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URBAN STORIES AND DIGITAL PARTICIPATION: Paris as a Tourist Experience on TikTok

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ABSTRACT
In the context of the digital transformation of urban tourism, this study analyses the narrative strategies used on Paris's official TikTok account (@parisjetaime). Based on a content analysis of 124 videos (April 2023–March 2024), it explores visual, spatial, and commercial variables associated with user engagement. Results show that posts featuring parks, architecture, and daytime scenes generate higher interaction, while nighttime and promotional content tend to reduce it. The study concludes that Paris's narrative strategy relies on everyday aesthetics and emotional appeal, reinforcing its positioning as a cultural and experiential destination.

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1. Introduction

Social media has radically transformed the way tourist destinations communicate with their audiences, not only facilitating the dissemination of content but also enabling direct, emotional and participatory forms of interaction. This change has been especially relevant in urban tourism, where cities compete to capture the attention of potential travellers by building visual and symbolic imageries that resonate with the lifestyles and aspirations of contemporary audiences (Niewiadomski and Brouder, 2024). The communicative transformation of the tourist destination is no longer limited to the promotion of its tangible attractions but includes the production of digital experiences that anticipate, amplify and complement the physical visit (Zhang et al., 2021).

In this context, TikTok has emerged as a strategic platform for promoting cities, especially among young audiences. Its short-video-based design, discovery algorithm and spontaneous virilization potential have made this social network a priority channel for destination management organizations (Metzler and Garcia, 2024). Unlike more established platforms such as Instagram or Facebook, TikTok promotes an algorithmic logic that rewards creativity, spontaneity and active user participation, requiring public institutions to radically adapt their ways of communicating and narrating territories (Bhandari and Bimo, 2022).

Paris is a paradigmatic case for analyzing this evolution. Beyond its consolidated international tourism position, Paris has managed to renew its image through TikTok, partially moving away from monumental imagery to propose more every day, emotional and participatory micro-narratives. These new representations range from local culinary experiences to urban nightlife, shifting from a "tourist postcard" logic to one of "shared experience". Through these practices, the city communicates not only what can be seen or done but also how Paris can be felt and experienced firsthand.

Academic literature on the use of TikTok in tourism promotion has grown in recent years, with emphasis on the platform's potential to influence visitor intention, destination perception and user emotional engagement (Stankov et al., 2025; Chang et al., 2025). However, studies focused specifically on urban tourism -and even more so on specific cities- remain limited despite the fact that metropolitan destinations concentrate a large part of the production and consumption of digital tourism content (Tham et al., 2024; Wei et al., 2025). In particular, the case of Paris offers a unique opportunity to explore how a global city consolidates its digital narrative on an emerging platform like TikTok, combining traditional identity elements with participatory formats characteristic of the contemporary algorithmic culture.

This study aims to analyse the narrative strategies used by the official Paris tourism account on TikTok and to evaluate their impact on the various engagement metrics generated by users. Through the analysis of 100 posts published between April 2023 and March 2024, the aim is to identify the visual, thematic and symbolic resources that foster meaningful interaction in order to provide useful empirical evidence for tourism management in digital environments.

Based on this general objective, the following specific hypotheses are formulated:

- H1: Posts that feature local cuisine, nightlife or everyday urban scenes generate higher engagement rates than those focused on iconic monuments or landmarks.
- H2: Promotional content posted on TikTok by the official Paris tourism account, especially those related to shopping and hotel services, is negatively associated with engagement metrics on the platform.
- H3: The temporal setting of posts about Paris -particularly daytime videos versus nighttime ones- significantly influences the engagement generated on TikTok.
- H4: In tourism posts about Paris, an emotional narrative tone, as opposed to an informative or humorous one, is associated with greater levels of engagement in at least two metrics (likes and shares).

These hypotheses allow us to structure the empirical analysis and explore how certain narrative, visual and thematic decisions affect user digital interaction, understood as a form of symbolic resonance, active participation and co-construction of the urban imaginary (Schreiner et al., 2021). By focusing exclusively on a single case study, this study aims to contribute to a deeper, more situated understanding of urban digital tourism on next-generation platforms.

2. Theoretical Framework

Social media has profoundly reshaped the way tourist destinations communicate with their audiences, enabling more direct, emotional and participatory interaction with potential visitors. In the case of urban tourism, these platforms not only serve to showcase the physical attractions of a city but also to project its values, lifestyles and symbolic experiences, aspects that increasingly influence traveller decision-making (Gretzel et al., 2006; Tugores and Bonilla, 2023; Stankov et al., 2025). The digitalisation of tourism has generated a communication ecosystem in which users not only consume institutional content but also co-produce it, amplifying the narrative reach of campaigns through the logic of distributed participation (Sigala and Gretzel, 2017; Song et al., 2023).

