



## DYING OF SUCCESS: INTERNET, PLACE MARKETING AND TOURIST APARTMENTS IN MADRID

LUZ MARTÍNEZ-MARTÍNEZ<sup>1</sup>, UBALDO CUESTA CAMBRA<sup>1</sup>, MARION ROBERTS MARTÍNEZ<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Universidad Complutense de Madrid, España

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### KEYWORDS

*Place marketing*  
*Place branding*  
*Tourist apartments*  
*Housing for tourist use*  
*Public communication*  
*Internet*  
*Social networks*

### ABSTRACT

*The phenomenon of tourist apartments in Madrid is a reflection of the tensions between the globalized economy of tourism and the local needs for housing and social coexistence. Although tourism is a crucial economic engine for the city, its excessive growth through digital platforms has generated a series of problems such as gentrification, rising housing prices, insecurity and rejection. In this context, communication and place marketing tools are key elements to address this problem in a sustainable way. This article explores the communication flow about tourist apartments in Madrid and their perception of conflict in relation to the city council and the need for efficient communication strategies and place marketing.*

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## 1. Introduction

During the first half of 2024, Spain received more than 42 million international travellers, with Madrid being one of the main tourist destinations in Europe. In 2023, the city registered more than 9 million international tourists (INE, 2024), with a 13% increase in the first half of 2024 (Europa Press, 2024). In terms of domestic tourism, Madrid continues to be a key destination for Spaniards looking for cultural and entertainment getaways. The promotional campaigns of the Madrid City Council have been instrumental in attracting both international and national tourists. According to the Madrid Tourism Observatory, in 2023, domestic tourists accounted for 40% of overnight stays in the city, and this percentage is expected to remain stable in 2024 (Madrid Destino, 2023). Business tourism also plays a very significant role, with the organisation of international events and large-scale fairs such as FITUR (Feria Internacional del Turismo/International Tourism Trade Fair) and SIMO (International Fair of Digital Technologies and Services). In 2023, according to figures presented by the Madrid Convention Bureau, Madrid hosted more than 53,500 meetings, congresses, conventions and conferences, bringing 2.66 million attendees to the city and generating a direct and indirect economic impact of 2.327 and 5.238 billion euros respectively (Madrid Destino, 2023). This segment represents an essential economic driver, as business visitors tend to have higher daily spending compared to leisure tourists. In fact, the city has been named the World's Leading Meetings & Conference Destination in the final of the World Travel Awards 2023.

Tourism is a key economic driver for the city of Madrid. According to Madrid Destino, the municipal company responsible for the promotion of tourism, the direct and indirect contribution of tourism to the city's GDP is 8%, generating a significant number of jobs in sectors such as hotels, restaurants and commerce (Madrid Destino, 2023). In 2023, the total expenditure of international tourists in the city was estimated at more than 7.5 billion euros (INE, 2024), and it is expected that in 2024 tourism expenditure will continue to grow, driven by rising prices in the hotel and accommodation sector due to high demand and inflation. Furthermore, tourism not only generates direct income in sectors such as hotels and commerce but also has indirect effects on employment. According to data, in the first quarter of 2024, the tourism sector employed 444,533 people, representing approximately 13% of the total number of employed workers in the region (Tourism Madrid, 2024).

As demonstrated by INE data concerning the type of accommodation utilised by international tourists (Figure 1), during the month of July 2024, the number of tourists employing market accommodation as their primary mode of accommodation exhibited an annual increase of 6%. Within this category, hotel accommodation grew by 4%, rented accommodation by 19.5%, and non-market accommodation increased by 14.6%. The data indicates that a significant proportion of these tourists opted for tourist accommodation (Viviendas de Uso Turístico. VUT) over conventional hotels (INE, 2024). The proliferation of platforms such as Airbnb, HomeAway and Vrbo has facilitated this growth, allowing individuals to rent out their homes on a temporary basis.

