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Exploring Slow Tourism Marketing Strategies Based on Slow Movement Philosophy: Preliminary Insights from Rural Tourism Businesses' Websites' Communication

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Abstract: This paper is based on ongoing research whose main objective is to explore tourism digital marketing strategies grounded in Slow Movement and Slow Tourism principles, focusing on rural accommodations entrepreneurs in Baixo Alentejo (Portugal). With a qualitative methodological approach, empirical research was initially based on a literature review. Also, it involved a systematic observation of accommodation businesses' websites selected with a convenience sample from the Regional Registry Online Platform. The research involved content analysis considering a review sustained in slow tourism dimensions upon websites' communication mission and values, presentation opening message, experiences, activities, and product offers. Research also included content analysis based on social media communication strategies (entrepreneurs' commercial posts on Facebook).

Preliminary findings indicate that some rural accommodations have adopted slow tourism activities, providing relaxed and immersive experiences that connect tourists to nature and local culture. In particular, companies share messages that can be theoretically related to slow movement and offer sustainable and local experiences, gastronomy, and tranquillity combined with rural tourism activities (e.g., wine and olive production), allowing tourists to slow down and appreciate the beauty and resources of the region.

Keywords: Slow movement; Slow tourism; Digital Marketing; Accommodations; Baixo Alentejo

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1 Introduction

The modern world's obsession with speed has transformed travel from an experience of adventure into a high-speed race against the clock (Musa, 2025). A “fast revolution” has shaped lifestyles centred on convenience and immediacy (Joseph & Singh, 2013; Khan, 2015). This demand for speed permeates communication, transport, and technology in food and services and is profoundly transforming tourism. Travellers increasingly prefer quick trips focused on major attractions rather than authentic engagement with the local environment and cultures.

Slow Movement philosophy highlights new dimensions of experience and emphasises sustainability, local culture, and quality over speed and mass production, and aims to preserve the unique characteristics of places, people, products, food, and the environment (Walker & Lee, 2021; Calzati & De Salvo, 2018). Within tourism, this philosophy has inspired slow tourism, a specific tourism niche, or as an umbrella term that includes various types of tourism, such as responsible tourism, alternative tourism, green tourism, and sustainable tourism (Serdane, 2019). Contemporary tourists are now more independent, experienced and search for new and valuable experiences (Moirá et al, 2017).

The Alentejo region (Portugal) is often associated with slowness, owing to characteristics such as a slower pace of life, tranquillity, and rural simplicity in its landscapes, culture, and way of life.

This study explores how rural accommodation entrepreneurs in Baixo Alentejo integrate the Slow Movement's values into their digital marketing strategies. It seeks to understand whether these businesses communicate slow tourism principles – such as sustainability, connection with local culture, and appreciation of time – through their websites and social media (parti-

cularly Facebook). Moreover, the research aims to assess whether these communication strategies can strengthen cooperation among regional stakeholders and promote the slow philosophy as part of Alentejo's tourism identity and brand.

The study adopts a qualitative methodological approach combining a literature review with systematic observation and content analysis of selected accommodation websites and social media. The analysis explores how businesses present their mission, values, opening messages, activities and product offerings within the slow tourism framework.

The paper is presented in four sections: theoretical background, research methodology, results and analysis and final considerations, including limitations and suggestions for future studies.

2 Literature Review

2.1 Paradigms of contemporary society: 'fast' versus 'slow'

In a post-modern and contemporary society, two paradigms coexist. On one side, a model that is defined by speed, where technology enhances efficiency and reinforces dependence and also accelerates lifestyles. This fast-paced living privileges quantity over quality, speed over reflection, compressing time, expanding space, and intensifying individualism. Despite increased access to information, awareness rarely leads to collective action, instead fostering passivity, individualism, and environmental disregard (Sari & Lukito, 2017; Khan, 2015). Consequently, this reveals a paradox between growth and responsibility.

On the contrary, an emerging paradigm values 'slowness'. Individuals re-evaluate their priorities, seeking more intentional lifestyles centred on well-being, harmony with nature and community, sustainable rhythm, and meaningful relationships (Österlund, 2020; Honoré, 2004; Khan, 2015; Sari & Lukito, 2017).

Within this framework, the 'slow movement' promotes human-centred values and deliberate time use (Honoré, 2004), assuming a form of countercultural resistance, challenging the dominant Western societal structures that promote consumption and relentless efficiency (Clancy, 2018). Thus, slow movement and slow living are positioned as a meaningful alternative, an approach to modern life that embraces slower temporalities to counterbalance the prevailing culture of speed.

2.2 Tourism consumption changes in contemporary society

Since the 1970s, with post-fordism, consumption behaviour, especially in tourism, has undergone a great revolution. The tourism industry has also developed in line with these changes, which significantly influence travel motivations and expectations.

The shift to post-Fordist economies led tourists to reject mass, standardised holidays and instead pursue more individualised and authentic experiences. Therefore, tourism producers have adapted to the consumers' changing preferences, developing niche markets and types of holidays based on lifestyle, such as trekking and birdwatching (Lash and Urry, 1994, cited in Mowforth & Munt, 2016).

The rise of digital media expanded access to alternative tourism destination options, while green tourism and eco-lodges reflect preferences for non-mass tourism. Tourism has become aestheticised and integrated with leisure, culture, sport, and education.

As Mowforth and Munt (2016) note, the expression 'S's' (sun, sea, sand) of mass tourism gave way to the 'T's' (travelling, trekking, trucking), reflecting a more responsible and meaningful approach to travel.

Understanding these evolving motivations is essential for grasping contemporary tourist behaviour, increasingly characterised by the pursuit of experiences and differentiation from traditional tourism standards.

