

Sustainable tourism intermediation: a ten-point management guide for the responsible marketing of destinations

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Abstract

This study develops a ten-point management framework to support the effective integration of sustainability into destination marketing through tourism intermediation. It adopts a qualitative, exploratory and practice-oriented approach combining a narrative review of the literature on tourism intermediation, sustainable management, supply chain management, digitalisation, consumer behaviour and environmental communication with a purposive analysis of documented practices implemented by domestic and international tourism organisations. The evidence was organised through thematic analysis and synthesised into ten operational principles addressing corporate strategy, supplier selection, product design, impact reduction, digitalisation, professional training, transparent communication, local stakeholder engagement, responsible traveller behaviour and continuous improvement. The study shows that sustainability acquires strategic significance when it extends beyond the internal operations of intermediary firms to encompass supply chain management, tourism product design and marketing decisions. Its principal contribution is an integrated management tool that connects corporate sustainability with the capacity of tourism intermediaries to influence destination development. The framework is flexible and transferable across different organisational and geographical contexts, although its practical applicability requires subsequent empirical validation in tourism businesses and destinations.

Keywords: tourism intermediation; destination marketing; sustainable tourism; tourism intermediary firms; sustainable supply chain management; commercial governance.

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1. Introduction

1.1. *The Transformation of Tourism Intermediation*

Tourism intermediation has undergone a profound transformation as a consequence of digitalisation, the emergence of new distribution channels and changes in consumer behaviour. Rather than leading to the disappearance of intermediaries, this process has reconfigured their functions and reshaped relationships throughout the tourism value chain (Kracht & Wang, 2010).

Contemporary tourism distribution brings together human actors, organisations, platforms and information systems whose interactions influence the design, distribution and consumption of tourism products (Jørgensen, 2017; Rivera-Garcia, 2025). The transition from traditional intermediation towards infomediation and innomediation has broadened the role of intermediary firms, which now create value through advisory services, personalisation, traveller assistance and the incorporation of technological innovations.

Marketing automation, artificial intelligence, data analytics and omnichannel strategies have increased the ability of tourism intermediary firms to influence destination visibility, supplier selection and the distribution of tourist flows (Salgado Domínguez et al., 2021). Tourism intermediation has therefore evolved beyond a merely transactional activity to assume a strategic role in shaping tourism supply.

Pastor Ruiz and Rivera García (2022) argued that this transformation should be underpinned by technological innovation, professional training, personalisation, omnichannel strategies and the marketing of sustainable tourism products. Subsequent studies expanded this perspective by examining practices related to digitalisation, supplier selection, carbon offsetting, animal welfare and collaboration with different stakeholder groups (Rivera García & Pastor Ruiz, 2025a, 2025b). Nevertheless, there remains a need to translate these experiences into practical guidance applicable to businesses with different organisational characteristics.

1.2. *Sustainability and Destination Marketing*

Sustainability has become established as a strategic dimension of tourism management, requiring coordination, managerial capacity and the participation of multiple stakeholders (Hall, 2019). Within this context, destination competitiveness should not be assessed solely in terms of demand growth, but also according to its contribution to community well-being and the conservation of the resources upon which tourism activity depends.

A number of studies emphasise the importance of social responsibility, community involvement and collaboration among local stakeholders in advancing towards more sustainable development models (Sarabia-Molina et al., 2022; Ziritt Trejo et al., 2024). Tourism intermediaries play a relevant role by connecting local supply with markets, facilitating market access for small businesses and translating destinations' sustainability attributes into value propositions for consumers.

The adoption of sustainable practices also represents a source of differentiation for intermediary firms (Garay et al., 2018). In the case of tour operators, sustainable supply chain management depends on supplier selection, contracting, monitoring and collaboration with the different actors involved

(Schwartz et al., 2008). However, sustainable destination marketing requires more than promotion. It involves embedding sustainability within strategic decision-making and addressing the tensions between marketing and sustainability identified by Font and McCabe (2017).

1.3. Research Problem

Despite the growth of corporate commitments, certification schemes and sustainability policies, a gap remains between the declaration of sustainable principles and their effective incorporation into commercial decision-making. A company may reduce its environmental impact or communicate sustainability objectives without substantially altering its supplier selection, product design or the distribution of the benefits generated by its activity.

This distance between commitment and implementation is reflected in the limited incorporation of sustainability criteria into supplier management, itinerary design and the participation of local stakeholders, as well as in the risk of greenwashing resulting from imprecise or insufficiently substantiated claims.