**Figure 1.** Arrival of international tourists according to type of accommodation. July 2024

	Datos mensuales		Datos acumulados	
	Valor absoluto	Variación anual (%)	Valor absoluto	Variación anual (%)
<b>TOTAL</b>	10.851.172	7,3	53.377.160	12,0
<b>Alojamiento de mercado</b>				
Total alojamiento de mercado	9.104.643	6,0	43.980.810	11,8
Alojamiento hotelero	7.085.203	4,0	35.189.837	9,5
Vivienda de alquiler	1.458.946	19,5	6.600.761	27,3
Resto alojamiento de mercado	560.494	0,2	2.190.212	8,7
<b>Alojamiento de no mercado</b>				
Alojamiento de no mercado	1.746.529	14,6	9.396.349	12,8
Vivienda en propiedad	564.019	1,9	2.802.688	2,5
Vivienda de familiares o amigos	1.059.210	19,9	5.898.901	15,6
Resto Alojamiento no de mercado	123.299	41,0	694.760	40,7

Source: INE, 2024.

### 1.1. VUTs in Madrid: Growth and Consequences

As demonstrated in the preceding discussion, tourism is a fundamental pillar of Madrid's economy. Tourist apartments, by attracting tourists seeking a more authentic local experience, have made a significant contribution to this sector, generating income for both owners and local businesses that benefit from tourist spending.

The proliferation of VUTs in Madrid has been exponential, driven by short-term rental platforms such as Airbnb. In 2020, the City Council estimated that around 14,000 tourist apartments were operating in the city, many of them without proper licences or illegally (Idealista, 2021). By 2023, this number had increased to more than 20,000, according to the Madrid Tourism Observatory, reflecting the persistence of the phenomenon despite regulatory efforts (Idealista, 2021). A high concentration of these apartments has been observed in central neighbourhoods such as Malasaña, Chueca and Lavapiés, with up to 15 per cent of dwellings dedicated to this use (ElDiario.es, 2023).

A notable consequence of the VUT surge is the escalation in residential rents. Landlords have found it to be significantly more lucrative to rent out their properties to short-term tourists as opposed to local residents on a permanent basis. A report by Idealista in 2022 noted that rents in the areas most affected by the proliferation of tourist apartments increased by up to 30% between 2017 and 2021 (Idealista, 2022). This phenomenon has given rise to concerns regarding the displacement of local residents, who find themselves unable to meet the elevated rental costs. However, this phenomenon has had far-reaching repercussions on the daily lives of Madrileños. A growing number of landlords have chosen to convert their properties into tourist accommodation, resulting in a significant decrease in available affordable housing in central areas. This has contributed to a widespread increase in rental prices, mainly affecting middle- and lower-class residents who already faced difficulties in finding affordable housing (Gurran and Phibbs, 2017; Lee and Rofe, 2019; Wachsmuth and Weisler, 2018).

This leads to another of the most visible effects of the proliferation of tourist apartments: gentrification. This process has been particularly evident in the Centro district of Madrid, resulting in a notable transformation of the local neighbourhoods. Gentrification is characterised by the displacement of the original residents, predominantly working class, to be replaced by individuals with higher incomes, resulting in a transformation of the neighbourhood's character. In the case of Madrid, this displacement is directly related to property speculation. Foreign and local investors purchase properties in central areas with the objective of converting them into tourist accommodation, thereby driving up the price of land and housing (López-Gay et al., 2021).

In addition to the economic impact, gentrification has resulted in cultural uprooting. Conventional commercial enterprises, such as shops and bars, are being supplanted by establishments that cater predominantly to tourists, thereby exerting an influence on the social fabric and identity of local communities, as well as the daily lives of permanent residents (Sequera, 2020). This phenomenon is particularly evident in areas such as Malasaña, where traditional local shops have been superseded by cafés and bars catering predominantly to foreign tourists (Gil and Sequera, 2022).

This phenomenon has given rise to contentious relations between residents and tourists, characterised by heightened tensions arising from a multitude of factors, including, but not limited to, increased noise, disruptive behaviours exhibited by tourists, inadequate maintenance of properties and communal areas, and concerns regarding resident safety (Borkowski & Tan, 2018; Gurran & Phibbs, 2021). The increase in the number of tourists using tourist apartments can overburden local public services, such as sanitation, security and transport, without the owners of these accommodations contributing adequately to the costs of these services (Dogru et al., 2020; Suess et al., 2021).

