

# EXPERIENTIAL COMMUNICATION AS A CREATIVE STRATEGY TO PROMOTE SPANISH TOURIST EVENTS

## LA COMUNICACIÓN EXPERIENCIAL COMO ESTRATEGIA CREATIVA PARA PROMOCIONAR LOS EVENTOS TURÍSTICOS ESPAÑOLES

**Victoria Martín Martín**<sup>1</sup>. *Complutense University of Madrid. Spain.*

**María Galmes Cerezo**. *Complutense University of Madrid. Spain.*

**Marta Retamosa Ferreiro**. *University of Castilla- La Mancha. Spain.*

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### ABSTRACT

**Introduction:** The promotion of events is analyzed as an opportunity to generate significant experiences between customers and brands. The adequate promotion of tourist events has become an urgent challenge to attract tourists to the destination and focus the communication strategy from the experience. **Methodology:** We proceed to review the experiential communication strategies based on the content analysis of the description of each of the events held in Spain in 2021 and promoted on the official website of Tourism of Spain (Spain.info). **Results:** The main consequences determine that experiential communication is poor and creative strategies focused on experience are underdeveloped, despite the fact that tourists can live optimal experiences in events designed and organized for this purpose, the descriptions are not presented as invitations to live experiences attractive. **Discussion:** Given the above, it has been possible to identify factors associated with the events described as richer experiences when the experience is oriented to the educational and escapist dimension, or when it is directed to the sports segment. The Autonomous Communities with the most optimized experiential communications have been identified and the core values that are most frequently included in the richest descriptions of experiences have been deepened. **Conclusions:** In the end, we found that destination promoters should consider the Spain.info Agenda as a powerful tool to describe experiences that attract tourists to destination events, adding value to the brand.

<sup>1</sup> **Victoria Martín Martín**. Complutense University. vimart09@ucm.es. PhD in Information Sciences from Complutense University, doctoral thesis on Branding in Tourism Websites. Professor and researcher in the Department of Marketing at UCM. Belongs to the teaching innovation research group at UCM.



**Keywords:** Communication; Experience; Dimensions of experience; Events; Tourism promotion.

## RESUMEN

**Introducción:** Se analiza la promoción de los eventos como una oportunidad para generar experiencias significativas entre los clientes y las marcas. La promoción adecuada de los eventos turísticos se ha convertido en un reto urgente para atraer a los turistas al destino y enfocar la estrategia de comunicación desde la experiencia. **Metodología:** Se procede a revisar las estrategias de comunicación experiencial a partir del análisis de contenido de la descripción de cada uno de los eventos realizados en España en el año 2021 y promocionados en la Web oficial de Turismo de España (Spain.info). **Resultados:** Las principales consecuencias determinan que la comunicación experiencial es pobre y las estrategias creativas centradas en la experiencia están poco desarrolladas, a pesar de que los turistas puedan vivir experiencias óptimas en eventos diseñados y organizados para ello, las descripciones no se plantean como invitaciones a vivir experiencias atractivas. **Discusión:** Visto lo anterior, se han podido identificar factores asociados a los eventos descritos como experiencias más ricas cuando la experiencia se orienta a la dimensión educativa y escapista, o cuando se dirige al segmento deportivo. Se han identificado las Comunidades Autónomas con comunicaciones experienciales más optimizadas y se ha profundizado en los valores centrales que se incluyen con mayor frecuencia en las descripciones de experiencias más ricas. **Conclusiones:** Al final encontramos que los promotores de los destinos deberían considerar la Agenda Spain.info como una herramienta potente para describir experiencias que atraigan a los turistas hacia los eventos de un destino aportando valor a la marca.

**Palabras clave:** Comunicación, Experiencia, Dimensiones de la experiencia, Eventos, Promoción turística.

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Events are integrated into tourism marketing strategies as resources that reinforce the value of destinations (Campillo-Alhama and Martinez-Sala, 2019). Describing an event from an experiential perspective can be a first step in attracting tourists and getting them interested in living the described experience (invitation to the experience). The integration of these two tools would achieve experiential communication through the synergy between the two actions (Galmes-Cerezo and Victoria-Mas, 2012). The Spain.info platform is the official tourism portal, owned by TURESPAÑA, and it constitutes the main informational resource for Spanish destinations by providing descriptive profiles of the majority of events held in Spain. In 2019, it had 10,507,676 users and 26,568,350 page views (Spanish Tourism Institute, 2019), and its content is translated into 11 languages. These data support the importance of the platform from the perspective of tourism promotion and the significance of its content (National Institute of Statistics, 2019). Therefore, the Spain.info website is considered an opportunity for Spanish destination brands to promote in-person events held in their autonomous communities, utilizing this space to describe these events from an experiential perspective.

Some authors consider it necessary to innovate in the communication strategies of tourist destinations, especially in the digital context (Cervi et al., 2023). Experiential marketing strategies, focused on creating experiences that allow for a creative and emotional connection with visitors, can strengthen the bonds with people and promote a higher level of engagement while generating satisfaction and loyalty. Events can be a perfect tool for

this, and an integrated communication strategy is a key component of experiential marketing (Galmes-Cerezo, 2010). In this study, we aim to identify whether the descriptions of in-person events included on the official Tourism website of Spain are being presented from an experiential perspective, and what types of experiences are being described. The research has focused on the study of all cultural and sports events or in-person activities (n=219) promoted on Spain.info during the year 2021.

