



OPEN ACCESS

EDITED BY

Rami K. Isaac,
Breda University of Applied
Sciences, Netherlands

REVIEWED BY

Mara Dantas Pereira,
Federal University of Bahia (UFBA), Brazil
Simone Moretti,
Breda University of Applied
Sciences, Netherlands

*CORRESPONDENCE

Hugo Guerrero-Sierra
✉ hugo.guerrero@unimilitar.edu.co

RECEIVED 01 April 2025

ACCEPTED 21 July 2025

PUBLISHED 08 August 2025

CITATION

Guerrero-Sierra H, Wilches Tinjacá JA and
Franco Correa A (2025) Digital narratives and
the legitimization of narcotourism: a critical
perspective from Latin American
thanatourism. *Front. Polit. Sci.* 7:1601301.
doi: 10.3389/fpos.2025.1601301

COPYRIGHT

© 2025 Guerrero-Sierra, Wilches Tinjacá and
Franco Correa. This is an open-access article
distributed under the terms of the [Creative
Commons Attribution License \(CC BY\)](#). The
use, distribution or reproduction in other
forums is permitted, provided the original
author(s) and the copyright owner(s) are
credited and that the original publication in
this journal is cited, in accordance with
accepted academic practice. No use,
distribution or reproduction is permitted
which does not comply with these terms.

Digital narratives and the legitimization of narcotourism: a critical perspective from Latin American thanatourism

Hugo Guerrero-Sierra^{1*}, Jaime Andrés Wilches Tinjacá² and
Andrea Franco Correa³

¹Facultad de Relaciones Internacionales, Estrategia y Seguridad, Universidad Militar Nueva Granada, Cajicá, Colombia, ²Facultad de Ciencias y Educación, Universidad Distrital Francisco José de Caldas, Bogotá, Colombia, ³Facultad de Ciencias Económicas, Universidad Militar Nueva Granada, Bogotá, Colombia

Dark tourism (or thanatourism) has emerged as one of the most dynamic and controversial segments of the global tourism industry. In Latin America, particularly in Colombia, Bolivia, and Mexico, this phenomenon intersects with the legacy of drug trafficking, producing a form of tourism that blends fascination with violence, symbolic consumption, and digital mediation. This article aims to identify the narratives that sustain the appeal of narco-tourism and to analyze how these narratives are constructed, circulated, and legitimized through digital platforms. The study adopts a qualitative methodological approach, combining multimodal discourse analysis with digital ethnography, and focuses on user-generated content from tourism platforms and social media. The findings reveal the emergence of prototypical narratives that aestheticize drug lords as transgressive heroes, while omitting the structural violence and illegality underpinning their histories. These narratives are not only reproduced by tourists but also amplified by tourism operators and tolerated by state institutions, contributing to the normalization of narco-culture as a legitimate form of cultural consumption. The article concludes by reflecting on the ethical and political implications of this trend, and calls for a critical rethinking of tourism practices in contexts marked by violence and historical trauma.

KEYWORDS

dark tourism, narcotourism, thanatourism, Latin America, legitimacy

1 Introduction

Humans' instinct is movement. Movement was usually reserved for sports, education, and entertainment and now it is argued to also be reflected in tourism. Crossing national and cultural borders has been normal since antique times when humans were nomads. Travelers are part of history, variations in climate, and wars. Moreover, the sense of survival was the main trigger for several forced migrations around the world. However, when technological improvements in communication and transportation began to peak since the Industrial Revolution, traveling was transformed from forced migration to leisure activities, and a source of inspiration (Morillo, 2011) to emulate urban planification models, as well as social and cultural mobility models.

Accordingly, tourism became an income source for the inhabitants of emblematic places, and it also enhance goods and services sector through a variety of offers as of the visitor's purchasing capacity. In several countries, hotels, restaurants, transportation, and

cultural activities depend on tourist flows. Being an accessible activity for a large part of the population, it contributes trillions of dollars to the world economy and moves more than 1.5 billion people each year (World Tourism Organization [UNWTO], 2020). Thereby, as mentioned by Mochón (2008), tourism is and will be a sector in constant expansion, thanks to globalization, new technologies, and new destinations.

In this framework, innovation has pushed new touristic experiences. To fulfill customer expectations, the sector must adapt and offer diverse choices, even more, after the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020 (United Nations [UN], 2020). Thus, destinations and tourism type are categories defined depending on motivations and interests of the client, or as Heitmann (2011) names it, their state of desire.