2.3 Slow movement philosophy and tourism

Slow movement philosophy began with the slow food movement, founded in Italy (1989) by Carlo Petrini as a protest against fast food's European expansion (Lowry & Lee, 2011). Rather than opposing consumption, it advocates ethical forms of production and consumption (Fusté-Forné & Tazim, 2020; Khan, 2015), often framed through concepts such as eco-gastronomy (Clancy, 2018; Williams et al., 2015, cited in Sousa et al., 2021). These principles inspired related movements - slow living, slow travel, and slow tourism (Ferreira et al., 2014; Conway & Timms, 2012) - as the prefix 'slow' is being added to different sectors (Fullagar et al., 2012).

The slow movement mobilises principles of slowness across everyday life domains (e.g., food, city, travel, work, design, education). Far from being a nostalgic and symbolic retreat, it is oriented towards sustainable development and waste reduction (Sousa, Santos & Lubowiecki-Vikuk, 2021). Its core values challenge the logic of

acceleration in at least four ways. First, slower temporalities contextualise time, emphasising appropriateness over haste. Second, valuing locality preserves cultural heterogeneity and sustains collective identity. Third, by privileging social activity and community well-being, the slow movement opposes individualism, enhancing social happiness. Finally, ecological concern is central. As Honore (2004) and Sari and Lukito (2017) argue, slowing down reconciles modern lifestyle with nature's preservation.

Far from being a temporary trend or an innovative tourism product (Calzati & De Salvo, 2018) 'slow' philosophy represents a global social movement shaping local communities in recent years (Honore, 2004; Calzati & De Salvo, 2018).

The concept focuses on sustainability, local culture, quality over speed, and mass production, prioritising the unique characteristics of places, people, products, food, and the environment. This approach presents a unique framework for business promotion in rural tourism (Walker & Lee, 2021).

The COVID-19 pandemic reinforced this shift, as many people returned to nature, also taking time to slow down (Benjamin et al. 2020 cited in Balaban & Keller, 2024) and looking for experiences that bring out slowness in leisure and tourism (Balaban & Keller, 2024).

The term 'fast' increasingly symbolises the disadvantages of mass tourism, encouraging the rise of alternative, slower forms of tourism (Clancy, 2018; Zago, 2018; Sousa et al., 2021).

Consequently, slow tourism and the Cittaslow movement emerged (Serdane et al., 2020; Balaban & Keller, 2024). These trends emphasise diversification of destinations, interest in green and active tourism, preservation of cultural heritage and landscape and the protection of peripheral areas from depopulation (Zago, 2018).

Slow tourism and slow travel both share inspiration from the slow food movement to counter the increasing speed of global mass tourism (Conway & Timms, 2012). Postmodern tourists increasingly seek diversity, identity and authenticity through leisure and vacation experiences (Zago, 2018; Sousa et al., 2021; Moira et al., 2017).

Both concepts have gained considerable attention in the popular media and academic circles (Dickinson & Lumsdon, 2010) over the past decade. However, they remain ambiguous in nature and are often perceived as a single notion. While slow tourism is related to activities at the destination, slow travel is related to low-carbon, overland travel between home and destination (Guiver & McGrath, 2016). Slow tourism is perceived as a part of slow travel, considering that the latter encourages longer stays

and fewer journeys, aligning with environmental purposes (Dickinson & Lumsdon, 2010).

Ultimately, slow movement in tourism emphasises the meaning of travel experiences to and within destinations, the conscious engagement with modes of transport, the association with slow food and beverages, the exploration of localities in relation to heritage and culture at a slower pace, and support for the environment (Dickinson & Lumsdon, 2010).

2.4 Slow tourism conceptualisation and dimensions

Slow tourism, as a part of the slow movement and slow travel framework, is defined as an ethos of supplying tourism experience and combines slow travel with slow holidays (McGrath & Sharpley, 2017). It is also considered as a broader concept that emphasises sustainability, cultural connection, and minimal environmental impact.

This is a guiding principle for trips and a specific tourist niche. The 'umbrella' concept involves responsible, alternative, green, and sustainable tourism. Moreover, slow tourism embraces conscious decision-making at all stages of travel (e.g., holiday options, accommodation types, destinations, and environmental sustainability) (Guiver & McGrath, 2016).

The literature links slow tourism closely with sustainable tourism, as well as with motivations, travel practices, and challenges related to infrastructure, policies, and market dynamics (Fullagar et al., 2010; Dickinson & Lumsdon, 2010).

Slow tourism is the antithesis of the frenetic pace of traditional tourism: it prioritises quality over quantity, depth over breadth and mindfulness over speed, savouring the journey and not rushing to the destination (Musa, 2025; Clancy, 2018). Dimensions associated with slowness in tourism - valuing time, privileging locality, encouraging experimental activities, adopting sustainable modes of transport, and prioritising environmental preservation (Lumsdon & McGrath, 2010) are essential to redefining tourism as a responsible practice addressing mass, speed-driven travel excesses.

The concept of slow tourism, in its broadest sense, refers to travelling at a leisurely pace, characterised by extended stays, limited movement between destinations, and an emphasis on travel quality and meaningful experiences such as appreciating landscapes, engaging with local people, exploring local history and culture and supporting environmental preservation (Oh et al, 2016; Kumar, 2019; Wen et al., 2021; Dickinson & Lumsdon,

2010; Lazarević et al., 2024). In this approach, the act of travelling becomes part of the experience itself as travellers engage with local transport, gastronomy, and slow food practices, explore local history and culture, and show commitment to supporting the environment (Oh et al., 2016).

The concept of slow tourism is not unique, and the literature presents several approaches. It can be seen as a trend or an alternative form of tourism intended to minimise the environmental impacts of mass tourism and strongly connected to sustainability and environmental consciousness (Oh et al., 2016; Serdane et al., 2020; Ballaman & Keller, 2024). Other authors define it through travellers' behaviour (Musa, 2025; Moira et al., 2017; Babou & Callot, 2009), highlighting longer stays as opportunities for deeper cultural immersion rather than superficial visits. This shift emphasises a genuine engagement with local traditions and identities, the mindfulness and presence reframing tourism as a conscious practice. Sustainability reinforces this perspective, positioning responsible behaviour as a moral obligation.