Such issues have the potential to impact the quality of life experienced by local residents and, moreover, give rise to mounting hostility towards tourism. In certain neighbourhoods of Madrid, there has been an emergence of movements advocating for enhanced regulation of tourist apartments and more sustainable tourism. These expressions of discontent contribute to an escalating social unrest that is prompting a re-evaluation of the prevailing tourism development model in the city. This is exemplified by the Regional Federation of Neighbourhood Associations of Madrid (Federación Regional de Asociaciones Vecinales de Madrid. FRAVM) and its Neighbourhood Information Office for People Affected by Tourist Accommodation (Oficina de Información Vecinal de Afectados por las Viviendas de Uso Turístico), in conjunction with the neighbourhood associations La Corrala, Sol and Barrio de Las Letras, Cavas-La Latina, Retiro Norte and El Organillo de Chamberí.

### **1.2. Legislation on TUVs in Madrid**

In order to address the aforementioned challenges, it is imperative to implement balanced policies that regulate tourist apartments and mitigate their negative impacts. Urban areas must devise regulatory frameworks that strike a balance between the promotion of tourism and the protection of residents (Bei and Celata, 2023). In response to the uncontrolled proliferation of tourist apartments, the Madrid City Council has endeavoured to implement a series of regulations aimed at mitigating their deleterious effects. Prior to 2020, existing regulations were found to be inadequate in addressing the extent of the issue. In numerous instances, tourist apartments were operating in an unauthorised manner, lacking the requisite licences or failing to adhere to accessibility and safety regulations. The proliferation of tourist apartments in certain neighbourhoods was further exacerbated by the absence of effective regulatory oversight. The proliferation of tourist apartments in Madrid has been a subject of considerable debate in recent years, particularly with regard to its impact on the real estate market and its interaction with residential areas. In response to mounting social and neighbourhood pressures, the Madrid City Council passed a regulation in 2019, obliging owners to obtain a tourist licence to operate their properties as tourist accommodation. This regulation also stipulates that tourist apartments located in residential buildings must have a separate access point to the rest of the dwelling, with a view to mitigating any potential nuisance that may be experienced by permanent residents. However, the implementation of this regulation has proven to be a considerable challenge.

Notwithstanding regulatory endeavours, the authorities' capacity to monitor and sanction infringements has been constrained, primarily due to a paucity of resources. A report by the Madrid Association of Architects revealed that, in 2021, only 15% of tourist apartments in the city complied with the legal requirements established by municipal regulations (Colegio de Arquitectos de Madrid, 2021). However, during the years 2020 and 2021, there was a significant increase in the number of inspections and sanctions; nevertheless, the prevalence of digital platforms offering unregistered accommodation continued to pose challenges in terms of enforcement.

In response to this situation, the City Council reinforced its efforts in 2022 by creating a mandatory register for tourist apartments and increasing inspections. Furthermore, penalties of up to 300,000 euros were established for landlords who failed to comply with the regulations, as part of the "Plan de

Choque contra el Alquiler Ilegal" ("Plan to Counter Illegal Rentals") which was initiated in the same year. At the regional level, the Community of Madrid has also implemented complementary regulations, including the establishment of an additional register of tourist dwellings and the imposition of fines for those who do not comply with the regulations. Nevertheless, these measures have been the subject of criticism on account of their limited effectiveness, especially in controlling the oversupply of tourist apartments in central areas of the city (Martínez et al., 2021).

### ***1.3. The Role of Digital Platforms in the Tourist Apartments Market***

Platforms such as Airbnb and Vrbo have played a crucial role in the expansion of the tourist rental market in Madrid. These services have facilitated the process by which homeowners can offer their properties to tourists, thereby contributing to the growth of an informal rental economy that, in many cases, evades the control of local authorities. Whilst these platforms have been accused of promoting the discourse that they offer economic opportunities and authentic experiences to travellers, they have also been criticised for their role in gentrification and the escalation of housing prices in the city (Cocola-Gant et al., 2020).

A body of research has indicated that digital platforms may be contributing to a consolidation of properties in the hands of major investors and corporate entities managing multiple properties, a development that appears to deviate from the original objective of facilitating the sharing of residences with tourists (Barón Rodríguez, 2019). In an effort to address these concerns, certain platforms have initiated measures to enhance transparency and social responsibility. For instance, Airbnb has entered into agreements with multiple European cities, thereby committing to the sharing of data with local authorities, with the aim of ensuring that tourist apartments comply with the relevant regulatory framework. Nevertheless, the efficacy of these measures has been constrained by the prevalence of unregulated operations, with numerous accommodations continuing to function beyond the confines of the legal framework (Cocola-Gant et al., 2020).

