (N=56141; 59.3%) and B (N=60635; 56.8%) (see Figures 7 and 8) and immersive image (Figures 9 and 10).



Figure 7. Visual effects Castle of Almodóvar del Río (Córdoba) (Source: Picture from the filme)



Figure 8. No visual effects Castle of Almodóvar del Río (Córdoba) (Source Instagram: @castillodealmodobar)



Figure 9. Immersive image Conjunto histórico de Cáceres (Cáceres, Extremadura) (Source Instagram: @coruelbarbasoficial)



Figure 10. Immersive image Rea Alcázar de Sevilla (Sevilla= (Source Instagram: @sarah_hepburn)

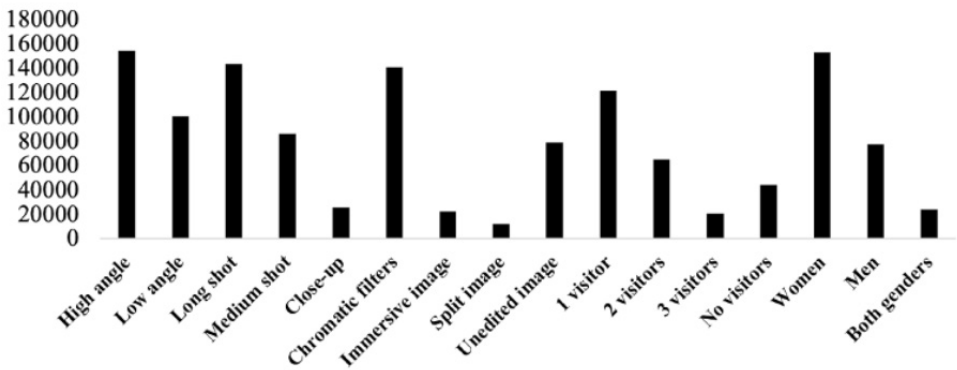


Figure 11. Likes/visual narrative (Own authoship)

In summary, the data suggest that the most successful Spanish destination images related to Game of Thrones on Instagram (see Figure 11) are high-angle long shots, shots with the presence of a female actor, shots with a single visitor or tourist in the image, and shots edited with a coloring effect.

5. Discussion

Game of Thrones has already become a cult phenomenon and is without doubt one of the most popular series of all time, with legions of fans all over the world. Filmed in multiple sites, Belfast, Northern Ireland, Malta, Scotland, Croatia, Iceland, the United States, Spain and Morocco and rolled over to six successful seasons by HBO, the GoT developed into a popular culture in its own right (Tzanelli, 2016, p. 3)

In 2017, tourism brought 172.9 billion euros into Spain, equivalent to 14.9% of the country's gross domestic product. The findings of Contu & Pau (2022) show the impact capacity of the successful GoT television series in a tourist destination, causing an increase in tourist performance. In Spain, 11.8% of GDP was generated by tourism in 2017, whereas in 2018 tourist arrivals have been 82.8 million (+1.1% compared to 2017) and have generated 89.8 billions of euros in international receipts (+3.3% compared to 2017). The shooting locations for Game of Thrones have become major attractions for thousands of Spanish followers, since Spain is home to more film locations for the series than any other country (Gail and Ruíz del Pozo, 2017).

The passage of the series' production team through various Spanish towns has prompted local authorities and residents to jump at the resultant tourism opportunities. A representative example is the town of Osuna, around 60 miles east of Seville. In 2015, Osuna saw a 75% increase in tourists over the previous year thanks to its connection with the mega-production, with 80% of tourists coming to the town solely for the purpose of visiting the bullring used for the series' emblematic dragon scene (Fernández, 2017). Social media are essential to sustain and build on this success with tourists for as long as possible. The vast number of destination images included on platforms like Instagram make it clear that tourism operators need to base their marketing strategies on the information provided by such images. Tourism campaigns should be adapted to the affective perspective of the photographers, who possess an emotional connection acquired from watching the series, which they transfer to their personal representations of these locations.