Finally, slow tourism is framed as a path to personal growth, focused on the process of travelling itself, marked by flexibility, spontaneity, patience, serenity, and in-depth discoveries, enriching both individuals and communities, considering their knowledge and skills. In this sense, slow tourism is less a style of travel than a transformative ethos.

Slow tourism shares many similarities with the slow food movement, which values traditional recipes, local cuisine, and local ingredients (Lazarević et al., 2024).

However, mass tourism still coexists with slow tourism. Traditional travel prioritises efficiency, encouraging visitors to cover multiple destinations rapidly and focus on major tourist attractions. On the other hand, slow tourism encourages unhurried, in-depth exploration, inviting travellers to go beyond conventional routes. Travellers might choose to spend a week, a month, or even longer in a destination, allowing them to discover hidden gems, form relationships with locals, and truly understand the essence of a place (authenticity) (Musa, 2025).

The academic discussion on slow tourism goes beyond general definitions, seeking to systematise its foundations into clear analytical dimensions.

Some authors define slow tourism through four key dimensions (Dickinson et al., 2010; Heitmann et al., 2011; Conway & Timms, 2012; De Salvo et al., 2013): (i) environmental (low-impact travel, longer stays) (ii) experiential (quality time, meaningful slower-paced experiences); (iii) economic (support for local suppliers); and (iv) ethical (responsible, conscious, slow and sustainable consumption).

Caffyn (2012) proposes a categorization based on five terms: (i) Place (locality, distinctiveness, landscape, heritage, environment, produce); (ii) People (community, culture, local enterprise, cuisine, hospitality, authenticity); (iii) Time (pace, relaxation, unhurried, more in-depth); (iv) Travel (distance, speed, mode, low carbon), and (v) the Personal (well-being, pleasure, recreation, conviviality, learning, meaning, enjoyment, understanding).

To give a more holistic perspective of the concept, Pécssek (2018; 2015) propose a four-pillar model that includes: (i) locality (local gastronomy, culture, and workforce); (ii) sustainability (profitability, low-impact, long stays in the destination); (iii) social well-being (growing well-being, community cohesion); and (iv) experience focus (non-standard supply, selective attractions, active programs, and collective experiences).

Through an extensive review of the literature, Balaban and Keller (2024) identify several conceptual categories on the concept: (i) an alternative to mass tourism emphasizing sustainability and meaningful tourism experiences; (ii) a sustainable tourism approach; (iii) a type of tourism that encourages deeper engagement with people, and places; (iv) an experience promoting slower low-impact forms of travel; (v) an approach fostering longer stays. Framed as an alternative to mass tourism, slow tourism reshapes travel as responsible, reflective, and sustainability-oriented.

2.5 Tourists' consumer trends and the integration of slow tourism values in hospitality

Social and demographic trends, along with changing values in society and consumer perceptions, promote the development of new opportunities within the hospitality, F&B, and tourism industries. Therefore, analysing these changes allows a better understanding of tourists' increasingly demanding preferences for experiences beyond traditional standards.

According to the literature (Guiver & McGrath, 2016; Serdane et al., 2020; Marques, 2019), slow tourists value participation and time in experiences, and integration with host communities, contributing to local well-being and showing interest in cultural and natural heritage. They are looking for holistic experiences and building memories, and want to take pleasure in the 'simple things'. Consequently, the hospitality industry adapts to individual visitors' rhythms and preferences.

Originated in the slow food movement, slow tourism emphasises the revitalisation of local gastronomy as

a means to highlight broader cultural values such as architecture and festivals (Pécsek, 2015). In F&B, local culture can be easily incorporated by serving regional dishes made with local and seasonal ingredients. It is an important trend of 'back to basics' in which some activities can be promoted, including a return of food to its roots, the use of aromatic herbs, cooking practices and workshops, and teaching culinary practices to guests, inviting them to participate more deeply and actively in the local community (Ferreira, 2023).

Health consciousness and well-being trends have intensified interest in silent retreats and wellness practices promoting stress reduction, mindfulness, work-life balance, and a better quality of life (Mariano, 2022; Ferreira, 2023).

Offers include overall wellness, spa, relaxation, spiritual journeys, thermal therapies, and traditional rituals using natural ingredients. The main purpose is to embrace completely new experiences in their travel journeys.

In a society of fast information and communication, travellers sometimes prefer limited off-network travel, and urban or rural hotels can suit travellers looking to escape the hustle and bustle of everyday life (e.g., digital detox).

Likewise, transportation is carefully considered by slow travellers with low-carbon, green, and sustainable options and also the availability of alternative modes, including hotel-provided services (e.g., bike rental, electric bikes, walking trails, train excursions).

2.6 Digital marketing in tourism

The digital world in tourism has taken on a greater dimension, mainly since the COVID-19 pandemic, providing tourism companies with agile communication tools to promote their brands, sell products, and enhance competitiveness globally, thus improving online marketing strategies.

Contemporary consumer trends are strongly influenced by the frequent use of information and communications technologies (e.g., websites, social media platforms and blogs), where customers share information, rate destinations, assess hotel and restaurant services, and consider environmental and social conditions (Mariano, 2022; International Labour Organisation, 2010).

Digital technologies have penetrated consumers' purchasing, reshaping traditional consumer behaviour. Approximately 90% of people buy online, using multiple screens such as computers, tablets, mobile phones, and TVs, while about 61% access social media via mobile devices, which play a central role in social life (Kotler et al,

2020). One advantage of digital marketing over traditional is its ability to track user behaviour in real time, enabling brands to gain insights into consumer preferences and better satisfy their needs (Kahur, 2017).