### ***1.4. Sustainable Solutions for the Management of Tourist Apartments***

The growth of tourism in Madrid, while signifying a substantial revenue stream for the city, has concomitantly engendered deleterious ramifications on the social fabric, the real estate market and the environment. Consequently, it is imperative to investigate sustainable solutions that strike a balance between the economic benefits of tourism and the necessity to safeguard the quality of life of residents. Among the most salient proposals are the following:

1. Stringent and efficacious regulation: It is paramount to enhance coordination between local and regional administrations to ensure the effective enforcement of prevailing regulations. The establishment of a comprehensive inspection system, complemented by effective sanctions, is paramount to curtail the unregulated operation of tourist apartments. The absence of stringent regulations has enabled numerous accommodations to function without requisite licences, thereby intensifying challenges such as gentrification and strain on public services (Cerdá-Mansilla et al., 2022). The implementation of zoning regulations and the monitoring of tourist density: In order to mitigate the deleterious effects of tourism in specific areas, it has been proposed to limit the number of tourist apartments allowed in high density areas. This would assist in preserving the residential character of neighbourhoods and maintaining a balance between the local population and tourists. Zoning could also mitigate the effects of gentrification, which has displaced residents in favour of short-stay tourists (Capellán et al., 2020).

3. Incentives for long-term renting: Another measure would be to provide tax incentives to landlords who choose to rent on a long-term basis, rather than to tourists. This policy would help to increase the supply of housing available for permanent residents, stabilising rental prices, which have been inflated in tourist areas due to the high demand for temporary accommodation (Crespí-Vallbona and Domínguez-Pérez, 2023).

4. Promotion of responsible tourism: Awareness-raising campaigns are considered a vital component of this strategy, with the objective of encouraging both property owners and tourists to embrace responsible tourism practices. These initiatives emphasise the importance of respecting neighbourly coexistence and minimising environmental impact. In cities such as Barcelona, the efficacy of such



campaigns in reducing disruptive behaviour in residential areas has been demonstrated (Córdoba and Gómez, 2023).

5. Affordable housing policies: The development of affordable housing policies is recommended to mitigate the long-term impact of tourist apartments on housing. The investment in the construction of social housing and the promotion of housing cooperatives could be solutions to avoid the expulsion of low-income residents from the urban centre (López and Matea, 2020). This would not only alleviate pressure on the housing market but also contribute to social cohesion.

In summary, the tourist flat phenomenon in Madrid poses significant challenges for both residents and local authorities. Although various regulations have been implemented, their effectiveness remains limited due to a lack of resources and coordination between different administrations. It is essential to continue exploring sustainable solutions that balance the needs of the tourism sector with those of the local community.

### **1.5. Place Marketing and VUTs**

Place marketing, also referred to as territorial marketing or place marketing, is a discipline that focuses on the promotion and management of geographic areas to attract different interest groups, such as tourists, residents, businesses and investors (Ashworth and Voogd, 1990). In contradistinction to product or service marketing, place marketing seeks to position a specific place in the minds of the target audience by highlighting its attributes and competitive advantages. Place marketing is defined as a strategic approach to promote and enhance three essential factors: 1) The image of a place, which is defined as the collective perception people have of that place and is built from a combination of tangible and intangible factors, such as infrastructure, local culture, history and personal experiences; 2) place identity, which includes the set of characteristics that define and distinguish a place from others such as architecture, cultural heritage and local events; and 3) positioning, which are those strategies used to position a place in the minds of the target audience in a favourable way, based on identifying and communicating the unique strengths of the place.

Place marketing is a strategic endeavour that aims to enhance the image of a locale by accentuating its attractions and fortifying its identity. As posited by Anholt (2010), the objective of place marketing is to position a locale positively in the minds of investors, tourists and residents, through a combination of promotional activities and infrastructure enhancements. To this end, cities implement strategies that include advertising campaigns and cultural events designed to highlight the unique attributes of the place. In this regard, digital platforms play a crucial role in disseminating these messages. User experience management, i.e. ensuring a positive experience for visitors and residents, is also critical. This encompasses aspects such as the quality of services, infrastructure, and security. The implementation of these strategies is instrumental in fostering a positive image and distinguishing a place in a competitive global marketplace (Kavaratzis and Hatch, 2020). However, it has been demonstrated that there is no correlation between the expenditure on image-building activities and the international perceptions of countries, thus indicating that countries do not have control over their image. It is therefore vital to conduct appropriate types of communications and allocate budgets to modify any negative public perceptions of places in what Anholt refers to as place branding 2.0 (Anholt, 2023).