Although the literature has extensively addressed sustainability in tourism, research on intermediation remains limited and frequently focuses on isolated business practices without integrating them into a common operational framework (Garay et al., 2018).

The research problem therefore lies in the absence of an integrated management framework capable of translating dispersed academic findings and isolated business practices into operational guidance for organisations involved in destination marketing. This limitation is particularly relevant for small and medium-sized travel agencies, destination management companies and tour operators operating in destinations characterised by fragmented tourism supply and limited coordination among stakeholders.

In this study, commercial governance refers to the capacity of tourism intermediaries to shape suppliers' access to markets, the configuration and visibility of tourism products, the spatial and temporal distribution of visitor flows, and the information that informs travellers' decisions. This form of market-based influence complements, rather than replaces, the public and destination-level governance of tourism development.

1.4. Research Objective

The objective of this study is to propose a ten-point management framework, grounded in the academic literature and documented business practices, to guide the incorporation of sustainability criteria into destination marketing by tourism intermediary firms.

To this end, the study reviews the literature on tourism intermediation, sustainability, destination marketing and value chain management, complemented by an illustrative analysis of practices developed by tour operators, travel agencies and other tourism organisations. Drawing on these sources, ten principles are identified that can be applied to corporate strategy, supplier management, product design, training, communication and performance evaluation.

The principal contribution of the study lies in integrating within a single management tool a range of dimensions that have generally been examined separately, thereby connecting corporate sustainability with commercial decisions that directly affect destinations. The framework consequently distinguishes between three complementary levels: the internal sustainability of the intermediary firm, the responsible management of its supply chain and its contribution to sustainable destination development.

The ten-point framework is not intended to replace existing standards, but rather to provide a flexible and adaptable set of guidelines for businesses of different sizes and geographical scope. In doing so, it seeks to strengthen the role of tourism intermediation as an instrument of commercial governance.

2. Tourism Intermediation and Sustainability: Foundations for Responsible Destination Marketing

2.1. The Influence of Tourism Intermediaries on Destination Sustainability

The sustainability of tourism destinations depends upon the interdependent decisions of public authorities, businesses, residents, visitors and civil society organisations. Within this context, tour operators, travel agencies, destination management companies (DMCs) and digital platforms do considerably more than facilitate commercial transactions; they actively influence the selection, combination and distribution of the services that ultimately shape the visitor experience.

One of their most significant sources of influence lies in supplier selection. Schwartz et al. (2008) propose a sustainable supply chain management framework based on organisational policies, supplier evaluation, contractual requirements, monitoring mechanisms and collaborative relationships, recognising that a substantial proportion of tourism's environmental and social impacts originate from services delivered by third-party providers.

Tourism intermediaries also shape the spatial and temporal distribution of visitor flows through the design of itineraries, travel seasons and tourism products. This capacity can contribute to reducing pressure on highly visited destinations and promoting a more balanced distribution of tourism demand, although achieving these outcomes requires close collaboration with destination management organisations, public authorities and local stakeholders.

Furthermore, intermediary firms are able to incorporate accommodation providers, transport services and tourism experiences that are aligned with recognised sustainability criteria. Pastor Ruiz and Rivera García (2022) found that 73.8% of the travel professionals surveyed considered specialised tour operators essential for bringing together the fragmented supply of sustainable tourism products currently available in the marketplace.

A further strategic function concerns the communication of information relating to sustainability certifications, environmental impacts and responsible tourism practices. Such communication must be transparent, evidence-based and verifiable in order to avoid greenwashing and enable travellers to make more informed purchasing decisions (Font & McCabe, 2017). Likewise, tourism intermediaries can encourage more responsible visitor behaviour by providing recommendations that promote

sustainable consumption without transferring the entire responsibility for sustainability to consumers themselves.

Taken together, these functions position tourism intermediary firms as key agents of commercial governance, whose effectiveness depends upon collaboration between public authorities, businesses and host communities (Nguyen et al., 2019). As demonstrated by Mendoza-Moheno et al. (2021), these collaborative networks foster sustainable innovation provided that they respect the decision-making capacity and development priorities of destinations.

2.2. From Corporate Commitments to Tourism Product Design

The integration of sustainability within tourism businesses often begins with internal initiatives aimed at improving operational efficiency and reducing resource consumption. However, genuinely sustainable tourism intermediation requires sustainability principles to be embedded throughout the entire tourism value chain.