### **Brand experiences and experiential communication**

Experiences are understood as events that can personally involve individuals (Pine and Gilmore, 1999). Experiential marketing becomes a strategy based on the added value that comes from customers using brands as instruments to experience sensations and emotions, treating consumption as a holistic experience (Schmitt, 1999). Brand experience generates a set of emotional responses provoked by stimuli associated with the brand. Experiential marketing adds significant value to the brand-consumer relationship through experience (Galmes, 2015). Consumers expect brands to provide them with experiences, not just messages, and they seek brands that can stimulate their senses, emotions, and minds in their communications (Schmitt, 1999). Research on brand experience and experiential communication is increasingly abundant and focuses on more specific aspects such as the relationship between experience and brand commitment (Das et al., 2019) or the relationship between customer experience with social media content and their engagement capacity (Waqas et al., 2021).

Experiential marketing is considered a response from brands to the needs demanded by new consumers. A large portion of these consumers belong to the so-called Millennial generation, which is generating great fascination both in the business and academic spheres, and their preferences for quality content and emotional relationships are evident (Martínez-Sala et al., 2018; Sádaba and Feijoo, 2022), as well as their tendency to invest their money in experiences rather than material products (Ketter, 2021). This audience is characterized by hedonistic behavior, considering the consumption of experiences as a way of differentiation and social elevation. They are highly motivated to participate in online word-of-mouth and social media interactions (Parolin and Boeing, 2019). This group is projected to comprise 75% of the global workforce by the year 2025 (National Institute of Statistics, 2021). They form a large segment that will make a significant contribution to the economy and have a major impact on the global market, so brands will have to meet the expectations demanded by Millennials (Villar-Lama, 2018). Experiential communication is becoming a key strategy to understand and propose personalized experiences for these groups (Amoroso et al., 2021). Events are considered a very useful tool to provide attendees with brand-immersed experiences, obtaining a positive image of the brand. For example, a study of a music event shows that the experience enhances brand image and preference among the target audience (Sánchez-Olmos, 2020).

The main theories and models of brand experience and their contributions to tourism marketing and communication have been reviewed. Kim et al. (2012) conducted research based on Pine and Gilmore's (1998; 1999) model, which focused on validating a scale that measures memorable tourism experiences to advance their knowledge. This 24-item scale encompasses 7 areas related to the experience: hedonism, local culture, meaning, knowledge, involvement, and novelty. Brakus et al. (2009) designed the Experience Scale, which measures consumers' experiential relationship with brands and is based on Bernd Schmitt's model of brand experience. The model identifies 5 Strategic Experiential

Modules (SEM): emotional, intellectual, relational, and performance. Godovykh and Tasci (2020), in line with Schmitt's model, propose a tourism experience model with four main components: emotional, cognitive, sensory, and conative, and suggest using a combination of them to capture the totality of the tourism experience in the pre-experience, during, and post-experience phases. In the tourism industry, Oh et al. (2007) developed a measurement instrument that applies Pine and Gilmore's (1999) theories and confirmed that the four domains of experiences are valid for evaluating tourism experiences. Numerous studies have confirmed the usefulness of this model for investigating tourism experiences. For example, Cornelisse (2018) used it in a case study and delved into the search for authenticity in tourism experiences. And Radder and Han (2015) used the four domains of experience to analyze the experiences of visitors to three South African heritage museums and were able to evaluate their expectations fulfillment and the relationship with satisfaction and behavioral intention. Other authors have continued to validate the model, such as the results of Güzel's (2014) study, which indicated that tourism experiences can be represented in terms of the four dimensions, demonstrating their reliability and validity, observing that in the tourism experience studied (Visit to Pamukkale, the ancient city of Turkey), the escapist, entertainment, and aesthetic dimensions had positive effects on emotional excitement.

### **The Pine and Gilmore Dimensions of Experience Model**

The literature review has led us to base our analysis on the model proposed by authors Pine and Gilmore (1998; 1999) since they are one of the main references in experiential marketing. Their work, "The Experience Economy" (1998), focuses on the fact that, for customers, the experience gained through products or services takes precedence over the product or service itself. They define experiences as events that personally engage individuals.

The model proposed by these authors over twenty years ago is still relevant and is used as a basis for analyzing current contexts of communication and experiential marketing, which is particularly relevant in the tourism industry. This model utilizes two coordinate axes that create four quadrants, each representing four types of experiences. In the horizontal axis, the degree of participant involvement is evaluated, ranging from passive to active. Passive means the subject does not participate, while active refers to when the consumer takes part in the event. The vertical axis measures the degree of consumer connection with the environment. Absorption occurs when the consumer is captivated by the event without altering it, while immersion occurs when the consumer becomes involved and can alter the lived experience. The more senses are stimulated, the higher the degree of immersion. These two dimensions give rise to four types of experiences proposed by the authors: entertainment, aesthetics, educational, and escapist. In entertainment experiences, the consumer does not alter the event and does not participate. An example of events that offer participants this dimension of experience could be attending a show, where they are simply present and entertained. However, when a consumer engages in an educational experience, they do not alter the event but participate mentally by "learning," memorizing, or drawing conclusions. An example could be an event based on expert presentations or talks. In escapist experiences, attendees "participate" and engage in an immersive manner, altering the experience itself, such as in a sports activity event. When the event offers an aesthetic experience, the subject does not participate in the environment but enjoys its contemplation, as it is something worthy of observation. An example of an event that can promote this

dimension of experience is the "Las carreras de Caballos de Sanlúcar de Barrameda" (Horse races of Sanlúcar de Barrameda) in the province of Cádiz, which takes place on the beach at sunset, offering aesthetic pleasure. The customers' experience is greatly influenced by the environmental characteristics of the physical surroundings, and therefore, the aesthetic experience will be crucial for evaluating the overall destination experience.