Place marketing, with its emphasis on promoting and managing the image of cities, is confronted with novel challenges in the context of the proliferation of VUTs. Tourist apartments have the potential to diversify the accommodation sector and generate additional revenue for cities. Furthermore, they have the potential to offer tourists a more authentic experience, thereby facilitating a deeper immersion in local culture (Dogru et al., 2021). Consequently, this form of accommodation, along with the associated information, wields considerable influence over the city's image, both positively and negatively. While they can contribute to a perception of dynamism and authenticity, they can also lead to a negative perception of issues affecting the local quality of life and, consequently, the urban image.

## **2. Objectives**

As previously discussed, the tourist flat phenomenon presents a number of complex issues that affect the real estate market, the quality of life for local residents, and urban management. Scientific research

demonstrates that, whilst tourist apartments can offer economic benefits and diversify the accommodation offer, thereby enhancing the experience for users, they also present challenges in terms of effective communication, which can have a negative impact on the city's brand or place branding. The implementation of effective communication strategies is therefore paramount in mitigating the adverse impacts and ensuring that tourism contributes positively to urban development and the image of the city. To do this it is important to be familiar with the discourse on the internet about the VUTs in Madrid and the conflict generated by them and the City Council. This comprehensive analysis will provide a detailed understanding of the existing discourse surrounding VUTs in Madrid, its perceived level of interest, and the key actors involved. This information will facilitate a more nuanced comprehension of the communicative needs, enabling the adaptation of effective strategies for place marketing campaigns and conflict management around tourist apartments in the city. The present research pursues the following objectives: 1) to analyse (a) the main initial generic discourses on tourist apartments in Madrid and (b) the specific discourse on the issue of tourist apartments and the Madrid's City Council, 2) to study the differences between both discourses: to investigate the evolution of discourses and engagement and 3) to identify the different DOLs according to the type of content, the source and the channels used. To this end, the following research questions are hereby presented:

RQ1: What is the discourse on the Internet about tourist apartments in Madrid and about the problem of tourist apartments in Madrid and the City Council?

RQ2: Are there differences in relation to the evolution of discourse and engagement?

RQ3: What are the different DOLs depending on the type of content?

RQ4: Are there differences in these DOLs in relation to the source and channels used?

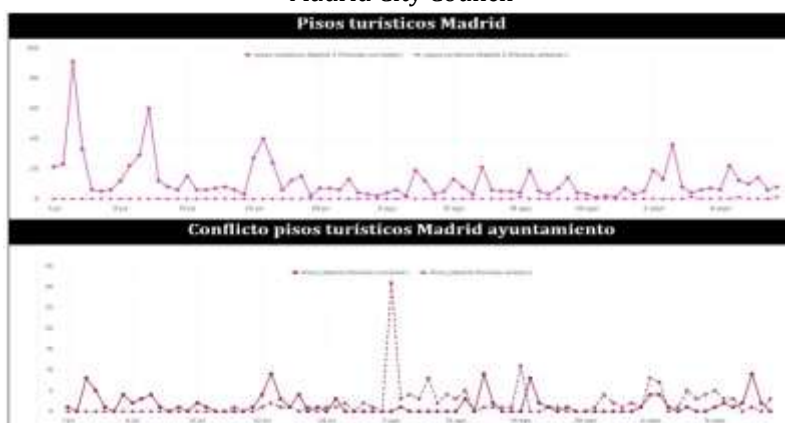
### 3. Methodology

The present study employed a descriptive analysis of the discourse surrounding tourist apartments in the cities of Madrid and Barcelona during the period prior to the summer holidays and in summer (from 1 July to 15 September). To this end, the most pertinent websites and social networks (namely, Instagram, X, Facebook, TikTok and YouTube) were monitored using the Mediatoolkit tools (<https://www.mediatoolkit.com/>), which facilitate the tracking of relevant mentions of a given topic on websites and social networks. The programme provides information on the number of publications, mentions, different channels of publication or consumption, DOLs per channel or sentiment of the publications. For the analysis, two different searches were carried out: 1) tourist apartments Madrid City Council and 2) tourist apartments Madrid. The searches were filtered with the keywords: "piso turístico", "VUT", "ayuntamiento", "problema", "conflicto", and "Madrid" ("tourist apartment", "VUT", "City Council", "problem", "conflict", and "Madrid"). Furthermore, the results were filtered to show results only from Spain.