A higher demand for flexible, individualised options and quality of information has shaped personalised leisure and tourism behaviour. Consequently, the tourism sector must maintain a strong digital presence, primarily through websites, review applications, and social networks (Tonini et al, 2022).

These digital tools are essential for promoting, publicising, and commercialising products and services, enabling businesses to engage closely with consumers. Their integration into company and destination strategies defines modern digital marketing, enhancing visibility, competitiveness, and consumer relationships (Tonini et al, 2022).

The tourism industry has been profoundly transformed by the rapid development of the internet, enabling users to purchase services online and compare businesses globally.

Key digital marketing strategies for success include quality websites that attract and retain customers, strong social media engagement to understand clients, email marketing for promotions, content, and interactive content such as videos and infographics (Kahur, 2017). Around 80% of the content should align with audience interests, fostering engagement, conversation, and effective promotion within the tourism sector.

Digital marketing in tourism uses internet technologies to engage existing and new audiences (Kahur, 2017), promoting offers and fostering long-term customer relationships (Maurer, 2021). Websites serve as a key tool, providing information, building brand image, generating direct consumer responses, and creating virtual product experiences (Fredes, 2008, cited in Tonini et al., 2022). While slow approaches are sometimes seen as incompatible with technology, their application can enhance meaningful experiences, such as connecting visitors with local guides (Caffyn, 2012).

3 Methodology

The study investigates tourism digital marketing strategies focusing on rural accommodation companies in Baixo Alentejo (Portugal), exploring their alignment with slow movement and slow tourism principles, and assessing whether managers provide activities and experiences on behalf of the slow tourism philosophy.

Using a qualitative methodological approach, the empirical research began with a literature review (theoretical

framework) to explore the main themes related to contemporary societal changes, slow movement philosophy, slow tourism principles and key dimensions, and digital marketing in tourism. Further, it involved a systematic observation of the websites and social media content in accommodation businesses in the region of Baixo Alentejo, selected from a convenience sample on the Regional Registry Online Platform.

3.1 Study object

Baixo Alentejo is a region located in the south of Portugal. It is part of the extensive Alentejo region, bordered to the north by the district of Évora, to the east by Spain, and to the south by the district of Faro. This subregion has a population of 114.889 (INE, 2024) and covers an area of 8,544.6 km², corresponding to 10.8 per cent of the national territory, and has 13 municipalities.

The sub-region is defined by its cultural heritage and archaeological sites, castles, churches, old mines, museums, and traditional settlements – as well as significant natural heritage, including protected landscapes, the Guadiana River, and diverse fauna.

The main economic activities are related to mining (pyrites), forestry, hunting, livestock farming, pastoralism, and agro-products, such as cork, olive oil, cheese, sausages and hams, wine, ‘medronho’ brandy, and honey (www.cimbal.pt).

Local gastronomy reflects Mediterranean cuisine, featuring pork, lamb, bread, olive oil, and aromatic herbs in traditional dishes like soups, ‘migas’, and ‘açordas’. Wines, cured meats, and origin-certified cheeses are key products, while eggs and almonds are central in traditional confectionery (www.cimbal.pt; https://rotasdeportugal.pt/).

For the increase in the number of tourist accommodation establishments in the country in 2023, Alentejo contributed 13,5% (+79), and the average number of overnight stays was 1.9 (INE, 2024). Additionally, in 2023, the Baixo Alentejo region registered 436.000 overnight stays, more than 14% compared with 2022, and it concentrates 13.9% of Portugal’s hotel supply (PORDATA, 2023).

3.2 Data collection

Data from companies in the accommodation tourism sector in Baixo Alentejo were collected from the Regional Registry Online Platform (RNT) (<https://rnt.turismodeportugal.pt/RNT>), and data processing was carried out,

followed by appropriate analysis and interpretation of the information and indicators.

The observation took place in November 2024 and started with the identification of a total of 244 tourist accommodations. To select the sample, we considered the following criteria: (i) only considered 12 municipalities of Baixo Alentejo (Barranco’s municipality was excluded); (ii) only accommodations that had a website identified in the platform; (iii) with their own website and effectively working during the data collection period.

Beyond the literature review, the methodology was based on the observational research, supported by content analysis, of accommodation websites and social media (Facebook). Analysis focused on: (i) strategic messages (e.g., mission, values, slogans; homepage) ; (ii) experiences, products, and commercial offers; (iii) attraction descriptions; (iv) marketing and communication strategies in social media. All content analysis was conducted from the entrepreneur’s perspective, excluding customer reviews

3.2.1 Website content analysis

Based on Matriz AWE-D: Analysing Destination Websites Wine Tourism (Tonini et al, 2022), we adapted the framework to slow tourism. From the original 10 categories (findability; usability; accessibility; design; general content; wine tourism; marketing; interactivity; services; security), three categories were considered: wine tourism was adapted to ‘slow tourism’; marketing and services. The indicators included: (i) Slow tourism - the presence of information related to slow tourism and dimensions in the region; (ii) Marketing - ways to publicise and promote the region (e.g. social networks; mission, vision, and values; slogan); (iii) Services - ways of marketing products and services from the region (e.g., bookings, e-commerce, promotions).

The analysis started with a first manual codification of the webpage textual contents, basically extracting phrases which were identified in the opening message page (“homepage”) and in “about us” and “mission and values” tabs. Then, data were collected from those phrases to identify keywords mentioned by entrepreneurs. Considering the literature review on slow tourism values, categorisation, and key dimensions, Caffyn’s perspective (2012) was considered relevant to the extracted keyword (see Table 1).