The four dimensions of experience described in the model do not necessarily have to occur in isolation. Instead, starting from these four types, they can be combined to form a hybrid experience. The model suggests that optimal experiences are those that encompass aspects of all four dimensions, forming an "optimal point" (Figure 1) in the area where the most complete experiences are found (Pine and Gilmore, 1998). In our analysis, we can see how each in-person act can give rise to various types of experiences, and this combination can enrich the overall experience and evaluation of the destination. Each experience of an event is not necessarily exclusively related to one of the four dimensions. While one dimension may stand out, the experience usually contains elements of all four. When participants perceive that they feel, learn, and immerse themselves in the event or actively engage in it, that's when the lived experience becomes meaningful for the tourist. Therefore, tourist events that provide the richest experiences are those that offer all the experiential dimensions.

**Figure 1.** Model of the Dimensions of Experience by Pine and Gilmore.



**Source:** Developed based on Pine and Gilmore (1998; 1999).

### Experiential tourist events

Currently, events are present in every marketing activity as a fundamental tool to create an authentic brand experience. They have the ability to generate experiences that the audience will remember and associate with the brand that provided them (Galmes-Cerezo, 2010). Events have proven to be a strategic marketing tool that allows direct interaction with the target audience while adding value to the organizing brands (Cristófol et al., 2019). Tourist events serve as attractions for visitors. They have a special appeal as each in-person act is unique and ephemeral, setting them apart from other permanent tourist attractions (Getz, 2008). Furthermore, the environment in which the experience takes place is authentic and identified as a real experience in a unique location

(Getz and Page, 2016). These in-person acts, which can take various forms (festivals, tournaments, popular parties, etc.), become a fundamental component of tourism development and marketing plans (Dini and Pencarelli, 2022). In the realm of tourism branding, in-person acts are a valuable instrument as they facilitate a deep relationship with visitors, offering unique experiences that cannot be replicated elsewhere. The concept of exclusivity contributes to the destination's differentiation, creating the perception that such an experience cannot be enjoyed anywhere else (Martín-Martín, 2017). This perception captivates visitors, giving new meaning to the organized experience and making them feel like they are part of a community that has invited them to participate (Cristófol et al., 2019). If the in-person act is well-organized, with an intentional design of the visitor's experience, it will leave a lasting impression on tourists, who will remember and share it as one of the most important highlights of their trip (Lamirán-Palomares et al., 2022). The experience lived by the participating visitor will directly influence their brand preference and overall evaluation of the destination, as well as their intention to share content about it on social media (Campillo-Alhama and Martínez-Sala, 2019).

Tourist brand experiences don't just happen during the event, but they begin before the event, on the stage where the target audience is invited to live the experience (Berridge, 2014). It is necessary, therefore, for the proposition to be appealing, and integrated communication should focus on highlighting these tourist experiences through event descriptions, allowing the target audience to envision the experience they will have. Following the proposal made by Pine and Gilmore (1998; 1999), the more dimensions of the experience potential participants can identify in the event description, the more attractive the experiential proposition will be, and the greater the power of attraction of the invitation to participate.

## **2. OBJECTIVES**

The objective of our work is to analyze the experiential communication strategies of Spanish tourist destinations. The starting point of our research is based on the main idea of Pine and Gilmore's Dimensions of Experience model (1998; 1999), which considers optimal experiences as those that encompass aspects of the four dimensions, forming an "optimal point" around the area where the most complete experiences are found. Therefore, the main objective is to determine how the experiences of tourist events included in the Spain.info Agenda are described. This allows us to assess whether the experiences are being adequately communicated and what types of experiences are being described on the Spain.info platform. Through the study of the Spain.info Agenda, we aim to understand how experiential communication strategies are being implemented in tourist events in Spain. We want to find out if the promotion of events is focused on the experience (O1) and identify the types of experiences being offered in the descriptions of events on the official Tourism of Spain website (O2).

In addition, we have set three specific objectives. The first is to identify the factors associated with the optimized descriptions of event experiences (O3). In other words, we aim to find the characteristics that events have when they are described as richer experiences. The literature review has allowed us to identify two possible factors associated with experiential descriptions that are closer to the optimal point, namely, the unique location and event segmentation.

The next specific objective is to determine which Autonomous Communities are offering richer experiences in the descriptions of their tourist events (O4). Finally, we aim to understand the core values included in the descriptions of the richest experiences (O5).

### 3. METHODOLOGY

To achieve the stated objectives, an exploratory research approach was conducted using content analysis and quantitative methodology. Quantitative variables were employed for content analysis, allowing for descriptive techniques such as frequency analysis. Subsequently, a bivariate analysis was performed using the Chi-square test for independence.