### 4. Results

An analysis of the communication flow on tourist apartments in Madrid during the summer holiday period reveals an increase in activity compared to 2023. This subject has generated a significant degree of interest, as evidenced by the 914 mentions (representing a 18% increase compared to the previous period), which resulted in 4.42 million impressions (a substantial increase of 165% compared to 2023). However, a more thorough examination of the issue of tourist apartments in Madrid and the City Council reveals a decline in the flow of communication compared to the previous year. This decline is evident in both the number of publications (114 mentions, representing a 22.9% decrease compared to 2023) and the interest and consumption of these publications (668,700 impressions, corresponding to a 27.43% reduction). Notwithstanding this decline, the profitability of the publications remains substantial, as they elicit a considerable degree of consumption, thereby underscoring the users' interest in the subject matter (Figure 2).

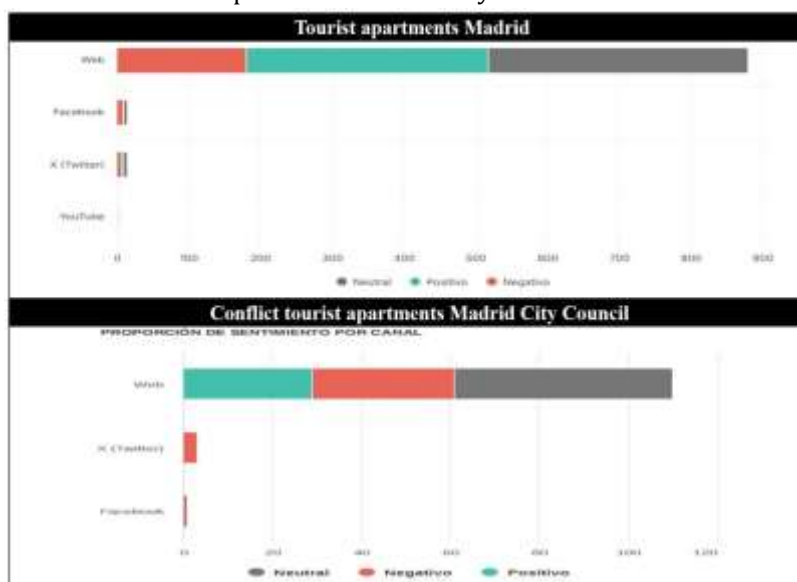
**Figure 2.** Temporal comparison of mentions of "tourist apartments Madrid" and "conflict tourist apartments Madrid City Council"



Source: Own elaboration, 2024.

In terms of the channels through which the information is published, we find some differences (Figure 3). Although in both searches the content is mainly published on websites (96.3% in the case of tourist apartments in Madrid and 96% in the case of the conflict between tourist apartments and the City Council), the other channels are used differently. For example, in the case of tourist apartments in general, the next most used networks are Facebook (1.6%) and X (1.6%) and YouTube (0.4%). In addition, we find a tendency towards positive sentiments (63.7%), mainly on websites and YouTube, while Facebook and X show a more negative tendency. In the case of the conflict between the tenants and the local council, websites are followed by X (2.6) and a little on Facebook. In this case, we find a negative tendency that is particularly present on social networks.

**Figure 3.** Comparison of channels and sentiment mentions of "tourist apartments Madrid" and "conflict tourist apartments Madrid City Council".



Source: Own elaboration, 2024.

The subsequent discussion will explore the disparities in discourse evolution and engagement.

- The data demonstrate an average level of activity on the Internet concerning tourist apartments, with a higher number of publications in the period prior to the summer holidays during the month of July. A lower number of posts was found in the specific case of the VUTs conflict and Madrid City Council. The analysis identified three significant periods in terms of the volume of publications: firstly, 3 July, when the tourist tax was announced and the president of the



Community of Madrid, Isabel Ayuso, made statements in opposition to the VUTs; secondly, 11 July, when the issue of VAT on tourist apartments and the construction of social housing in Madrid was raised; and thirdly, 23 July, when the fines and the ban on converting commercial premises into VUTs were announced.