In this environment, the concept of engagement has gained relevance as an indicator of success in tourism promotion. It is understood as a form of active, emotional and meaningful interaction with digital content (Munar and Jacobsen, 2014). Cities that generate engagement strengthen their visibility and positioning as culturally relevant destinations. They also strengthen emotional bonds with users that increase both the intention to visit and the desire to return (Sjafril et al., 2025). This symbolic dimension is essential in contemporary urban tourism, where digital representations -videos, images, sounds- mediate the experience of the place and merge the real with the imagined (Ravelli et al., 2024). Thus, social media not only expand the possibilities for promotion but also reshape the ways in which cities are perceived, narrated and consumed in the digital space (Hatuka et al., 2021).

Among these platforms, TikTok has taken on a central role. Thanks to its personalised recommendation algorithm, it allows even accounts with a small follower base to achieve a high level of visibility (Bhandari and Bimo, 2022). This discovery logic is supported by user creativity and the circulation of native formats such as challenges, duets or viral audios, which have been leveraged by brands and destinations to generate highly participatory campaigns (Shutsko, 2020). In the tourism sector, TikTok facilitates the creation of short, authentic, visual stories that connect emotionally with audiences, fostering a closer relationship between users and the places represented (Huang et al., 2024).

At the same time, TikTok not only promotes entertainment but also acts as a space for aesthetic validation and visual credibility. The popularity and style of content influence viewers' perceptions of authenticity and trust, creating an environment conducive to experiential marketing (Jin et al., 2025). The platform also democratises access to visibility, as it prioritises thematic relevance over previous popularity, which has modified the strategies of tourism institutions, which must now adapt their content to agile, visually powerful and emotionally resonant formats (Gillespie, 2022).

Engagement on TikTok is multidimensional: it is not limited to quantifiable metrics such as likes or views but includes the emotional resonance of the content, the quality of interactions and the active participation of users in the co-creation of meanings (Brodie et al., 2011; Naeem et al., 2023). Digital narratives play a central role in this construction. On TikTok, visual storytelling, the use of popular music, humour, authenticity and the presence of local creators are crucial for capturing attention and encouraging participation (Lee et al., 2018; Jo and Ahn, 2024). This logic is especially effective in urban tourism, where everyday settings—cafes, plazas, markets, transportation—can generate greater identification than iconic tourist spots (Stankov et al., 2025).

Added to this is the role of algorithmic factors, which determine the visibility of content and boost its virality. The strategic use of hashtags, visual effects and trending music, as well as collaborations with local influencers, reinforce the platform's participatory and community-based logic (Lee et al., 2025; Jiang et al., 2025). In this framework, engagement is understood as a shared narrative construction in which posters and interpreters co-create symbolic value around the destination (Pino Gavidia and Adu, 2022).

Given this general overview, it is pertinent to focus on a specific case: the city of Paris. A consolidated tourist capital, Paris faces the challenge of updating its image without losing its identity, appealing to new generations of visitors (Stankov et al., 2025). On TikTok, the city's official tourism account has developed a strategy that combines aspirational content with everyday scenes, local protagonists and formats adapted to the platform's dynamics. This strategy responds to the need to represent a "lived Paris" as opposed to an "iconic Paris", shifting the focus from traditional monuments to local experiences such as gastronomy, nightlife, popular neighbourhoods and urban emotions (Stankov et al., 2025). The case of Paris therefore offers a unique opportunity to analyse how the digital identity of a global city is constructed and communicated in an audiovisual, algorithmic and participatory environment such as TikTok (Dwivedi et al., 2021; Yolanda et al., 2025).

3. Methodology

This study adopts a quantitative, non-experimental and ex post facto approach, focusing on the analysis of the narrative strategies used by the official Paris tourism account on TikTok (@parisjetaime) and their relationship with user-generated engagement metrics. The sample consists of 124 videos posted between April 2023 and March 2024, selected through systematic sampling of the total number of posts made during that period. All pieces analysed correspond to original content generated by the institutional account itself, excluding reposts or external collaborations not identified as its own.

Each post was coded based on quantitative and qualitative variables. The former included the number of views, likes, comments, shares and saves. From these metrics, the engagement rate was calculated, defined as the quotient between the sum of interactions and the total number of views, multiplied by 100. This formula is widely used in studies on social networks as a proportional indicator of active user participation, since it allows the relative performance of each content to be assessed in terms of effective visibility (Schreiner et al., 2021). The qualitative variables were coded dichotomously (presence/absence) and included elements such as the main content theme (gastronomy, iconic places, nightlife, everyday scenes, cultural events), the presence of local creators, the use of trendy music, the application of visual effects, and the predominant narrative tone (emotional, informative or humorous).