In this regard, the World Tourism Organization [UNWTO] (2019) has recognized this diversification and has established different types of tourism such as cultural, gastronomic, business, health, nature, wellness, sportive and eco-tourism. Nevertheless, in this classification is not taken in consideration the tourism related to illicit drug consumption and the myth of drug-trafficking economy (Narcoturismo) (Bingöl, 2021); and associated with the morbid curiosity generated by violence, death, or gruesome experiences -Thanatourism or Dark Tourism- (Van Broeck and López, 2018; Khaydarova and Isheryakova, 2022).

It should be noted that the fascination for violence and illegality is not a new phenomenon, nor exclusive from contemporary society. In the past, there was no lack of audience in the Roman Coliseum during the spectacles performed by gladiators, in the House of Correction in Victorian Britain, or in the execution sites in France or in Tyburn village (also known as Tyburn tree), located on the outskirts of London. Those are just a few examples of how flagellation was exposed.

Nowadays, media, social networks and advertising have become the public square for death exposure. For instance, morbid curiosity and macabre interest have triggered the collapse in the number of spectators for live streaming of public executions in the United States (Evans, 2017). In Latin-American's case (specially Mexico and Colombia), the interest for a kind of tourism that moves from the violence experience -Thanatourism- to the emotion of emblemizing the adventures of drug traffickers in the territories where they have had influence and hold their economic power -Narcoturismo- (Delgadillo, 2017).

Despite the critics from drug trafficking victims and the touristic restrictions to the offering of that kind of services, the increasing of this practice has been inevitable (Naef and Guillard, 2019), and it ends up being duplicated by digital platforms where the narco-tours are highly recommended and making echo to its mythic narrative.

Although narco-tourism is formally prohibited in countries like Mexico, its persistence in informal circuits reveals a deeper socio-cultural phenomenon. Far from disappearing, these tours have adapted to legal restrictions by disguising themselves as historical, cultural, or even folkloric experiences. This dynamic reflects not only the limitations of state regulation but also the symbolic power of narco-narratives in shaping tourist imaginaries. As Navarrete (2020) argues, the tourism industry in Mexico has learned to coexist with the presence of organized crime, generating new forms of

demand even in hostile environments. Therefore, this study does not limit itself to the analysis of official touristic offerings, but rather explores how digital platforms and user-generated content contribute to the normalization (and even celebration) of narco-related experiences across Colombia, Bolivia, and Mexico. This approach invites a broader reflection on the role of tourism in the construction of memory, legitimacy, and cultural consumption in post-violence societies.

While Colombia and Mexico have traditionally dominated the discourse on narco-tourism due to their historical association with major drug cartels, the inclusion of Bolivia in this study offers a necessary comparative lens. Bolivia's case, though not centered on the glorification of drug lords, reveals how ancestral and spiritual narratives surrounding coca leaves are also being commodified within the tourism industry. This contrast allows for a broader understanding of how narco-related imaginaries are constructed and consumed across different cultural contexts. By juxtaposing these three countries, the study aims to explore not only the diversity of narco-tourism narratives but also the mechanisms through which violence, legality, and heritage are negotiated in the tourist experience.

Therefore, this paper aims to identify how thanatourism and dark tourism have derived in the spread of narco-tourism in Colombia and Mexico. This phenomenon has been driven by the tourists' experiences that turn viral through digital platforms, in which the effects of violence to standardize an apology narrative of illegality is ignored. Consequently, this narrative allows illegal practices to be considered as a risky but legitimate way of achieving economic prestige and social rising.

Understanding narcotourism is not merely an academic curiosity, it is a pressing necessity in the face of a growing global phenomenon that blurs the boundaries between entertainment, historical memory, and the normalization of criminal economies. As this form of tourism proliferates through digital platforms and audiovisual narratives, it reshapes public perceptions of violence, legitimacy, and social mobility, particularly in Latin American contexts where drug trafficking has left deep social scars. The fascination with narco figures like Pablo Escobar or El Chapo is not only a matter of morbid interest but a reflection of how commodified narratives can reframe illegality as a path to prestige. This research seeks to interrogate the mechanisms through which such narratives are constructed, circulated, and consumed, and to ask: how do digital platforms contribute to the legitimization of narcotourism as a form of dark tourism? Who benefits from this narrative, and who is silenced by it? By addressing these questions, the study contributes to a broader understanding of how tourism, media, and memory intersect in the production of contemporary cultural imaginaries, and why this matters for societies grappling with the legacies of violence.