- In both cases, the publications proved to be highly effective, generating a substantial number of impressions, thereby achieving considerable visibility and reflecting the prevailing interest and concern surrounding the issue.
- However, when discussing tourist apartments in Madrid, Facebook, X and YouTube are predominantly employed, while in relation to the conflict between the VUTs and the City Council, X and Facebook are the primary platforms utilised.
- A comparative analysis of the sentiment expressed in these publications reveals a more negative tone in the case of the conflict between the VUTs and the City Council.

In order to undertake a comprehensive analysis of the sources and form of consumption of the vaccine and the campaign, DOLs were identified by reach for each channel analysed for the two searches.

For the search term "pisos turísticos Madrid" ("tourist apartments Madrid"), the primary DOLs on websites with respect to the number of mentions are media outlets such as EUROPAPRESS.ES, ELCONFIDENCIALDIGITAL.COM, NOTICIASDE.ES, DIARIOSIGLOXXI.COM or ELDIARIO.ES. Conversely, the most frequently searched for sites are MARCA.COM, AS.COM, ELPAIS.COM and ELMUNDO.ES. In fourth place, we find ELCONSERJE.COM, a website dedicated to tourist and residential rentals with 37,694 impressions. With regard to X, a variety of profiles were identified, some of which were professionals in the housing sector, such as @AlfonsogsJose (Ldo. in the field of Social Sciences, specialising in mobility and urban planning, we find @EatingMadrid and @ApartmentswethHome by Gabriel Avalos, an architect and real estate manager. Among the politicians, we highlight @Alicia\_Torrija\_L (PhD in archaeology and member of the Madrid Assembly) and @EmiliaSPB (Member of the Madrid Assembly). We also observe personal profiles such as @DaceTeresa, and profiles dedicated to other sectors, including art (@FachArte), which, despite its focus on negative debate, is the third most consumed DOL by search. The initial ranking places @Transxte (Secretary General of Sustainable Mobility of transport) and @EmiliaSPB, with a predominance of negative sentiment.

In relation to Facebook, media or news accounts such as NOTICIAS PARA MUNICIPIOS, ECONOMÍS DIGITAL, AGENCIA EFE or EL CONFIDENCIAS DIGITAL were found. A notable exception is AD ESPAÑA, a magazine specialising in interior design and architecture, which published an article on the conservation of a property as a residence, with the aim of preventing it from being converted into a tourist apartment. This article attracted an impressive 35,600 impressions. However, the most frequently searched publications are EL PAIS, EL MUNDO, EUROPA PRESS and LA VOZ DE GALICIA.

Figure 4. Examples of publications on X and sites about tourist apartments in Madrid.



Source: Own elaboration, 2024

In the case of the "conflicto pisos turísticos Madrid ayuntamiento" ("conflict tourist apartments Madrid City Council") controversy, the primary Digital Observatory Logs (DOLs) on websites concerning the number of mentions pertain to media outlets such as 20MINUTOS.ES, EUROPAPRESS.ES, ELPAIS.COM, MADRIDDIARIO.ES and LARAZON.ES. However, the most frequently searched for are ELPAIS.COM, ELMUANDO.ES, LAVANGUARDIA.COM, ELESPANOL.COM and ABC.ES. In terms of X, the DOLs in terms of both mentions and searches are accounts of professionals in the housing sector, such as @AlfonsogsJose (Social Sciences, specialising in mobility and urban planning), @EatingMadrid and @ApartmentswetHome by Gabriel Avalos, architect and real estate management. Finally, on Facebook, a single DOL was identified: NOTICIADEVENCIDARIO published a single post about the regional federation of neighbours of Madrid (FRAVM) and the denunciation of tourist apartments in Madrid, which garnered 5,863 mentions.

Figure 5. Example of a publication on FRAVM and tourist apartments.



Source: Facebook profile News For Municipalities, 2024.

A comparison of the data from both discourses reveals that the primary DOLs on sites are predominantly media entities, with a limited presence of specialised sites or public administration. However, in the case of X, we find some profiles of professionals in the housing sector, as well as political figures. Additionally, there is a negative sentiment in debates on social media, whereas on websites, the discourse appears to be more positive.