Digitalisation represents one of the most widespread practices, provided that it contributes to improving operational efficiency, information traceability and knowledge management. Rivera García and Pastor Ruiz (2025a, 2025b) demonstrate how digital technologies can facilitate the elimination of printed documentation, the implementation of mobile applications for travellers and more effective communication concerning suppliers and sustainability impacts.

Reducing resource consumption and greenhouse gas emissions constitutes another fundamental dimension of sustainable tourism management. Although carbon offsetting initiatives may help address unavoidable residual emissions, they should complement rather than replace strategies aimed at reducing emissions at source. Likewise, tourism product design can incorporate more efficient transport connections, lower-impact mobility options and longer stays better suited to the characteristics and carrying capacity of individual destinations.

Certification schemes contribute to standardising management processes and verifying compliance with recognised sustainability standards, whilst issues such as animal welfare illustrate how corporate sustainability commitments can be translated into concrete product development decisions. Professional training also plays a critical role. Pastor Ruiz and Rivera García (2022) identified significant deficiencies in sustainability training, with only 7.2% of respondents considering the level of sustainability expertise among conventional tour operators to be satisfactory.

Collaboration with local suppliers, together with partnerships involving public authorities, destination management organisations, universities, non-governmental organisations and professional associations, contributes to a more balanced distribution of tourism value whilst facilitating the development of shared sustainability strategies (Nguyen et al., 2019).

Collectively, these practices demonstrate that sustainability must extend beyond internal corporate management to influence supplier selection, tourism product design and destination marketing. The need to integrate these dimensions provides the rationale for the ten-point management framework proposed in this study.

2.3. Sustainable Management Models and Standards

The integration of sustainability into tourism intermediation requires management systems capable of translating broad corporate commitments into operational policies, measurable objectives and verifiable performance indicators. International sustainability standards fulfil this function by providing common frameworks for planning, implementation, evaluation and communication.

The Global Sustainable Tourism Council (GSTC, 2025) organises sustainability requirements for tour operators around four principal dimensions: sustainable management, socio-economic impacts, cultural heritage and environmental impacts. Importantly, these standards recognise that the responsibility of tourism intermediaries extends beyond their own operations to encompass supplier selection, tourism product design and relationships with destinations.

Among the sustainability programmes specifically developed for travel agencies and tour operators, Travelife provides a structured approach to integrating sustainability into business management. Its model follows a continuous improvement cycle comprising organisational commitment, diagnosis, planning, implementation, monitoring and communication, with particular emphasis on sustainable supply chain management.

These standards enhance organisational credibility, facilitate performance assessment and improve access to certain tourism markets. Nevertheless, their implementation may prove challenging for small and medium-sized enterprises due to financial, technical and organisational constraints. In response to these challenges, programmes developed by organisations such as CBI and Travelife combine training, technical support and certification in order to facilitate the adoption of sustainable management practices.

Taken together, these frameworks share a common sequence based upon commitment, planning, implementation, evaluation and communication. This sequence provides the conceptual foundation upon which the ten-point management framework proposed in this study has been developed.

2.4. International Cases and Good Practice

The documented practices of tourism operators and sustainability organisations indicate that there is no single model for sustainable tourism intermediation. Nevertheless, they reveal several recurring principles associated with the integration of sustainability into intermediary business models.

TUI has established differentiated carbon reduction targets for its various business divisions, illustrating the need to tailor sustainability measures to the operational characteristics of each activity. G Adventures combines climate action with biodiversity conservation and support for local communities, whilst Intrepid Travel is distinguished by its transparent communication of both its achievements and the limitations of its sustainability commitments.

Within Spain, Icarion has incorporated the carbon offsetting of passengers' flights at no additional cost, presenting this initiative as an integral component of the travel experience (Rivera García & Pastor Ruiz, 2025a, 2025b). Nevertheless, carbon offsetting should be regarded as a complementary measure rather than a substitute for effective emissions reduction and responsible supplier management.

Similarly, initiatives promoted by CBI and Travelife demonstrate that small travel agencies can also progress towards more sustainable business models through professional training, technical support and closer collaboration with local suppliers.

Overall, the cases examined consistently highlight the importance of senior management commitment, clearly defined and measurable objectives, the integration of sustainability into tourism products, collaboration throughout the supply chain, transparent communication and continuous performance evaluation. These common elements constitute the foundations of the ten-point management framework proposed in this study.

3. Methodology

This study adopts a qualitative, exploratory and practice-oriented research design aimed at developing a ten-point management framework to support the integration of sustainability criteria into destination marketing through tourism intermediation. The methodological approach combines two complementary sources of evidence: academic literature, which provides the conceptual foundations of the proposed principles, and institutional and corporate documentation, which illustrates their practical implementation within the tourism industry.