2 Literature review

Thanatourism and dark tourism are relatively new concepts although the types of activities they imply are not new. Getting to know and visiting places where there was any act of violence has always been interesting (Adriaensen, 2015; Light, 2017). The

thanatopic tradition is based on death contemplation and is dated to the Middle Ages (Seaton, 1996). Several academics highlighted a strong relationship between tourism and tragic-related places due to sensorial effects (Rojek, 1993 as cited in Light, 2017). Their discussion opened a new trend to build concepts on touristic interests that were unknown then.

Thanatourism was first mentioned in 1996 in the *International Journal of Heritage Studies* by Seaton and the concept of dark tourism was firstly introduced by Lennon and Foley (Light, 2017; Seaton, 2009). Since then, touristic practices related to death, violence, and disaster have been categorized as a type of tourism (Seaton, 2009). Both concepts entail “[traveling] to a location wholly, or partially, motivated by the desire for actual or symbolic encounters with death, particularly, but not exclusively, violent death” (Seaton, 1996, p. 240) and “the presentation and consumption (by visitors) of real and commodified death and disaster sites” (Foley and Lennon, 1996, p. 198).

Nevertheless, initially, thanatourism and dark tourism were conceptualized differently. The former was focused on heritage tourism, defined as visiting places that represent historical events, ruins of ancient civilizations or paradigmatic character's graves (Garrod and Fyall, 2000).

In this light, tourists were thought to have a two-fold motivation to select some places where tragic events had happened, i.e., 1) heritage, as the coalification of universal culture knowledge and 2) entertainment, as the visitors simulate to be witnesses of historical facts through souvenirs and photographs.

The dark tourism (Light, 2017) consisted of visiting dark places or black spots (Rojek, 1993 as cited in Light, 2017), like visiting cemeteries, concentration camps, or places related to any type of violent or accidental events outside of official history or excluded from the offers of tourism agencies.

These differences became less relevant (Light, 2017) since both concepts have a place in common: the market of death. This, mainly because with its understated charm and enigmatic places usually excluded from traditional conceptions of pleasure travel (Hartmann et al., 2018) and the fascination for prohibited territories but secure enough for visitors, due to the local communities' role as tour guides (Adriaensen, 2015; Martini and Buda, 2018).

As Stone (2006) mentions, thanatourism is the dirty little secret of the tourism industry, even when it is intended to hide the excuse of needing a narrative for those places with low attendance of foreign visitors (Mionel, 2019). Its popularity sparked ethical debates around the economic benefits collected from death and violence (Light, 2017), to the detriment of the construction of historical memory, the respect to the victims, the sanction to the victimizers and the prevention of natural disasters.

The commodification of death and violence within dark tourism has generated significant ethical debates, particularly regarding the commercialization of suffering and the potential trivialization of historical trauma. As Stone (2025) explains, the transformation of sites of death into tourist attractions—whether through museums, themed tours, or memorials—raises complex questions about how societies remember the dead and represent difficult heritage. In the case of narcotourism, these concerns are amplified by the glamorization of criminal figures and the

omission of victims' voices. The conversion of violent histories into consumable experiences often results in a form of cultural kitsch that prioritizes spectacle over substance, and entertainment over education.

These ethical tensions have also influenced how dark tourism is performed and marketed. While some initiatives attempt to reframe these experiences through heritage-based narratives that promote critical reflection, others continue to exploit emotional stimulation and sensationalism for commercial gain. As Stone and Grebenar (2022) argue, the blurred line between commemoration and commodification is particularly visible in digital platforms, where user-generated content can either reinforce or challenge dominant narratives. Thus, the ethical dimension is not peripheral but central to understanding how dark tourism, and specifically narcotourism, functions within contemporary visitor economies.