Then, accommodation services, offers, products, and experiences were observed. After extracting manually that information, those data were categorized supported by Caffyn’s approach which includes several elements

Table 1: Key dimensions and indicators

Keyword	Indicators / Expressions
Place	Locality, distinctiveness, landscape, heritage, environment, produce.
People	Community, culture, local enterprise, cuisine, hospitality, authenticity
Time	Pace, relaxation, unhurried, more in-depth
Travel	Distance, speed, mode, low carbon
Personal	Well-being, pleasure, recreation, conviviality, learning, meaning, enjoyment, understanding

Source: Caffyn, 2012

and indicators of how tourism businesses can introduce a slow approach in their offers: (i) Allow visitors to choose their own pace (e.g. flexible timings for meals, options to extend stays or take a slower paced tour); (ii) Promote the use of slower transport options discounts for those arriving without a car, information on public transport and bicycle hire, good knowledge of slow options and routes; (iii) Provide slower environments such as tranquil areas, TV free or mobile phone free zones, reducing advertising, use of local imagery or literature to strengthen sense of place; (iv) Source and promote local food and drink, traditional dishes, tastings, fair trade products; (v) Develop specific slow products such as relaxation, well-being breaks, learning traditional skills or cuisine, slow tours, chill out holidays, slow food menus; (vi) Target specific markets to which slow would especially appeal such as people with stressful loves or older people.

Supported by literature and observations of accommodations businesses' websites, we used a keyword extractor tool (Word Count) to identify and count keywords related to the dimensions and principles of slow movement, slow tourism, and slow food, and also for the identification of tourist experiences and activities within the scope of slow tourism, considering Caffyn's approach (2012). A word cloud was used to share the results and better represent the findings (WordClouds.com).

3.2.2 Social media content analysis

According to Kaur (2017), the most relevant social media platforms for tourism businesses include Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, LinkedIn, and YouTube. Presence on these platforms is not just about promoting the latest packages and facilities. However, a business must become a part of users' conversations on these platforms.

Thus, to explore the social media marketing communication and strategy of accommodation businesses in Baixo Alentejo, Facebook was selected as the primary empirical setting.

In this study, a sample of accommodations was selected as we did for the website's content analysis. Another sampling decision concerns how many posts to analyse from each page. The literature indicates that communication of brand posts over a four-week period is sufficient (Tafesse & Wien, 2017; Ashley & Tuten, 2015), but since not all Baixo Alentejo accommodations had updated their Facebook pages, we decided to define a longer, more recent period.

The study used content analysis of businesses' accommodations' commercial posts on Facebook. The parameters included a selection of the most recent entrepreneurs' marketing posts on Facebook in the summer season (May-July 2025), which gives an exploratory, more recent perspective of the marketing communication of these enterprises and, specifically, gives an exploratory view of whether and how entrepreneurs include slow tourism dimensions and offers in their commercial brand texts.

Qualitative content analysis extracts manifest and latent meanings following a systematic and transparent procedure for analysing data (Tafesse & Wien, 2017). In this study, and as a first step, entrepreneurs' commercial brand posts, advertising strategic messages, and the ancillary information they incorporate (i.e., texts, presentation phrases, activities, offers, experiences, expressions) were the unit of analysis. The second step involved reviewing the relevant literature to identify pre-existing coding categories. Referred to as deductive coding, this approach is applied when prior literature exists, and in this study, it was again supported by Caffyn's five dimensions of slow tourism (place, people, time, travel, and personal) and indicators.

The content analysis was supported by AI, specifically ChatGPT. The use of this tool is already current in scientific research with a guarantee of ethical preservation. Indeed, since qualitative content analysis requires significant time, effort, and resources, tools such as ChatGPT may have tremendous potential in automating at least some of the analysis (Bijker et al, 2024). Moreover, ChatGPT may significantly facilitate qualitative data analysis exploration, especially during initial research stages

and when dealing with extensive transcription material (Goyanes et al, 2025).

Inductive and deductive content analysis was performed on entrepreneurs' Facebook posts during the selected period. All the texts were manually extracted and introduced into the ChatGPT tool. Through prompt engineering, appropriate instructions were provided for ChatGPT to execute data analysis tasks. The precision of the extracted data was assessed through comparison with human coding in the beginning and at the end of the process. The deductive approach was based on the five dimensions and indicators of Caffyn (2012), and that instruction was given to the ChatGPT tool. Coding schemes were developed with ChatGPT using a data-driven (inductive) and theory-driven (deductive) content analysis approach, resulting in a structured coding matrix (based on Bijker et al, 2024). The matrix was improved by researchers' manual coding after the preliminary procedure to ensure that it reflected the prompt instructions correctly.

4 Results and Discussion

4.1 Baixo Alentejo accommodation companies' sample characteristics

The number of accommodation businesses in the Baixo Alentejo registered in RNT in November 2024 was 244. Considering the three criteria (12 municipalities, accommodations with a website identified in the platform, and effectively working), the final sample was 58 enterprises.

The characteristics of the sample included the distribution of accommodations by municipalities (localisation) and the classification of the accommodation (type) as of the present date. According to the characteristics, we present the distribution: Aljustrel (1); Almodôvar (2); Alvito (1); Beja (14); Castro Verde (5); Cuba (1); Ferreira do Alentejo (4); Mértola (9); Moura (5); Ourique (4); Serpa (8); Vidigueira (4).

Concerning the type of accommodation, the distribution was: Camping and caravan – (5); Hotels (12); Housing tourism (2); Agro-tourism (13); Rural tourism (22); Rural hotels (3); Monuments and historical hotels (1).

4.2 Observation of websites – keywords and indicators of slow tourism

From 58 tourism businesses, we concluded that 55 have effective mentions (expressions and phrases) on their

websites, primarily assumed to be related to slow movement and slow tourism principles and dimensions.

After identifying the webpage contents (homepage, initial page, “about us”, and “mission and values” separator), the phrases, and the word count application was applied, and it was possible to identify equal or similar keywords mentioned on the selected sample of accommodation businesses' websites (see Table 2).