The research was conducted in three successive stages: (1) a narrative literature review, (2) the selection and analysis of documented business practices, and (3) a thematic synthesis leading to the development of the proposed framework. This methodological design reflects the applied nature of the study, whose purpose is not to assess the performance of specific organisations but rather to identify transferable management principles applicable to tour operators, travel agencies and destination management companies.

3.1. Literature Review

The first stage consisted of a narrative review of the academic literature aimed at identifying the principal contributions relating to tourism intermediation, corporate sustainability, destination marketing, supply chain management, digitalisation, environmental communication, responsible consumer behaviour and stakeholder collaboration.

The literature search was conducted between 14 and 28 July 2026 using the Scopus, Web of Science Core Collection and Google Scholar databases. In addition, institutional and corporate documentation published by international organisations, certification bodies and tourism companies was examined in order to identify recent examples of sustainability implementation within tourism intermediation.

Searches combined Spanish- and English-language terms related to tourism intermediation, travel agencies, tour operators, destination marketing, sustainable tourism and sustainable supply chain management. The principal search terms included *intermediación turística*, *agencias de viajes*, *operadores turísticos*, *comercialización de destinos*, *cadena de suministro sostenible* and *turismo sostenible*, together with their English equivalents: tourism intermediation, travel agencies, tour operators, destination marketing, sustainable supply chain management and sustainable tourism. Priority was given to peer-reviewed journal articles, scholarly book chapters and institutional

publications directly addressing the practical implementation of sustainability within tourism intermediary businesses.

The review included studies examining sustainability from the perspective of tourism intermediation, destination marketing, supplier management, tourism product design or value chain governance. By contrast, studies focusing exclusively on accommodation, transport, food services or destination management were excluded unless they explicitly addressed tourism intermediaries or destination marketing processes.

The review identified a series of recurring themes that subsequently provided the analytical basis for the development of the proposed framework. These themes included strategic commitment, supply chain management, tourism product design, impact reduction, innovation and digitalisation, professional training, communication and transparency, destination collaboration, traveller behaviour and continuous evaluation.

The objective of the review was not to undertake a bibliometric or systematic literature review, but rather to identify, integrate and synthesise those management principles that consistently emerge across the literature and that can be translated into a practical framework for incorporating sustainability into destination marketing through tourism intermediation.

3.2. Selection and Analysis of Business Practices

The second stage involved the purposive selection of sustainability practices implemented by tourism intermediary organisations and other national and international institutions engaged in sustainable tourism. The objective was not to develop detailed case studies or compare organisational performance, but to employ documented examples illustrating how the principles identified in the academic literature have been translated into business practice.

The organisations included in the analysis were selected according to one or more of the following criteria:

- the availability of sufficiently detailed public information;
- a direct relationship with tourism intermediation or destination marketing;
- the existence of verifiable sustainability policies, objectives or initiatives;
- participation in internationally recognised sustainability standards or certification schemes;
- the incorporation of sustainability into tourism product design, supplier management, customer communication or impact reduction; and
- the inclusion of organisations differing in size, geographical scope and business model in order to provide a broad representation of current approaches to sustainable tourism intermediation.

The material analysed comprised sustainability reports, corporate reports, international standards, institutional publications, official websites and commercial documentation published between 2021 and 2026. These sources were used to examine sustainability practices implemented by TUI, G Adventures, Intrepid Travel, Icarion, Travelife, the Global Sustainable Tourism Council (GSTC) and the business support programmes developed by the Centre for the Promotion of Imports from Developing Countries (CBI), as these organisations represent different approaches to the integration of sustainability within tourism intermediation.

To minimise potential bias associated with corporate communication, priority was given to initiatives supported by recognised standards, certification schemes, institutional documentation or sufficiently detailed evidence regarding their objectives and implementation. Consequently, these materials were not treated as scientific evidence demonstrating the effectiveness of the initiatives concerned, but rather as documented examples illustrating different ways in which sustainability can be incorporated into the management and marketing of tourism products.

3.3. Thematic Synthesis and Development of the Ten-Point Framework

The evidence collected was analysed through an interpretative thematic categorisation process designed to identify recurring management dimensions across the academic and documentary sources. The analysis focused on conceptual convergence and practical complementarity rather than on the frequency with which particular themes appeared.

In the first stage, the contributions derived from both the academic literature and documented business practices were organised according to their principal area of application: corporate strategy, internal operations, supplier management, product design, environmental impacts, professional training, communication, destination collaboration, traveller behaviour and performance evaluation.