## 5. Conclusions

Tourism is a pivotal source of revenue for Madrid, contributing substantially to the city's GDP. Statistics from 2023 and 2024 demonstrate an upward trend in both international and national tourism (INE, 2023; Europa Press, 2024). The direct and indirect impact on employment, particularly in sectors such as hotels and restaurants, which account for 13% of the workforce employed in the sector (Turismo Madrid, 2024), underscores the importance of this economic activity. This tendency is further substantiated by the surge in tourist expenditure, which in 2023 reached 7.500 million euros (INE, 2024).

This type of accommodation offers great advantages in terms of services, income and finances, both for the owners and for the environment. However, their large number, lack of control and speculation also lead to social problems such as gentrification, rising housing costs, lack of services or insecurity (López-Gay et al. 2021; Gil and Sequera, 2022). This has led to various social mobilisations and denunciations against the massification of VUTs, as well as attitudes of neighbourhood rejection. These

actions can affect the perception of users and the brand image of cities such as Madrid and its place branding (Ashworth and Voogd, 1990; Anholt, 2021). In this sense, knowing the existing discourse on the Internet about VUTs in Madrid and their conflicting reality allows for a better design of place marketing.

The analysis of the discourse around tourist apartments in Madrid has revealed several significant trends. Firstly, it can be seen that the issue of tourist apartments in general is generating growing interest, with an increase in the number of mentions and a high volume of impressions compared to the previous period. This increase suggests that the issue of tourist apartments in Madrid is still a relevant topic of great interest to the public, with 18% more mentions and 165% more impressions than in 2023. This activity corresponds mainly to the start of the holidays or when people are preparing for them. These issues become topical with regard to tourist taxes, interventions in apartments, bans or social housing to compensate. This type of news generates great interest (high consumption) and a certain negative debate that affects the perception of stability among tourists and in the sector, which also affects the brand image of Madrid as a tourist destination. The publications generate high consumption and visibility, which suggests that users remain interested in the topic, especially if the publications are effective in terms of engagement.

In terms of the evolution of the discourse, key moments of greater communication activity are identified, particularly around events related to public policies such as the tourist tax, VAT on tourist apartments and fines related to the prohibition of converting commercial premises into tourist accommodation. These peaks of activity indicate that the public reacts more strongly when the discourse is linked to legislative measures or public statements. As far as the discourse is concerned, it mainly takes place on websites, and it is on social networks such as X and Facebook that it takes on a more negative tone. With media profiles, but also with the presence of profiles related to the sector, in the form of denunciations of the negative effects of VUTs and the lack of action by the public administration in this regard. Although a couple of political profiles were found, their content is also one of denunciation of the administration. This highlights the diversity of actors involved in the public debate on tourist apartments. Similarly, the negative tone of the debate on social media indicates a greater polarisation in the discussion of the conflict between tourist accommodation and city council policy.

These data reveal several ideas:

1) The discourse generated by the sites is mostly from media that present 'worrying' content about interventionist measures on holiday apartments in a neutral way, which has the effect of putting the issue on the agenda of citizens, creating the perception that it is a problem that affects them and that it is about to be solved just as the holidays are approaching. At the same time, it creates uncertainty among owners (many of whom are citizens themselves) and potential investors. In this sense, we find media that publish a lot on the subject in search of visibility or clickbait, but that users prefer certain more "recognised" sources that generate a lot of interest with a single publication; 2) this is reflected in social networks, where there is a parallel negative debate. On these channels, the profiles of experts and politicians are consumed, denouncing both the negative effects of the VUTs and the lack of action on the part of the administrations. These messages can feed misinformation and the negative projection of both those in charge of managing Madrid and the city itself, which can be perceived as "uncomfortable", "annoying" or "disorderly", with a direct impact on the city's place marketing. And finally, 3) there is a total lack of presence on the part of the responsible administrations themselves, as well as of communication campaigns offering attractive and useful information on the management of the conflict and its impact on the image of the city (Capellán et al., 2020). This highlights the importance of implementing good place marketing and place branding strategies by the organisations themselves in order to manage situations that may be perceived as conflictive and have a negative impact on the tourism sector in cities as important as Madrid.

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