After this first step, we categorised the keywords related using the five dimensions and indicators of slow tourism proposed by Caffyn (2012): place, people, time, travel, and personal.

Related to the dimension **place**, we identified from the website's texts 15 references to the heritage, 12 related to the landscape, and 3 related to the environment. Considering the dimension of **people**, we identified 15 keyword categories related to culture, 21 for cuisine, and 7 for hospitality. Related to the dimension of **time**, we identified 8 references to relaxation. Considering the **travel** dimension, none of the proposed keywords was identified. Finally, and related to the personal dimension, the keyword identified was well-being (4 references). One tourism business mentions the keyword “*Slow Living*” on its homepage. From the findings, we present a word cloud to better visualise the keywords (see Figure 1).

4.3 Accommodation tourism businesses offer

Considering the purpose of identifying if accommodations tourism businesses present a slow approach to their offers (activities and experiences), and by the observation



Figure 1. Word cloud of the slow tourism indicators keywords
Source: Author

Table 2: Identical or similar keywords related to slow movement and slow tourism

Keyword	Number of accommodations websites with the identical/similar keywords identified
Tranquillity/Serenity/Serene/Calm/Quiet	26
Nature + Natural	23
Gastronomy / Flavours / Food / Cuisine	21
Heritage / Culture + Cultural / History + Historical	15
Landscape	12
Countryside / Rural + Rurality / Rustic	11
Tradition + Traditional	10
Experience	8
Family	8
Rest / Relaxation	8
Hospitality / Welcoming / Receiving	7
Leisure	7
Quality	7
Life + Living	6
Refuge	6
Peace	5
Time	4
Well-being	4
Sustainable	3
Beauty	3
Environment	3

Source: author (note: Portuguese words were translated into English)

of the websites of the 58 accommodations, we conclude that 17 of them did not present any reference to the commercialization of activities and experiences (not even related to slow movement) in their business, nor in their opening message, not even with reference to bookings or promotions.

Considering the 41 identified accommodations businesses' websites, it was possible to observe a variety of offers and product activities that can be clearly classified within the slow tourism framework (see Table 3).

In the literature review, we observe several product offerings and active experiences related to promoting green transport (e.g., electric cycling, horse riding, “bike-friendly”). The activities related to typical slow products and local food and gastronomy are overestimated in what concerns traditional food tasting or learning traditional skills of local cuisine (e.g. activities of cooking, or wine tasting) and learning more about local culture (e.g. visits to local heritage guided by farmers) are also well observed with the promotion of workshop programs, activities in relation to nature, or relaxation (see Table 3).

4.4 Content analysis of Facebook entrepreneurs' posts

A content analysis was also conducted on Facebook commercial posts (from the entrepreneurs' side) on 55 accommodation businesses (similar to the first observation procedure). Based on the first observation and the inclusion of sample criteria, we excluded one enterprise without a Facebook page.

As described in the methodology chapter, textual content from Facebook posts, published between May and July 2025, was extracted for analysis. In the first stage of the study, content analysis was only thematic and categorical to identify allusions to slow tourism in the extracted phrases. All the information was consolidated within a single document, and once the data was organised correctly (Goyanes et al, 2025), the next step was to access ChatGPT and provide an initial instruction (prompt 1) to contextualise the platform, specifying that a dataset would be uploaded.

Based on the theoretical framework's key dimensions and indicators, prompt instructions for ChatGPT

Table 3: Activities and experiences commercialised and their relation with slow tourism dimensions

Dimensions (Caffyn, 2012)	Examples of offers and product activities (according to the literature)	Observations on websites
To choose their own pace	Flexible timings for meals, options to extend stays or take a slower-paced tour.	Not directly observed.
Promote the use of slower transport.	Options discounts for those arriving without a car, information on public transport and bicycle hire, and a good knowledge of slow options and routes.	“Walks,” “hikes,” “cycling,” “and trails.” “Bike hire, electric bikes, ‘bike friendly’ programme, horse riding, carriage rides”.
Provide slower environments	Such as tranquil areas, TV-free or mobile phone-free zones, reducing advertising, and use of local imagery or literature to strengthen the sense of place.	Not directly observed.
Source and promote local food and drink	Traditional dishes, tastings, fair trade products.	“Wine and olive oil tasting”. “Cheese and bread tasting”.
Develop a specific slow product.	Relaxation and well-being breaks, learning traditional skills or cuisine, slow tours, chill-out holidays, and slow food menus.	“Cookery workshop”. “Picnic in the countryside”. “Alentejo cuisine”. “Jam making”. “Carnival programme. Guided tours”. “Visits to historical heritage”. “Visits with shepherds and former smugglers”. “Hiking, hunting, fishing, boating, hot air ballooning, animal handling, farming, sunset activities, stargazing”.
Target specific markets to which slow would especially appeal (people suffering stress, older people)	Distressing activities; well-being activities.	“Yoga, Pilates, retreats, massages, SPA, wellness programs”.

Source: Author

were designed in accordance with Caffyn’s classification. According to Goyanes et al. (2025), the next step involved uploading the dataset to ChatGPT for analysis (Prompt 2).

The second phase of thematic analysis using ChatGPT focused on identifying themes, patterns, or key concepts within the data. As a result, a first classification was provided with excerpts and key expressions according to the five dimensions of Slow Tourism mentioned in the accommodation’s Facebook posts of the total sample. From this first observation, we conclude that 19 accommodations Facebook pages (during the established period of time) have no publications or are not updated (this fact can be related to the use of other more popular social media networks, e.g., Instagram), or have no relevant information related to the slow tourism focus.

Then, to explore the data and reduce its dimensionality, content was aggregated, resulting in a classification of words/expressions for each dimension. In this part, the authors complement the results of the AI tool with manual coding to give a more precise perspective of the findings.

Considering the **place** dimension and its indicators (locality, distinctiveness, landscape, heritage, environment, produce), frequent words/expressions were observed (see Table 4).