The second stage focused on identifying relationships, complementarities and recurring patterns across these thematic categories. These analytical dimensions were subsequently reformulated into ten operational principles. Each principle was designed to satisfy three criteria: it had to be conceptually grounded in the academic literature, capable of practical implementation within tourism businesses, and sufficiently flexible to be applied across organisations of different sizes, business models and geographical contexts.

The transformation of the analytical categories into the proposed management framework is summarised in Table 1.

Table 1. Thematic Development of the Proposed Ten-Point Management Framework

Analytical category	Resulting principle
Corporate governance and strategic commitment	Integrate sustainability into corporate strategy
Supply chain management	Incorporate sustainability criteria into supplier selection
Tourism experience design	Design products that create value for destinations
Climate and environmental management	Prioritise impact reduction over carbon offsetting
Process innovation	Use digitalisation as a sustainability tool
Organisational capabilities	Train employees, travel advisers and business partners
Information and trust	Communicate transparently and avoid greenwashing
Destination collaboration	Engage destinations and local communities

Analytical category	Resulting principle
Consumer behaviour	Encourage responsible traveller behaviour
Performance management	Measure, evaluate and continuously improve

Source: Authors' own elaboration.

The resulting framework is intentionally conceptual and practice-oriented. It is not intended to function as a certification standard or as a prescriptive management model. Rather, it provides an integrated synthesis of management principles applicable to tourism intermediation. The absence of empirical validation constitutes one of the study's principal limitations and should be addressed through future research involving expert interviews, Delphi studies, focus groups or pilot applications within tourism businesses and destinations.

4. A Ten-Point Management Framework for Sustainable Destination Marketing through Tourism Intermediation

The combined analysis of the academic literature and documented business practices enabled the identification of ten principles that synthesise the principal dimensions through which tourism intermediary firms can contribute to destination sustainability. The proposed framework is not intended to establish either a mandatory sequence of actions or a certification system. Instead, it provides a practical managerial framework to support the progressive integration of sustainability into corporate strategy, tourism product design, supplier management and stakeholder relationships. Although each principle is presented individually, their effectiveness is considerably enhanced when implemented as an integrated management approach.

4.1. Integrate Sustainability into Corporate Strategy

Sustainability should be embedded as a cross-cutting component of corporate strategy and should guide decision-making throughout tourism intermediary organisations. It should not be confined to isolated corporate social responsibility initiatives or marketing campaigns, but rather incorporated into the organisation's mission, strategic objectives, planning processes and day-to-day management.

This strategic commitment should be translated into measurable objectives, clearly defined responsibilities and performance monitoring mechanisms that enable organisations to assess progress and promote continuous improvement. When sustainability becomes an integral part of corporate strategy, it consistently influences supplier selection, tourism product design, destination relationships and customer communication, thereby becoming a source of long-term competitiveness and value creation.

4.2. Incorporate Sustainability Criteria into Supplier Selection

Supplier selection represents one of the principal mechanisms through which tourism intermediary firms can influence destination sustainability. Alongside traditional criteria such as price, quality and

availability, procurement decisions should incorporate environmental, social and governance considerations, including working conditions, resource efficiency, heritage conservation, accessibility and commitment to local development.

Rather than excluding suppliers that have not yet achieved recognised sustainability standards, intermediary firms should encourage progressive improvement through technical support, training initiatives and transparent evaluation criteria. This collaborative approach strengthens the tourism supply chain, enhances the competitiveness of local businesses and promotes stable, long-term relationships among tourism stakeholders.

4.3. Design Tourism Products that Create Value for Destinations

Tourism product design provides an important opportunity to steer demand towards more sustainable models of destination development. Decisions concerning itinerary design, activity selection and the inclusion of local businesses can contribute to a more equitable distribution of tourism benefits whilst reducing pressure on overcrowded destinations.

Tourism intermediary firms can also support the geographical and seasonal diversification of visitor flows by developing experiences that enhance natural and cultural heritage, stimulate local economies and encourage more meaningful interactions between visitors and host communities. Consequently, tourism products become more than simply combinations of services; they become instruments that actively contribute to the sustainable development of destinations.

4.4. Prioritise Impact Reduction over Carbon Offsetting

Sustainability strategies should primarily focus on preventing and reducing the environmental and social impacts associated with tourism activities. Whilst carbon offsetting mechanisms may contribute to mitigating certain unavoidable impacts, they should never replace measures aimed at reducing impacts at source.