The descriptions of events scheduled for the year 2021 and included on the official website of Tourism in Spain were reviewed. The analysis corpus consists of all cultural and sports live events (n=219) promoted on the website (<https://www.spain.info/es/>). Data collection took place between June 20, 2021, and July 20, 2021. The number of promoted events from each Autonomous Community was as follows: Catalonia (39), Andalusia (35), Community of Madrid (27), Canary Islands (20), Balearic Islands (17), Basque Country (13), Extremadura (11), Valencian Community (10), Aragon (12), Castile and León (12), Galicia (7), while the remaining Communities held fewer events (between 1 and 4). For content analysis, a structured form was designed with various observation fields related to the experiential communication of the event, as well as other descriptive event data. The analysis was conducted manually by the researchers, and the collected data were classified in Excel pivot tables.

**Figure 2.** Description of the mountain bike race event "The Legend of Tartessos".



**Source:** Official tourism website of Spain Spain.info (2023) <https://www.spain.info/es/>

Two categories of variables were used: event descriptive variables and variables related to the type of experience described. The event descriptive variables included event segmentation, event location, Autonomous Community (Communities that held more than 12 events), and projected core values. The variables related to the described experience were dimensions of experience included in the event description (entertainment, escapism, aesthetics, and education) and experience optimization (description of an experience closer to the optimal point with 3 or 4 dimensions, or

description of an experience further from the optimal point with 1 or 2 dimensions). These variables were defined based on Pine and Gilmore's (1998; 1999) model of experience dimensions. To identify the "singular place" variable, explicit mention of the special location in the description was considered, emphasizing its uniqueness. For the variables related to the "dimensions of experience" offered in the event, the aforementioned model (Figure 1) was taken into account, and classification criteria were established (see Table 1) based on the use of specific words in the event description that evoke different dimensions of experience. Following linguist De Saussure, words form a system in which each one derives its value from its position in relation to the others. In the lexicon, each word is the center of what he called an associative "constellation." For example, the word "learning" (educational dimension) evokes formal associations with "to learn" and "we learn," but also semantic content such as critical analysis, thinking, intellectual development, reflection, etc.

**Table 1.** *Classification criteria of the Dimensions of Experience.*

<p style="text-align: center;"><b>AESTHETIC DIMENSION</b></p> <p style="text-align: center;"><b>(Observing)</b></p> <p>It involves <u>observing and enjoying something</u> without causing any changes to it.</p> <p><b>Criteria:</b> When the event description refers to the beauty of the surroundings, monuments, natural environment, works of art, artistic expressions (theater, music, dance, painting, or literature), historical spaces in the city, cultural heritage, and charming places.</p>	<p style="text-align: center;"><b>EDUCATIONAL DIMENSION</b></p> <p style="text-align: center;"><b>(Learning)</b></p> <p>It involves <u>mental engagement to acquire knowledge.</u></p> <p><b>Criteria:</b> When the event description refers to critical analysis, thinking, intellectual development, reflection, individual rights, knowledge, learning, erudition, courses, workshops, and conferences.</p>
<p style="text-align: center;"><b>ESCAPE DIMENSION</b></p> <p style="text-align: center;"><b>(Engaging)</b></p> <p>The person <u>actively participates and influences the development of the experience.</u></p> <p><b>Criteria:</b> When the event description refers to participation, interaction, collaboration, advocacy, coexistence, workshops, participatory physical activities, and contests.</p>	<p style="text-align: center;"><b>ENTERTAINMENT DIMENSION</b></p> <p style="text-align: center;"><b>(Being entertained)</b></p> <p>It involves <u>enjoyment and fun without influencing the development of the experience.</u></p> <p><b>Criteria:</b> When the event description refers to: fun, having a good time, leisure, party, festival, show, exhibition, personal interests, or hobbies.</p>

**Source:** Own elaboration based on Pine and Gilmore (1998; 1999).

Finally, statistical analyses were conducted using the IBM SPSS 23 statistical program. The analysis began with a descriptive phase of the data to summarize the observed information through the creation of frequency tables and graphical representations. Subsequently, in order to analyze the relationship between the proposed variables of qualitative/nominal nature (as is the case in the present study), it was deemed



appropriate to use the contrast provided by the Chi-Square test of independence. This technique allows us to determine whether the proportions in which the qualitative variables appear in the study are significantly related to each other, not attributed to chance.

## 4. RESULTS

### 4.1. Dimensions of the Experience and Optimization of Experiential Communication

Firstly, the described dimensions of the experience (aesthetic, escapist, educational, and entertainment) have been related to the optimization of the experience (closer or further from the optimal point). The Chi-square test yielded a value below 0.05 in all cases. Thus, a significant association is observed between events that describe a specific dimension of the experience and the optimization of that experience. When the event description includes the entertainment dimension, in most cases, the proposed experience is further from the optimal point (offers 1 or 2 dimensions of the experience). If the described experience includes the aesthetic dimension, it is also mostly further from this point. However, for events that describe the escapist dimension, the experience is predominantly closer to the optimal point (offers 3 or 4 dimensions). In the case of including the educational dimension, all observed descriptions also present an experience closer to the optimal point (See Table 2).