Based on the observation, it is possible to conclude that entrepreneurs use several terms and expressions alluding to slow tourism principles about **place** in their commercial posts. In fact, it was possible to find mentions to the physical place and environment (e.g. “Sesmarías”, “Alentejo”, “Moura”, “Alqueva”), elements that highlight uniqueness and distinctiveness of the localization (e.g. “archaeological history”, “heritage”, “Cante Alentejano”), natural and visual characteristics (e.g. prairie, sunset, landscape, countryside, nature), local cultural and historical elements (e.g. Mértola Islamic Festival, Talha Wine, Castro da Cola), atmosphere, climate, and local sensations (e.g. serenity”, “peacefulness”, tranquility, welcoming atmosphere), local and regional products and local economic activities (e.g. Alentejo cuisine, local producers, local products like gin).

Table 4: Synthesis of the most frequent associated words/expressions related to the Place dimension

Indicators	Frequently mentioned word/expression
Locality	Alentejo, heart, city, Moura, Beja.
Distinctiveness	Authenticity, allure, charm.
Landscape	Landscape, countryside, land, flowers.
Heritage	History, tradition.
Environment	Nature, tranquillity, silence, peace, countryside, flowers.
Produce	Pool, flavours, culinary arts, local products, wines, land.

Source: author (note: Portuguese words were translated into English)

The high frequency of terms such as “Alentejo”, “landscape”, “nature”, “heritage”, “culture”, “local products” and “wine” shows an evident appreciation of the place. The publications highlight identity, authenticity and emotional connection to the territory, which are central principles of slow tourism. Theoretically, appreciating the ‘sense of place’ and anchoring in the local context are fundamental pillars of slow tourism (Caffyn, 2012; Fullagar et al., 2012).

The second dimension is **people**, and after post-extraction and aggregation, it was possible to observe the following findings (see Table 5).

Observations allow to conclude that the thematic of the posts are related with aspects such as belonging, sharing, and establishing emotional ties with locals and visitors (e.g. partnerships, community connection in festivals), opportunities of experiencing music, traditions, symbols, and local celebrations (e.g. “Cante Alentejano”, “handicrafts”), active participation of locals in creating the tourist experience (e.g. “sharing stories through generations”), culinary tradition as a vehicle for memory, affection and identity (e.g. “the pleasure of good food”, “genuine Alentejo cuisine”), local roots, loyalty to traditions, authentic, non-commercialised experiences (e.g. “rooted in the soul of our land”) (see Table 5).

References to “community”, “tradition”, “Cante Alentejano”, storytelling and “authentic hospitality” reveal a focus on the human dimension of the tourist experience. Also, the emphasis on local producers, regional cuisine, popular festivals and local customs reveals an approach that prioritises direct contact with the local population and their cultural practices. This conclusion is in line with the literature (Caffyn, 2012; Oh et al, 2016; Kumar, 2019; Wen et al., 2021; Dickinson & Lumsdon, 2010; Lazarević et al, 2024), given that slow tourism encourages visitors to connect with local people in a genuine way.

Furthermore, considering the **time** dimension, the following words/expressions were identified (see Table 6).

By the observation it is possible to conclude that the main expressions are related to rhythm, since time is marked by allusion to nature, seasons and simple daily rituals (e.g. “the start of the day”, “sunset”, “harvest”); relaxation is

promoted considering accommodation offers related with rest, leisure, lightness; no rush, presenting expressions allusive to “slow down”, and “take time for ourself”; and live deeper experiences with expression promoting emotional and spiritual regeneration and to create lasting memories. Terms such as “slow down”, “slow living”, “pause”, and “refuge” are widely used. Also, mentions of specific times of day and seasons (e.g., grape harvests) or light reinforce the slowed-down perception of time, as do the emotional and reflective experiences associated with these times (see Table 6). Slow tourism encourages travellers to reconsider their relationship with time, providing an alternative to the rushed nature of conventional tourism (Musa, 2025; Clancy, 2018). The language used in the analysed communications seems to be strongly aligned with this perspective.

Considering the **travel** dimension, the following words/expressions were identified (see Table 7).

According to the words and expressions extracted, it is possible to conclude that the word “slow” is often mentioned as the opposite of the “speed” indicator (translated from the Portuguese word). Considering the mode of transport, there is also no direct mention of means of transport (car, train, bicycle), which could be a point to explore or reinforce in sustainable communication. In what concerns low carbon, the analysis of the posts was not very relevant and direct, but expressions can demonstrate some consciousness of the entrepreneurs to communicate their actions (e.g., “caring for the Earth... is woven into everything we do”; “we are moving towards self-sufficiency”) (see Table 7).

Terms such as “getaway”, “retreat”, “slow down”, “getaway”, and “no rush” demonstrate an appreciation of physical and mental distance from urban life. Sustainable transport is not explicitly mentioned, but there are indirect allusions to it (e.g., “bike-friendly”, “walking”, “no Wi-Fi”, “self-sufficiency”), suggesting some environmental awareness (see Table 7).

Finally, the last dimension is **personal**, and the following words/expressions were identified (see Table 8).

By the observation it is possible to identify messages which are focused on personal care, relaxation, mental

Table 5: Synthesis of the most frequent words/expressions associated with the People dimension

Indicators	Frequently mentioned word/expression
Community	Roots, producers' union, families, children, local groups, local community, affective ties, sharing, playfulness, warm welcome.
Culture	Tradition, Cante Alentejano, folk songs and culture, festivals, Portuguese music, history, handicrafts, basil plants, local sounds and expressions.
Local enterprise	Local producers, dedicated team, handicrafts and regional specialities, local management.
Cuisine	Regional flavours, Alentejo cuisine, shared meals, local products, sardines, barbecue, traditional dishes, full buffet, free meals.
Hospitality	Welcoming atmosphere, excellent service, feeling at home, welcome warmly, receive with care, turn guests into friends, calm and tranquillity, memorable experiences, sharing and socialising, attention to detail.
Authenticity	Genuine products, genuine and authentic experiences, preserved tradition, stories told, local atmosphere, bonds and memories, cultural and natural elements, sincerity in service.