The coding was carried out following the principles of quantitative content analysis proposed by Neuendorf (2017), which allow complex communicative phenomena to be transformed into observable, replicable data through systematic protocols. Three previously trained researchers participated in the process, using a common guide that guaranteed homogeneous criteria in the observation. To ensure the reliability of the procedure, Cohen's Kappa index was calculated, obtaining an average value of 0.82, considered very high according to the usual standards in media research.

Statistical analysis was performed using SPSS v. 29 software. A descriptive analysis of the quantitative variables was conducted, and Spearman correlations were then applied to explore associations between the narrative characteristics and interaction metrics. To compare significant differences in engagement levels according to the presence or absence of certain narrative variables, non-parametric Mann-Whitney U tests and Kruskal-Wallis tests ($p < 0.10$) were used, depending on the number of groups compared.

In addition to the exploratory analysis, five independent multiple linear regression models were developed, one for each specific type of interaction (likes, comments, shares, saves and views), with the aim of identifying significant predictors of each form of engagement. To do so, the stepwise method was employed, using dichotomously coded narrative categories as independent variables. The assumptions of normality of residuals (Kolmogorov-Smirnov), homoscedasticity (standardised residuals graphs), independence (Durbin-Watson) and absence of multicollinearity (VIF) were verified, thus guaranteeing the validity of the constructed models.

This dual exploratory and confirmatory approach provides greater analytical robustness to the study, allowing not only association patterns to be described but also the explanatory power to be estimated of the narrative variables on the different dimensions of engagement on TikTok. The chosen methodological design enables the narrative elements that influence users' digital interaction with Paris tourism content on TikTok to be precisely identified without the need to establish intercity comparisons.

4. Results

4.1. Correlations between narrative variables and total engagement

An analysis of the 124 posts from Paris' official tourism account on TikTok reveals clearly differentiated narrative patterns that help characterise the city's visual strategy. Using Spearman correlations, the narrative variables most associated with engagement levels were identified, defined as the weighted sum of interactions (likes, comments, shares, saves and views) over the total number of views.

As shown in Table 1, the variables that present the strongest positive correlation with global engagement are 'public streets' ($\rho = 0.27$), 'civil architecture' ($\rho = 0.24$) and 'parks and gardens' ($\rho = 0.19$). These results reinforce the idea that iconic and accessible spaces, as well as recognisable urban landscape elements, generate greater emotional connection and visual resonance among users.

In contrast, the variables with the most notable negative correlations are 'shopping' (ρ = -0.29), 'nightlife' (ρ = -0.22) and 'hotel advertising' (= -0.20), which reinforces the hypothesis that content perceived as excessively commercial or with low symbolic visibility tends to discourage user participation

Table 1. Correlations between narrative variables and total engagement on TikTok (@parisjetaime).

Narrative variable	ρ (Spearman)
Parks_gardens	0.22
Civil_architecture	0.19
Sunset_sunrise	0.16
Hotel advertising	-0.16
Restaurant advertising	-0.18
Shopping	-0.22

Source: Own elaboration, 2026

4.2. Significant associations by type of interaction (Kruskal-Wallis)

After analysing general correlations, the narrative variables that show statistically significant associations with each specific type of interaction were then identified. This approach allowed us to more precisely observe which elements of Parisian visual and symbolic content are most effective in stimulating engagement in its various forms: likes, comments, shares, saves and views.

Table 2 presents the variables that, according to the non-parametric Kruskal-Wallis test, are significantly associated ($p < 0.10$) with one or more forms of interaction. A distinction is made between those with positive ($\rho > 0$) or negative ($\rho < 0$) effects, which enables interpretation of both the content that encourages participation and that which could discourage it.

Table 2. Variables significantly associated with engagement on the Paris TikTok account.

Type of interaction	Variables (+)		Variables (-)	
	Variable	p-value	Variable	p-value
Comments	Public streets	0.002	Civil architecture	0.038
	Daytime	0.058	Nighttime	0.029
	Parks and gardens	0.023		
Likes	Public streets	0.003	Nighttime	0.019
	Daytime	0.040		
	Civil architecture	0.005		
	Parks and gardens	0.013		
Shares	Restaurant advertising	0.044	Parks and gardens	0.008
Saved	Civil architecture	0.076	Parks and gardens	0.004
	Restaurant advertising	0.003	Nighttime	0.003
			Daytime	0.002
			Hotel advertising	0.091
Views	Publicstreets	0.004	Civil architecture	0.018
	Daytime	0.008	Parks and gardens	0.002
			Nighttime	0.035

Source: Own elaboration, 2026.