**Table 2.** Relationship between dimensions and experience optimization.

DIMENSIONS OF THE DESCRIBED EXPERIENCE	OPTIMIZATION OF THE DESCRIBED EXPERIENCE		$\chi^2$
	LESS CLOSE TO THE OPTIMAL POINT (1 or 2 exp.)	CLOSER TO THE OPTIMAL POINT (3 or 4 exp.)	
ENTERTAINMENT	53.9% (110)	46.1% (94)	12.337 (0.006) ***
ESTHETIC	56.8% (121)	43.2% (92)	36.357 (0.000) ***
ESCAPE	17% (18)	83.0% (88)	135.548 (0.000) ***
EDUCATION	-	100.0% (36)	167.819 (0.000) ***
*** significant at $p < 0.001$ ; ** significant at $p < 0.01$ ; * significant at $p < 0.05$ ; ns: non-significant			

**Source:** Author's own work.

#### 4.2. Singular Location and Optimization of Experiential Communication

The Chi-square test does not provide a value lower than 0.05 in any case. There is no significant relationship when associating events held in a singular location with the proximity to the optimal point of the described experience. Therefore, there is no tendency for events held in singular locations to offer experiences closer to the optimal point (See Table 3).

**Table 3.** Relationship between the optimization of the experience and unique place.

UNIQUE PLACE	OPTIMIZATION OF THE DESCRIBED EXPERIENCE		$\chi^2$
	LESS CLOSE TO THE OPTIMAL POINT (1 or 2 exp.)	CLOSER TO THE OPTIMAL POINT (3 or 4 exp.)	
SINGULAR	61.8% (42)	38.2% (26)	1.790
NON-SINGULAR	55.0% (83)	45.0% (68)	(0.617) n.s.

\*\*\* significant at  $p < 0.001$ ; \*\* significant at  $p < 0.01$ ; \* significant at  $p < 0.05$ ; ns: non-significant

**Source:** Author's own work.

#### 4.3. Segmentation of the tourist event and optimization of experiential communication

When analyzing the degree of association between event segmentation (cultural/sporting) and the description of an experience closer to the optimal point (offering 3 or 4 dimensions) or less close (offering 1 or 2 dimensions), the Chi-square test yields a value less than 0.05. Therefore, this relationship can be considered significant, allowing us to assert that there is a dependence between these variables. It is observed that cultural events mostly promote an experience less close to the optimal point, while sporting events predominantly describe an experience closer to the optimal point (See Table 4).

**Table 4.** Relationship between event segmentation and experience optimization.

SEGMENTATION	OPTIMIZATION OF THE DESCRIBED EXPERIENCE		$\chi^2$
	LESS CLOSE TO THE OPTIMAL POINT (1 or 2 exp.)	CLOSER TO THE OPTIMAL POINT (3 or 4 exp.)	

CULTURAL	72.4% (110)	27.6% (42)	97.776 (0.000) ***
SPORTY	22.4% (15)	77.6% (52)	
*** significant at $p < 0.001$ ; ** significant at $p < 0.01$ ; * significant at $p < 0.05$ ; ns: non-significant			

**Source:** Author's own work.

#### 4.4. Optimization of experiential communication by Autonomous Community

Below, by Autonomous Community, the number of events that offer experiences closer to the optimal point, and the number of events that describe experiences further from the optimal point are shown (See Table 5). The only Autonomous Communities that promote a higher percentage of events as optimized experiences are Aragón, Canary Islands, Madrid, and Balearic Islands. In the other observed Autonomous Communities, there is a higher percentage of events that describe less optimized experiences by including only 1 or 2 dimensions of the experience.

**Table 5.** *Autonomous Community and Intensity of the Experience.*

AUTONOMOUS COMMUNITY	OPTIMIZATION OF THE EXPERIENCE		N = 219
	LESS CLOSE TO THE OPTIMAL POINT	CLOSER TO THE OPTIMAL POINT	
	(1 or 2 exp.)	(3 or 4 exp.)	
Andalucía	65,7% (23)	34,3% (12)	35
Aragón	41,7% (5)	58,4% (7)	12
Canarias	45,0% (9)	55,0% (11)	20
Castilla y León	75,0% (9)	25,0% (3)	12
Cataluña	64,1% (25)	35,9% (14)	39
Madrid	40,7% (11)	59,3% (16)	27
C. Valenciana	70,0% (7)	30,0% (3)	10
Extremadura	72,7% (8)	27,3% (3)	11