This principle requires organisations to promote more efficient transport options, optimise resource consumption, minimise waste generation and develop tourism products that reduce pressure on environmentally and socially vulnerable destinations. Carbon offsetting may therefore play a complementary role where residual impacts cannot be avoided, provided that it forms part of a broader strategy centred on genuine impact reduction rather than the justification of unsustainable practices.

4.5. Use Digitalisation as a Sustainability Enabler

Digital transformation creates new opportunities to improve the sustainability of tourism intermediation by increasing operational efficiency and enabling more intelligent resource management. Technology should therefore be regarded as a means of supporting sustainability rather than an objective in itself.

Digital solutions can reduce paper consumption through electronic documentation, optimise itineraries, improve destination capacity management, enhance planning through data analytics and provide travellers with accurate, up-to-date information. In addition, digitalisation enables more transparent

communication regarding the characteristics and impacts of tourism products, thereby supporting more informed purchasing decisions and encouraging more responsible travel behaviour.

4.6. Train Employees, Travel Advisers and Business Partners

Sustainability can only be effectively transferred to the marketplace if tourism professionals understand the principles underpinning sustainable tourism and are capable of communicating them confidently. Professional development should therefore include training in sustainability certification schemes, greenhouse gas emissions, animal welfare, cultural heritage, local supplier engagement and the prevention of greenwashing.

Product development teams require the knowledge necessary to evaluate suppliers and design responsible tourism experiences, whilst sales departments and travel advisers must be capable of explaining the sustainability implications of different travel alternatives to customers. The significant training deficiencies identified by Pastor Ruiz and Rivera García (2022) demonstrate that sustainable tourism products must be accompanied by continuous professional development and clear, evidence-based information. Sustainability can only be effectively transferred to the marketplace if tourism professionals understand the principles underpinning sustainable tourism and are capable of communicating them confidently (Litvin & Heinrich, 2026).

4.7. Communicate Transparently and Avoid Greenwashing

Communication concerning sustainability should be based upon clear, verifiable and consistent information that accurately reflects organisational practices. Tourism intermediary firms should avoid vague or unsubstantiated claims that may create unrealistic expectations regarding the environmental or social performance of their tourism products.

Responsible communication requires organisations to report both achievements and areas requiring further improvement in a balanced and transparent manner, making use of recognised indicators, certification schemes and international standards wherever possible. Such transparency strengthens trust among travellers, suppliers and other stakeholders, reduces the risk of greenwashing and supports more informed purchasing decisions.

4.8. Engage Destinations and Local Communities

Sustainable tourism intermediation depends upon active collaboration with destinations and host communities. The participation of public authorities, destination management organisations, local businesses and civil society organisations facilitates the development of tourism products that are better aligned with the specific characteristics, capacities and development priorities of each destination.

Such collaboration contributes to a more equitable distribution of tourism benefits, supports the conservation of natural and cultural heritage and reinforces local identity. Within this context, tourism intermediary firms can act as connectors between supply and demand, promoting initiatives that generate shared value for businesses, visitors and host communities alike.

4.9. Encourage Responsible Traveller Behaviour

Tourism intermediary firms do more than market tourism products; they also influence the decisions and behaviour of travellers. Information provided before and during the journey can encourage more responsible behaviour and help minimise negative impacts on destinations.

Providing guidance on respect for cultural and natural heritage, the consumption of locally produced goods and services, sustainable mobility and appropriate behaviour in natural and cultural environments contributes to a more conscious and responsible tourism experience. In this way, destination marketing also performs an educational function by aligning visitor expectations with destination sustainability objectives.

4.10. Measure, Evaluate and Continuously Improve

The integration of sustainability should be understood as a continuous improvement process supported by the regular evaluation of organisational performance. The establishment of performance indicators, systematic monitoring of objectives and periodic review of management practices enable organisations to identify opportunities for improvement and adapt their strategies to changing circumstances.

Performance evaluation enhances transparency, strengthens organisational accountability and promotes institutional learning. It also provides valuable information for updating tourism products, improving supplier relationships and responding more effectively to stakeholder expectations, thereby supporting increasingly sustainable and competitive tourism management.