Among the most significant results are the positive effects of parks and gardens, civil architecture and public streets, especially on metrics such as likes, views and saved content. These findings reinforce the idea that Paris' symbolic and visually recognisable spaces constitute a central axis of emotional and aesthetic attraction on TikTok.

Conversely, variables such as nightlife, shopping and hotel advertising show negative associations across various forms of interaction, suggesting a lower receptivity toward content perceived as dark, impersonal or excessively commercial. In particular, the negative effect of the nighttime variable contrasts with the traditional narrative of Paris as a "city of light", raising questions about how this category is visually interpreted in the specific environment of TikTok.

The restaurant advertising variable shows an ambivalent profile: it appears to have positive effects on saved and shared content, but with no impact or neutral effects on other metrics. This may indicate a functional use by users (saving food recommendations) without implying a deeper emotional connection.

Taken together, these results suggest that Paris' narrative strategy on TikTok achieves better results when based on visual authenticity, symbolic emotionality and aesthetically charged everyday representations, avoiding an excessive presence of elements perceived as explicitly promotional.

Based on the set of results obtained, it can be affirmed that Paris' institutional narrative on TikTok responds to a communication logic carefully balanced between the iconic, the emotional and the functional. The content that generates the highest levels of engagement is that which projects a recognisable image of the city through elements such as parks, civil architecture or grand avenues, creating a visual aesthetic strongly associated with the international tourist image of Paris. The effectiveness of these symbolic resources suggests a strategy based on the revaluation of heritage assets but articulated from a close, everyday representation.

At the same time, the greater effectiveness of daytime content compared to nighttime content and the low reception of material related to shopping or hotel promotions reinforce the idea of an audience sensitive to authenticity and unreceptive to content perceived as commercial or artificial. This pattern coincides with recent studies that warn about the importance of emotional credibility and experiential aesthetics in digital tourism communication (Jin et al., 2025; Stankov et al., 2025).

The ambiguous position of the "restaurant advertising" category, which obtains good results for saved content but not for other metrics, indicates strategic consumption by users more oriented toward future usefulness than emotional identification. This pattern reveals a more instrumental form of engagement, compatible with the behaviour of digital audiences seeking inspiration but also planning.

4.3. Multiple linear regression models

In addition to the descriptive, non-parametric analysis, five multiple linear regression models were performed to determine which narrative variables significantly predict the level of engagement in each specific type of interaction. As summarised in Table 3, the models explain a small proportion of the variance overall, with R^2 values ranging from 0.023 (shares) to 0.227 (comments). The most explanatory model is the one corresponding to comments, in which variables such as daytime, nighttime, sunset/sunrise and public streets show significant effects.

Table 3. Multiple linear regression results by type of interaction.

Type of interaction	R^2	Significant variables
Likes	0.032	
Comments	0.227	Sunset sunrise, Daytime, Nighttime, Public streets
Shares	0.023	
Saved	0.027	
Views	0.077	

Source: Own elaboration, 2026.

These results suggest that, while individual associations are useful for identifying general patterns, predicting specific engagement on TikTok depends on multiple factors that are difficult to model linearly. Nevertheless, the significant role of certain variables reinforces previous findings based on correlational analyses.

Although the explanatory model for the comments shows some predictive capacity ($R^2 = 0.227$), the low explanatory power of the other models suggests that engagement on TikTok responds to a complex, non-linear logic influenced by variables not collected, such as the time of posting, duration of the video or the presence of influencers.

4.4. Final narrative synthesis and strategic reading

Paris' communication strategy on TikTok aligns with a symbolic, experiential narrative in which the city's visual emblems -such as its architecture, parks and everyday urban life- act as central elements, avoiding commercial overexposure. This emphasis on visual and emotional authenticity, reinforced by content that prioritises the everyday and the symbolically charged, fosters not only an image of Paris as a cultural, elegant destination but also the creation of an active, emotionally engaged digital community. These results are consistent with those expressed by Yin et al. (2023), who highlight that "higher levels of enjoyment or authenticity can strengthen the positive effects of destination distinctiveness on electronic word-of-mouth and destination image".

5. Discussion

The results of this study confirm that TikTok has established itself as an effective tool for tourism communication in urban destinations such as Paris, especially in the context of a visual narrative based on everyday life, symbolic aesthetics and emotionality. This finding is consistent with previous research highlighting the ability of social media, and TikTok in particular, to generate engagement through short, creative and culturally resonant content (Stankov et al., 2025; Jin et al., 2025).