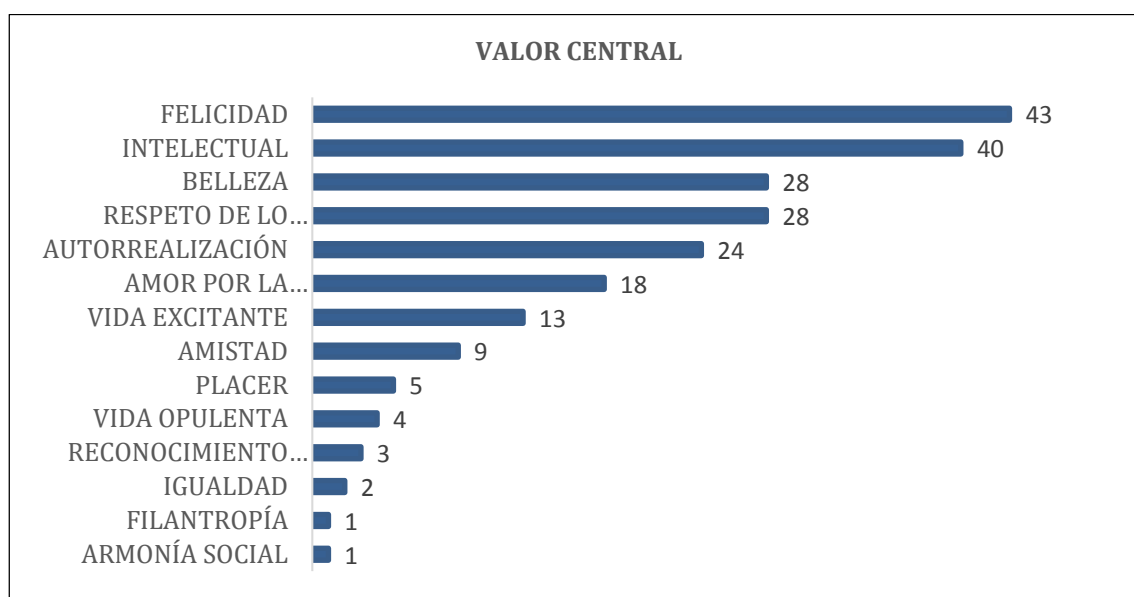
Islas Baleares	41,2% (7)	58,8% (10)	17
País Vasco	61,5% (8)	38,5% (5)	13
Resto de Comunidades	57,1% (125)	42,9% (94)	23

**Source:** Author's own work.

#### 4.5. Values of the event and optimization of experiential communication

Based on the core values identified in the study by Martín-Martín et al. (2022), we have examined which of these values are included in the descriptions of events that offer experiences closer to the optimal point (2-3 dimensions) and compared them to the overall total. The predominant core values in the total descriptions of events have been "happiness" and "intellectual value," followed by "beauty" and "respect for one's own" values (see Figure 3). However, when the offered experience is closer to the optimal point, the values that are predominantly presented are "love for nature," "happiness," "exciting life," and "self-realization" (see Figure 4).

**Figure 3.** Core values presented in the events described.



**Source:** Author's own work.

**Figure 4.** *Central values when the experience is closer to the optimum point.*



**Source:** Author's own work.

## 5. DISCUSSION

Based on the literature review and the results, new meanings have been explored that invite reflection on the experiential communication of tourist events.

The entertainment industry has become a disproportionately influential force in modern society, leading event organizers to be overly focused on entertainment and undervalue other dimensions such as education. The results of this research (see Table 2) indicate that when the dimension of education or escapism is present in the description, the described experience is less rich than when the aesthetic and entertainment dimensions are present. From this research, we can conclude that event organizers assume that people seeking entertainment experiences do not require much more, and therefore, their event descriptions offer experiences composed of only one or two dimensions. For example, the majority of descriptions of cultural events only include the entertainment dimension and the aesthetic dimension (see Table 4). On the opposite end are descriptions that include the education dimension, which in 100% of the cases are promoting experiences closer to the optimal point, such as the MADBird Fair (Nature Observation Fair), which describes an educational, aesthetic, and entertainment experience.

Descriptions that include the escapism dimension also tend, although in fewer cases, to be richer experiences by including more dimensions. In this regard, some sports events in which tourists can actively participate, such as the "Canary Olympic Sailing Week," are offering not only an escapism experience but also an aesthetic experience by sensually enjoying the surrounding environment, and an entertainment experience by observing the spectacle of boats sailing.

The literature review determines that the factor that affects visitor satisfaction towards a heritage destination is the experience of living in an emblematic place. It is then suggested that destination managers could offer visitors meaningful experiences through events

held in heritage spaces to enhance their sense of belonging and their emotions related to the place (Su et al., 2020).

However, the lack of significance between the variables "unique place" and "optimization of the experience" (See Table 3) raises the question of whether event descriptions in many cases are missing the opportunity to showcase the events and their experiences. As pointed out by Martín-Martín (2014), it is crucial for destination marketing organizations (DMOs) to optimize the design of content on their tourism websites. This way, the heritage of each destination, its distinctive spaces, and the diversity of experiences it can offer to tourists will be highlighted, allowing the experience to begin on the website itself, before the trip, and serve as an effective tool for national and international promotion. Tourism websites, such as Spain.info, function as owned media that can be adapted, modified, and improved to provide a comprehensive perception of tourism experiences in Spain (Martín-Martín, 2017). In our analysis, in order for an event to be considered as taking place in a unique place, the description had to emphasize that the event location was special. In some cases, the researchers were aware that the events took place in a unique or even heritage site, such as the Cáceres Classical Theater Festival, but this information was not mentioned in their description, and therefore it could not be considered as a unique place, hence the lack of significance of the variable.

The results linking segmentation with the optimization of the described experience (See Table 4) show that events targeting a segment of tourists interested in sports are closer to the optimal point of the experience than those targeting the cultural segment. Several researchers describe this segment as more likely to develop richer experiences and have a strong inclination toward participation (Richards, 2018). Therefore, it is possible that event promoters targeting sports tourists, who are familiar with their interests, are making a special effort to offer and describe hybrid experiences that are closer to the optimal point, thus achieving an affective disposition towards the destination.