Source: author (note: Portuguese words were translated into English)

Table 6: Synthesis of the most frequent words/expressions associated with the Time dimension

Indicators	Frequently mentioned word/expression
Pace	Day, morning, seasons, light, slow, slowly, cycle, nature, grape harvest, landscape.
Relaxation	Relaxing, rest, comfort, tranquillity, pause, restart, peace and quiet, refuge, well-being, spa, jacuzzi, pool.
Unhurried	Slow down, take your time, wander, pause, slow living, time just for you, walk and run slowly, peace and quiet.
More in-depth	Moment, memory, detail, meaning, history, eternalise, presence, communion, beauty, enchantment, connection.

Source: author (note: Portuguese words were translated into English)

Table 7 - Synthesis of the most frequent words/expressions associated with the Travel dimension

Indicators	Frequently mentioned word/expression
Distance	Escape, refuge, isolation, getaway, break.
Speed	Slow down, without haste, slowness, slow living, slowed down time.
Mode	Walking, living, inhabiting, communion, presence.
Low carbon	Nature, no Wi-Fi, self-sufficiency, green certification

Source: author (note: Portuguese words were translated into English)

Table 8: Synthesis of the most frequent words/expressions associated with the Personal dimension

Indicators	Frequently mentioned word/expression
Well-being	Comfort, peace, tranquillity, refuge, energy
Pleasure	Flavour, wine, beauty, pleasure, embrace, colour.
Recreation	Relaxation, rest, leisure, holidays, recharging
Conviviality	Sharing, family, friendship, home, celebration
Learning	Discover, transform, communion, history, learn.
Meaning	Soul, detail, pause, love, inspiration
Enjoyment	Smiles, lightness, memories, relaxation
Understanding	Essence, reflection, reconnection, journey, inner peace

Source: author (note: Portuguese words were translated into English)

and physical health, and taking a break for the body and mind (e.g. “need a moment to yourself?”, “stress stays outside”, “only peace and well-being remain”; “a place that cares for you”; “transformation and inner peace”); that emphasis on sensory, gastronomic and emotional pleasure, the pleasures of life (e.g. “with a glass of Alentejo wine in hand”, “pure pleasure of relaxation”, “authentic flavours”, “almost as good as a hug”); highlights activities for leisure, fun and active rest, with a focus on relaxation and entertainment (e.g. “outdoor massage”, “horse riding”, “slow mornings”); focus on social relationships, shared moments, celebrations, connection with other people (e.g. “sharing snacks and prolonging conversations”, “family, friendship, love”); and highlight curiosity, personal development, cultural enrichment and self-knowledge (e.g. “transformative experience”, “breaking with old patterns”, “unique experience”).

The communication emphasises personal care, relaxation, sensory pleasure (i.e., wine and flavours), memorable experiences, personal transformation, and introspection. The identification of terms/expressions such as “do you need some time to yourself?”, “reconnection”, “inspiration”, “memories”, “reflection” and “transformation” reveal that the focus on the individual, emotions and personal growth is central. Slow tourism is closely linked to personal experience and the search for meaning. The results show that companies probably explore and communicate this dimension the most.

5 Conclusions

Preliminary findings indicate that accommodations in Baixo Alentejo have adopted slow tourism practices, prioritising relaxed and immersive experiences that connect tourists to nature and local culture. Businesses communicate messages promoting slow movement and offer sustainable, local experiences, gastronomy, and tranquillity combined with rural tourism activities (such as wine and olive production), allowing tourists to slow down and appreciate the region’s resources.

Website content analysis, commercial offers, and Facebook posts reveal that marketing communications consistently reflect Caffyn’s (2012) slow tourism dimensions, particularly place, people, time, and personal experience, though sustainable transport is underrepresented. While communication strategies align with slow tourism values, it remains unclear if entrepreneurs consciously frame their marketing under this ‘umbrella’.

These strategies appear to foster deeper tourist engagement, promote authentic experiences, and enhance the cultural and natural appeal of the region, contributing to potential sustainable economic growth.

These insights can provide valuable implications for tourism businesses seeking to differentiate themselves in competitive markets. This positioning provides a differentiation strategy emphasising authenticity, slowness, sustainability, and community involvement.

Despite numerous examples of rural tourism activities in Baixo Alentejo that align with the principles of slow movement and slow tourism, there is no direct self-identification by businesses as part of this movement.

Providing sustainable and local experiences, gastronomy, tranquillity and rural tourism activities (e.g., wine and olive production and tasting) enables tourists to experience a ‘slowdown’ and appreciate the region’s beauty and resources.

Platforms like Slow Portugal promote and book a relaxed, nature-oriented lifestyle, from rural lodgings to boutique hotels. Stakeholders should develop strategies to communicate and strengthen the region’s slow tourism principles and brand.

The study’s exploratory nature presents limitations, including incomplete website data, fragmented information, and a narrow social media observation period, which can be insufficient for a deeper analysis of the post messages. Also, Facebook’s popularity has declined, overtaken by newer networks (e.g., Instagram). Methodological triangulation, incorporating interviews or user reviews, would strengthen the findings.

Besides, the literature supports the utility of AI such as ChatGPT for content analysis, but its exclusive utilisation is questionable, underscoring the need for complementary observations through manual coding and analysis.

Future research will extend the study to the District of Beja, including Odemira municipality, analysing full website content and conducting semi-structured interviews with accommodation entrepreneurs to explore perceptions about slow tourism, future ‘slow’ business strategies, and collaborative initiatives to enhance the Slow Alentejo ‘brand’.

Bionotes

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