Regarding hypothesis H1, the data suggests that content focused on local experiences (such as everyday urban scenes, nightlife and gastronomy) performs better in terms of engagement than content focused on iconic locations. Variables such as public streets and parks and gardens are positively associated with several metrics, especially likes, comments and views, suggesting that audiences respond favourably to content that depicts urban space from an experiential, accessible perspective. This result reinforces the idea that relatable visual content generates a greater emotional connection with the user (McLean et al., 2023).

Hypothesis H2 is also supported by the results. Explicitly promotional content -such as shopping or hotel advertising- shows negative associations with various forms of interaction. This pattern coincides with recent studies that warn about the saturation of commercial content and the preference for formats perceived as authentic and organic on social platforms (Chang et al., 2025).

Regarding hypothesis H3, the analysis reveals a clear influence of the time of day on engagement. Daytime videos perform better than nighttime ones, which is a paradoxical result considering the traditional narrative of Paris as a "city of light". This difference could be explained by the greater visibility, colour or narrative clarity of content recorded during the day, which is more aligned with the dominant visual codes on TikTok (Schreiner et al., 2021). Regression by interaction type reinforces this interpretation, showing a positive impact of the daytime category on several metrics, especially comments and saves.

Regarding hypothesis H4, it is observed that the emotional tone has a greater capacity to induce engagement compared to other narrative tones, particularly in posts that combine trending music, recognisable landscapes and everyday scenes. While this variable did not stand out in all regression models, its symbolic weight appears reinforced by the greater effectiveness of content with a strong aesthetic charge, such as sunsets or wide views of the city.

Taken together, the results suggest that Paris' digital narrative on TikTok responds to a communicative logic that prioritises visual proximity, symbolic authenticity and emotional utility. The most successful posts not only convey tourist information but also trigger an aesthetic and emotional connection with their audience, especially when they include elements that combine the recognisable (such as monuments) with the everyday (such as promenades or scenes of urban life). This positions TikTok not only as a promotional platform but also as a narrative space where brand building is achieved through visual micro-stories loaded with symbolism, emotion and functionality.

This approach fits with the idea of an "experiential symbolic narrative" in which tourist destinations are presented not only as places but as living experiences capable of being shared and reframed by the digital community. In this respect, the results of the study reinforce the theses of Jin et al. (2025) and Stankov et al. (2025), which highlight the role of social networks in the creation of participatory tourist communities that are sensitive to urban aesthetics and the emotional representations of places.

6. Conclusions

This study of the official Paris tourism account on TikTok (@parisjetaime) allows us to draw several relevant conclusions regarding the narrative strategies used and their impact on users' digital engagement. Firstly, the results reinforce the usefulness of TikTok as a platform for projecting a city image based not only on its traditional tourist icons but also on everyday scenes, recognisable urban spaces and emotional representations linked to the Parisian lifestyle. This symbolic-experiential narrative aligns with new forms of digital consumption in which aesthetics, authenticity and emotionality play a central role in generating engagement (Stankov et al., 2025; Jiang et al., 2025).

Secondly, it is noted that not all types of content generate the same type of interaction. Narrative variables associated with open spaces, civil architecture and daytime settings tend to foster emotional reactions (likes, comments), while those perceived as functional—such as food recommendations—are more closely associated with content saved for later reference. On the other hand, videos with a clearly

commercial focus (shopping, hotel promotion) show a lower capacity to activate audience participation, especially in spontaneous interactions such as comments or shares. This differentiation suggests that the content strategy should consider not only the type of message but also the specific form of interaction that account managers wish to stimulate (Yolanda et al., 2025).

Linear regression models also confirm that certain narrative variables can partially predict user behaviour based on the type of interaction, especially in the case of comments. However, the low explanatory capacity of the models in general highlights the complexity of the TikTok ecosystem, where factors that are not always observable, such as publication timing, audiovisual editing or the platform's algorithmic design, play a role.

Overall, Paris has developed a digital strategy on TikTok that prioritises emotional connection, aesthetic value and symbolic representation of the city, avoiding commercial overexposure that could erode perceived authenticity. This approach appears particularly effective in building communities, inspiring visits and reinforcing the cultural and experiential image of the destination.

For future research, it would be appropriate to expand the number of variables analysed, include qualitative or ethnographic reception measures, and compare the performance of this strategy with that of other European cities. Furthermore, including contextual variables (seasonal, touristic or social) could provide greater depth to the analysis, as well as open lines of work around the temporal evolution of tourist narratives in algorithmic environments with high symbolic competition (Jin et al., 2025).

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