Table 2. Summary of the Proposed Ten-Point Management Framework

Principle	Objective	Examples of implementation
Integrate sustainability into corporate strategy	Embed sustainability as a core element of corporate management	Strategic objectives, performance indicators, assigned responsibilities and monitoring mechanisms
Incorporate sustainability criteria into supplier selection	Promote a more responsible tourism supply chain	Environmental and social criteria, sustainability certifications and supplier development programmes
Design tourism products that create value for destinations	Generate positive economic, social and cultural impacts	Local experiences, spatial diversification and seasonality management
Prioritise impact reduction over carbon offsetting	Minimise impacts before applying compensatory measures	Itinerary optimisation, waste reduction and resource efficiency
Use digitalisation as a sustainability enabler	Improve organisational efficiency and decision-making	Electronic documentation, data analytics and smart capacity management
Train employees, travel advisers and business partners	Develop organisational capabilities for sustainable tourism	Continuous professional development, skills enhancement and awareness-raising
Communicate transparently and avoid greenwashing	Build trust through verifiable information	Sustainability indicators, certification schemes and evidence-based communication
Engage destinations and local communities	Strengthen collaboration and shared value creation	Partnerships with destination management organisations, local businesses and communities

Principle	Objective	Examples of implementation
Encourage responsible traveller behaviour	Promote more sustainable consumption patterns	Traveller information, behavioural guidance and promotion of responsible practices
Measure, evaluate and continuously improve	Consolidate continuous organisational improvement	Performance indicators, periodic monitoring and strategic review

Source: Authors' own elaboration.

5. Discussion

5.1. *Tourism Intermediation as an Instrument of Commercial Governance*

The proposed framework reinforces the view that tourism intermediary firms should not be regarded merely as distribution channels, but as key actors exercising commercial governance within contemporary tourism systems.

Their influence extends well beyond transactional activities to encompass supplier contracting, tourism product development, professional training and customer communication. This perspective is consistent with Schwartz et al. (2008), who identify supply chain management as one of the principal mechanisms through which tour operators can promote sustainability across tourism destinations. However, this capacity to influence also entails responsibility. Sustainable commercial governance should not rely solely on imposing sustainability requirements upon suppliers, but rather on fostering long-term partnerships, transparency, stakeholder participation and a fair distribution of tourism benefits. In this respect, the proposed framework advocates a model of tourism intermediation founded upon shared responsibility among public authorities, tourism businesses and host communities, supported by evaluation mechanisms capable of identifying and correcting potential imbalances (Nguyen et al., 2019).

Consequently, tourism intermediary firms emerge not simply as market actors but as strategic coordinators capable of shaping the sustainability performance of tourism destinations through their commercial decisions.

5.2. *From Corporate Sustainability to Destination Sustainability*

A central implication of the proposed framework is the need to distinguish clearly between corporate sustainability and the effective contribution of tourism businesses to destination sustainability.

Measures such as reducing paper consumption, adopting digital technologies or improving energy efficiency undoubtedly enhance the internal environmental performance of intermediary firms. Nevertheless, their contribution to destination sustainability remains limited unless these initiatives are extended to supplier management, tourism product design and destination marketing practices.

Meaningful transformation occurs when sustainability influences the selection of tourism services, the design of itineraries, the choice of tourism experiences and the information provided to travellers

throughout the customer journey. The organisations examined in this study demonstrate different degrees of integration of these dimensions, yet none of the individual initiatives can be regarded as sufficient in isolation. Carbon offsetting cannot substitute for effective emissions reduction; sustainability certification cannot guarantee the absence of environmental or social impacts; and contracting local suppliers does not automatically ensure an equitable distribution of tourism benefits. These findings reinforce the tensions between sustainability and tourism marketing identified by Font and McCabe (2017), highlighting the importance of maintaining consistency between corporate strategy, operational practices, tourism products and communication activities. Sustainability therefore becomes meaningful only when these different organisational dimensions are aligned within an integrated management approach.

5.3. Applicability and Limitations of the Proposed Framework

The proposed framework has been designed as a flexible management tool capable of supporting tour operators, travel agencies and destination management companies in integrating sustainability into their commercial activities. Nevertheless, its practical implementation will inevitably depend upon organisational size, available resources, target markets and the characteristics of the tourism products offered. Consequently, sustainability should be understood as a gradual process of organisational learning and continuous improvement rather than as a fixed objective to be achieved through isolated actions.

Effective implementation also requires monitoring systems tailored to the specific characteristics of each organisation and combining both quantitative and qualitative performance indicators. Rather than replacing existing sustainability standards or certification schemes, the proposed framework seeks to complement them by offering a coherent managerial perspective capable of integrating sustainability into commercial decision-making.

Finally, although the framework has been developed from a synthesis of academic evidence and documented business practices, it remains conceptual in nature. Its empirical validation across different organisational contexts, market environments and geographical settings therefore represents the next logical step in assessing both its practical usefulness and its broader contribution to sustainable tourism management.