The Autonomous Communities that describe richer experiences in their events are the island communities and Madrid (See Table 5). The possibilities offered by good weather and maritime natural spaces allow for the optimization of the design of tourist events, and organizers are aware of this and highlight it in their descriptions to attract visitors. Additionally, events held in Madrid, being the capital and one of the most important cities in Spain, are usually more established and have a larger budget, requiring better tourism promotion.

The core values projected in the description of events proposing richer experiences are "love for nature," "happiness," "exciting life," and "self-realization" (See Figure 4). These values do not align with those of the overall descriptions (See Figure 3), except for the value of "happiness." The persistence of this value may lie in the essence of the tourism industry itself, as tourism is a sector that works towards the goal of contributing to increasing customer happiness, to the extent that it is even referred to as the "Happiness Industry" (Arimany, 2017). Furthermore, it is important to consider that events are often designed to take tourists out of their routine and provide them with a pleasurable experience that contributes to their happiness (Mitas & Bastiaansen, 2018). The importance of the value of "love for nature" is closely related to the existence of the aesthetic experience, which in some events can evoke a "sensory shock" sought by tourists (Carballo-Fuentes et al., 2015). These events described in a way that conveys "love for nature" are mostly held in natural areas of great beauty, allowing for unique experiences

due to the geographical nature itself, thereby enriching them. The value of "exciting life" is primarily projected when the experience is escapist. Tourist events have the particularity of offering customers a scenario where they can become the actors themselves. When events allow tourists to actively participate, become involved, and be part of the event, more valuable, memorable, and therefore more complete experiences are created (Carballo-Fuentes et al., 2015). The value of "self-realization" is generated by the tourist experience that involves high levels of participation, which has the potential to contribute to personal growth and self-development (Li et al., 2022).

The results show a lack of generalization in the descriptions of tourist events and their experiential proposals, as they include different dimensions of the experience and offer more or less rich experiences. Additionally, the research has identified some characteristics of experiential communications in events that can influence the optimization of the proposed experiences according to Pine and Gilmore's model (1998; 1999). These characteristics are: orienting the event towards a segment of sports tourists and incorporating the dimension of education or the escapism dimension.

## 6. CONCLUSIONS

We can say that the promotion of events on the Spain Tourism website is not highly focused on integrated experiential communication, as in many cases, there is no experiential description of the event, and when it is present, the majority describe experiences that are not highly optimized. This conclusion is drawn from the analysis of the descriptions, which, as we have been informed by the content developers of Spain.info<sup>2</sup>, are created by event promoters or the platform's own content development team using data provided by the organizers. The reality is that many of these descriptions do not reflect integrated experiential communication, and it is possible that the experience designed for the event is much closer to the optimal point than the description itself. So why isn't the experience promoted effectively? It seems that event promoters are not paying enough attention to event promotion or may not be aware of its experiential potential. Previous research shows how the use of specific vocabulary contributes to potential visitors identifying the destination's personality and recommends that responsible parties strategically plan tourism promotion discourses to position the destination, for example, by having a greater presence in cultural experience-related content to help convey an exciting personality (Vinyals-Mirabent et al., 2019). Carballo-Fuentes et al. (2015) conclude that experiential marketing not only means having a range of experiences but also promoting them appropriately and not merely communicating the obvious. Promoters of the experience must attract tourists to a destination by offering meaningful experiences through a "more creative expression." Therefore, organizers of tourist events should not only focus on designing and organizing optimized experiential events but also use integrated experiential communication strategies to design their content and promote rich and meaningful experiences for the target segment (Galmes-Cerezo and Victoria-Mas, 2012). Pine and Gilmore's model (1998; 1999) and the dimensions of the experience can guide their creative strategies and help not only attract visitors to experiential events but also motivate them to share their experiences with other tourists and make them memorable.

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<sup>2</sup> Communications with those responsible for the content development of the Spain.info website have been maintained via email in an efficient and professional manner, answering all the questions raised.

From this perspective, the description of events would include a representation of all the dimensions of the experience that are included in the experiential event itself. Additionally, there are other key factors of the event, such as the unique location or core values, that will also enrich the event description and attract tourists to live these experiences. This experiential view of tourism events, as offered by our study, can help event organizers design innovative proposals for visitors that will evoke excitement and remain in their minds (Schmitt, 1999).

Furthermore, when tourists have a meaningful experience, they are highly likely to generate positive eWOM (electronic word-of-mouth) on travel platforms and social media (Campillo-Alhama and Martínez-Sala, 2019; Rasoolimanesh et al., 2021). To leverage this propensity, we suggest that Spain.info website could invite visitors who have had a significant experience at a specific event to share their experiences with other users. This could include a review system based on the four dimensions of the experience (Pine and Gilmore, 1998; 1999), allowing for an experiential relationship between tourists and destinations through events to be observed (Brakus et al., 2009). This would greatly benefit both event organizers in improving experiences year after year and guests themselves in understanding these experiences from the perspective of individuals in the same segment.

Destination promoters should consider the Spain.info Agenda as a powerful tool for describing experiences that attract tourists to a destination and add value to the brand. They should describe events from the perspective of integrated experiential communication to promote experiences that are closer to the optimal point, attracting new visitors and maintaining the loyalty of existing ones. Additionally, they can explore new alternative experiences that, depending on the target segment (cultural or sports), can strengthen the values that make the destination and the event unique (Martín-Martín, 2017).