Gartner (1993) defined different types of images according to the agents involved in their construction. First of all, the covert, projected "induced image"; for example, Game of Thrones draws visitors to the tourist attractions represented in this case on Instagram. Secondly, the "organic perceived image", induced by the previous image. Thirdly, a new, "autonomous organic image" is projected. This autonomous projected image is potentially useful for Destination Management Organizations (DMOs) to create induced images, such as advertising, based on the visual representation inspired by the images provided by users, in this case on Instagram, which is the ultimate objective of this research.

For legal reasons, tourism service providers cannot use images posted by users on social media platforms for marketing purposes. This means that for the creation of successful marketing campaigns they have to consider which destination images are most effective in terms of virality, to develop brand policies and implement advertising campaigns that are more persuasive; this has been explored in this study and is supported by its results. As Munar (2011, p. 296) recommends, to develop effective advertising strategies and encourage tourism to specific destinations, it is necessary to analyze and assess the content produced by travelers themselves.

This study has numerous implications for tourist destination marketers, managers, and providers. It analyzes the level of success on Instagram of images constructed by tourists after comparing the real destination with the mental image they formed through viewing audiovisual content like series or films, with the intention of reducing the distance between the imagined space and the perceived location. Tourists explore places and reconstruct scenes from films and series with the aim of getting closer to the story and its characters; in other words, fusing the imaginary and real worlds (Reijnders, 2010, p. 45). Regardless of whether natural or artificial

landscapes are used to build worlds that physically exist —or have existed— to shape the vast empires of the imagination, the locations used become, if they were not already, cultural tourism destinations. Thus, screen fiction that crosses over into tangible reality is a tourism development model (Parramon, 2018, p. 101).

In the UK, with Titanic filming in Belfast, the ways in which the economy of the screen was connected to James Cameron's *Titanic* (1997) and HBO's *GoT* led to Belfast being viewed by all media as a modern and dynamic capital (Celik, 2019, p. 540). Due to the great success of *Game of Thrones*, numerous historical and cultural spaces in Europe, and specifically in Spain, have gained worldwide recognition. It is necessary to indicate that this recognition is linked to the fictitious heritage of cinematographic images. Through these narratives, an appropriation of historical identity and its places is made, a fictional heritage that rewrites the definition of history (Mathews, 2018, p. 92).

This cultural heritage has become the object of profound transformation influenced by popular culture. This patrimonial recognition is what Saarinen (2004, p. 166) called "discursive formation", which will emerge after the series is forgotten by its fans. We refer to the suspicions that these cultural spaces should be transformed by culture and tourism professionals to previous stages of *Game of Thrones*. This can cause historical and conceptual distortions that must be reoriented correctly to avoid losing these significant cultural destinations. This is a great social challenge.

A key finding of this research is that the most successful posts (i.e., with the most "likes" on Instagram) are the ones that refer to feelings, that offer a visual construction with affective elements, and that call on a symbolic perception, meaning a perception that is more connotative than denotative. We have also found that photographers who capture tourist destination images not only reproduce spaces but tell personal stories. In addition, we have provided a narrative typology for those images that are significantly more successful on the social media platform. This analysis may be more effective than the traditional "mashups" that combine the services of various web platforms and suffer from serious limitations.

Future studies could define whether the descriptive concepts proposed here are applicable only when spectators get emotionally involved in processing the images as opposed to observers who are not familiar with the audiovisual content and do not have their own constructed image of the destination; in other words, whether the analysis of success on Instagram of destination images is valid for spectators and future tourists not familiar with the film or series. It should also be borne in mind, as Peracchio and Meyers-Levy (2005, p. 34) demonstrate, that stylistic properties are not invariable, and that the different formal compositions can convey negative, positive, or other types of concepts in different situations such as lighting, exposure, color, or even the impact of the images appearing in video games (Dubois et al., 2020, p. 562).

Another study that the authors consider necessary to develop in the near future is one that analyses the degree of similarity between the filmic image and the image of the author or tourist, and to determine its degree of success on the networks. In other words, to verify the greater or lesser level of similarity, and whether the narrative changes applied to the images constructed and disseminated by the social networks correlate with the engagement of users in these networks.

Finally, the methodology developed here should be applied in future studies of different film genres and different social media platforms, with attention to the phe-

nomenon of fake images that can organize the immersive cognitive construction and the affective reach with consequences that are as yet unknown.

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