The proposed framework should therefore be understood not as a collection of independent recommendations but as an integrated management system in which each principle reinforces and supports the others.

6. Conclusions, Limitations and Future Research

6.1. Conclusions

Tourism intermediation continues to play a strategic role in destination marketing. Although digitalisation has transformed tourism distribution and introduced new market actors, tour operators, travel agencies, destination management companies and digital platforms continue to exert significant influence over supplier selection, tourism product design, the distribution of visitor flows and the information provided to travellers.

This study proposes a ten-point management framework designed to integrate sustainability into these commercial decisions through principles addressing corporate strategy, supplier management, product design, impact reduction, digitalisation, professional training, communication, local stakeholder engagement, demand management and continuous evaluation.

The principal contribution of the study lies in connecting three analytical levels that are frequently addressed separately: the internal sustainability of intermediary firms, the responsible management of their supply chains and their contribution to sustainable destination development. By integrating these levels within a single managerial framework, the study positions sustainability as a cross-cutting criterion in commercial decision-making and conceptualises tourism intermediaries as agents of commercial governance. Their market influence should therefore be exercised through transparency, stakeholder collaboration and systematic evaluation in order to contribute more effectively to destination sustainability. Overall, the proposed framework offers a practical management tool capable of guiding the progressive integration of sustainability into tourism intermediation whilst supporting a more responsible approach to destination marketing.

6.2. Limitations

Several limitations should be acknowledged.

First, the narrative review undertaken does not seek to provide an exhaustive assessment of the available literature and therefore cannot claim complete coverage of existing research.

Secondly, the business cases and examples of good practice were selected purposively and employed solely for illustrative purposes rather than for systematic comparison between organisations.

Furthermore, part of the evidence derives from institutional and corporate documentation, which may present a favourable representation of the sustainability initiatives analysed. Although priority was given to practices supported by recognised certification schemes, international standards or sufficiently detailed documentation, it was not possible to verify independently all the reported outcomes.

Finally, the proposed framework remains conceptual and has not yet been empirically validated through its application within tourism businesses or destinations. It should therefore be regarded as a flexible management framework whose practical value requires further empirical assessment.

6.3. Future Research

Future research should seek to validate the proposed framework through expert interviews, focus groups or Delphi studies involving professionals from tourism intermediation, destination management, sustainability and academia.

In addition, the framework should be tested across organisations of different sizes and within different tourism markets and geographical contexts in order to evaluate its transferability and practical applicability.

A further avenue for research would involve transforming the ten principles into measurable performance indicators capable of assessing the degree to which sustainability has been integrated into tourism intermediary firms and analysing their relationship with variables such as organisational reputation, customer loyalty, innovation, financial performance and territorial impacts.

Finally, future studies should incorporate the perspectives of suppliers, host communities and travellers in order to evaluate sustainability from the viewpoint of all stakeholders involved in tourism activity.

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N/A.

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(Title, Abstract and Keywords in Spanish)

Intermediación turística sostenible: un decálogo de gestión para la comercialización responsable de destinos

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Resumen

El objetivo de este trabajo es proponer un decálogo de gestión empresarial que facilite la incorporación efectiva de la sostenibilidad a la comercialización de destinos turísticos desde la intermediación. La metodología adopta un enfoque cualitativo, exploratorio y propositivo, basado en una revisión narrativa de la literatura sobre intermediación turística, gestión sostenible, cadena de suministro, digitalización, comportamiento del consumidor y comunicación ambiental, complementada con el análisis intencional de buenas prácticas desarrolladas por operadores nacionales e internacionales. Las evidencias obtenidas se organizaron mediante un análisis temático y se transformaron en diez principios operativos relacionados con la estrategia empresarial, la selección de proveedores, el diseño de productos, la reducción de impactos, la digitalización, la formación, la transparencia, la participación local, la orientación de la demanda y la evaluación continua. El principal resultado de la investigación es la propuesta de un decálogo de diez principios para integrar la sostenibilidad en la comercialización de destinos desde la intermediación turística. Se concluye que la sostenibilidad adquiere un carácter estratégico cuando supera el ámbito interno de la empresa y alcanza la cadena de suministro, el diseño del producto y la comercialización. El decálogo constituye una herramienta flexible y transferible, aunque su aplicación deberá validarse posteriormente en empresas y contextos turísticos diversos.

Palabras clave: Intermediación turística; comercialización de destinos; turismo sostenible; empresas intermediarias; cadena de suministro; gobernanza comercial.

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