The main contribution of our study is the experiential vision of communication in tourist destinations, leveraging the execution of their events. The communicative revolution we are experiencing, which has compelled advertisers and agencies to innovate in communication in order to offer meaning to the target audience (Castelló-Martínez and Del Pino-Romero, 2019), invites the prominence of communicative strategies focused on inviting potential customers to live significant experiences. Therefore, integrated experiential communication, which begins with the promotion of the event, can successfully convey the essence of each destination and engage the tourist, optimizing the space. This starting point can be crucial in providing the most comprehensive experiences that project the values visitors demand, enabling the recognition and differentiation of destinations.

## **7. RECOMMENDATIONS**

The limitation of the study lies in the fact that only texts and event descriptions were analyzed, while in many cases, the descriptions also contain images that may be contributing meaning to the dimensions of the experience. Therefore, the scope of this study intentionally focused on the event descriptions found on the official tourism website of Spain. In the methodological description, the usefulness of this website for the study has been justified, as it is the official tourism platform with a high number of visits from potential visitors to our country. Additionally, it is the most comprehensive repository of event descriptions in Spain. This limitation serves as inspiration for



recommending future studies that could include the analysis of images and their contributions to experiential communication.

It would be of great interest to expand this study to encompass all promotional actions for each event held in Spain, but it is not the objective of this research. Therefore, this initial exploratory study can be the beginning of an interesting line of communication that can continue investigating the evolution of experiential communication strategies in tourist destinations through event descriptions on the Spain.info digital platform in the coming years. Furthermore, it would be highly valuable to investigate how tourists perceive the events described on the website from their experiential dimensions. This study proposes an initial approach to this new perspective and provides guidance for tourism marketing professionals toward a new strategic approach based on experiential communication. It also highlights the possibilities offered by the official tourism website of Spain to communicate events in each destination from this new perspective, inviting potential visitors to live optimized and meaningful experiences.

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**Conceptualization:** Martín Martín, Victoria y Galmes Cerezo, María. **Methodology:** Martín Martín, Victoria, Galmes Cerezo, María y Retamosa Ferreiro, Marta. **Software:** Retamosa Ferreiro, Marta. **Validation:** Martín Martín, Victoria, Galmes Cerezo, María y Retamosa Ferreiro, Marta. **Formal Analysis** Retamosa Ferreiro, Marta. Martín Martín, Victoria y Galmes Cerezo, María. **Data Curation:** Martín Martín, Victoria, Galmes Cerezo, María y Retamosa Ferreiro, Marta. **Writing - Original draft preparation:** Martín Martín, Victoria y Galmes Cerezo, María; **Writing - Review and Editing:** Martín Martín, Victoria y Galmes Cerezo, María. **Visualization:** Martín Martín, Victoria; **Supervision:** Martín Martín, Victoria y Galmes Cerezo, María. **Project management:** Martín Martín, Victoria. **All authors have read and accepted the published version of the manuscript.:** Martín Martín, Victoria.

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## AUTHORS

### **Victoria Martín Martín**

Universidad Complutense de Madrid.

PhD in Information Sciences from the Complutense University of Madrid, with a doctoral thesis on Branding in tourism websites. Professor and researcher in the Department of Marketing at UCM. Her research interests focus on Branding, Communication, Tourism, and Tourism Marketing. She has published several articles in scientific journals and those of the Ministry of Industry, Trade, and Tourism, and has participated in national and international conferences. She is a member of the Teaching Innovation research group at UCM.

[vimart09@ucm.es](mailto:vimart09@ucm.es)

**Índice H:** 2

**Orcid ID:** <https://orcid.org/0000-0003-3839-7368>

**Google Scholar:** <https://scholar.google.com/citations?user=LdMHZBgAAAAJ&hl=es>

### **María Galmes Cerezo**

Universidad Complutense de Madrid.

Professor in the Department of Marketing at the Complutense University. PhD from the University of Malaga with a thesis on Events and experiential marketing. She has served as the coordinator of the Master's Degree in Neuromarketing at the International University of La Rioja. Her main research focus is on Communication and experiential marketing. She has been recognized with a research six-year period by CNEAI. She is a member of the UCM Research Group on Responsible Communication and Vulnerable Audiences, with competitive European projects.

**Índice H:** 7

**Orcid ID:** <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-1520-3703>

**Google Scholar:** [Maria Galmes Cerezo](#)

**Scopus Author ID:** [56041349600](#)

**WOS Author ID:** <https://www.webofscience.com/wos/author/record/GQQ-1560-2022>

### **Marta Retamosa Ferreiro**

Universidad de Castilla-La Mancha.

Dr. Marta Retamosa is a professor in the Department of Marketing and Market Research at the University of Castilla-La Mancha. Marta earned her Ph.D. in Economics with a thesis on University Branding. She specializes in international marketing and neuromarketing. Her research fields include brand management or branding, consumer behavior, and neuromarketing. She has publications in prestigious journals such as the Journal of Marketing for Higher Education.

[marta.retamosa@uclm.es](mailto:marta.retamosa@uclm.es)

**Índice H:** 3

**Orcid ID:** <https://orcid.org/0000-0001-9984-7639>

**Google Scholar:** <https://scholar.google.com/citations?hl=es&user=T2ZzIPMAAAAJ>

**Scopus ID:** <https://www.scopus.com/authid/detail.uri?authorId=57209860058>