As interest in dark tourism has grown, new and increasingly complex experiences have emerged that reflect evolving tourist motivations and cultural sensibilities. Thanatourism, a subcategory of dark tourism, offers multiple layers of engagement and a diverse range of products that appeal to visitors seeking emotional intensity, historical immersion, or transgressive encounters (Stone, 2006; Wright, 2018, as cited in Martini and Buda, 2018). Among these emerging forms, narco-tourism has gained prominence as a particularly controversial variant. It not only capitalizes on the fascination with death and violence but also intersects with narratives of power, illegality, and social mobility (Adriaensen, 2015; Flores and Sánchez, 2018; Bendaña, 2019; Hunt, 2021).

This expansion of dark tourism's scope reflects a broader shift in the cultural geography of tourism, where sites associated with criminality and trauma are reimagined as spaces of leisure and spectacle. As Bideci (2020, p. 24) notes, “the scope of places covered by dark tourism has therefore expanded beyond religious rituals, traditions, myths, ancient cities, graveyards, places of worship, sanctuaries, war and disasters.” Narco-tourism exemplifies this shift by transforming the legacy of drug trafficking into a consumable experience, often mediated through digital platforms and audiovisual narratives. This transformation challenges traditional boundaries between education and entertainment, memory and marketing, and invites critical reflection on the ethical and cultural implications of tourism in spaces marked by violence.

The narco phenomenon has strengthened during the 21st century, replacing other moralized narratives that used to cause fascination such as the holocaust, magic rituals, and nuclear accidents. Narco tours are spectacles opening new markets, offering an authentic experience of violence around a persistent and actual problem, drug trafficking (Adriaensen, 2015). At first, narco-tourism was understood as the type of tourism where people could acquire, consume, transport, and learn about the manufacture of drugs, mainly marijuana, cocaine, and heroin (Hunt, 2021). Through time, additional tourist activities have been added and tourists have begun to be captivated by the places where the most famous drug trafficking *capos* as Pablo Escobar and Chapo Guzman lived (Sánchez, 2020). Thus, the expected experience, adrenaline, and emotion associated with violence and drug trafficking (Delgadillo, 2017) led to an extended conceptualization

of narco-tourism by researchers in several sectors (economic, social, cultural, etc.).

Hunt (2021) describes six distinct forms of activities related to narco-tourism: consumption-oriented, production-oriented, acquisition-oriented, dark heritage, narcotrafficker, and appropriation and cultural assimilation of drug trafficking gestures, rituals, and symbols.

In short, there are numerous forms of narco-tourism, this activity nowadays is no longer exclusively based on the consumption and purchase of illicit drugs, instead, it is related to the emotion and excitement of being in the same places where leaders of drug traffic execute their operations while defying state institutions and under threats or complicity of society.

Unlike concentration camps or thanatological rituals -result of ancient traditions and cultures-, *narco*-tourism is practiced in a complex scenario where legality and violent conditions imposed by criminal organizations, are faced. Motivation is not the goal, it is living an experience related to iconic characters related to violence, criminal hunting, and death. There is a generalized infatuation with visiting places far from an *ethical and moral compass* (Edwards, 2000 as cited in Stone, 2006). As stated by Stephens (2007 as cited in Korstanje and Ivanov, 2012), different modalities attached to thanatourism grant “the privilege to scape.” In other words, people have the license to be in contact with odd traditions and out-of-ordinary situations. Tourists have the permission to experience events that are completely new to their understanding, being alien to the original environment (Thurnell-Read, 2011).

In *narco*-tourism, that scape has been catalyzed by the capacity of illegal actors to influence public sphere from a present that preserves missing Capos legacy and the cartels fighting for their survival. The narco-narrative is global through the moralization process, making it a credible option to commercialize (Antezana, 2015; Naef, 2017; Karam, 2019).

[T]he ability of drug traffickers, is [...] manipulate discourses and social relations, altering the values (Penglase, 2010) and legitimizing their action within society, whether by coercion or persuasion. What the experts have analyzed is that the use of violence is legitimized itself as a form of construction of [...] identity values. (Yanes and Valdés, 2019, p. 55)

In the context of narco-tourism, the notion of a “moralization process” refers not to a coherent ethical condemnation accompanied by structural interventions, but rather to a discursive mechanism through which political and social elites publicly repudiate drug-related tourism while simultaneously avoiding the implementation of concrete public policies to address its normalization. This process results in a paradox: narco-tourism is symbolically rejected in the public sphere, yet tolerated—and even negotiated with—in the private domain. As a result, the phenomenon becomes naturalized through everyday practices and digital narratives that legitimize it as a form of entertainment or cultural curiosity, rather than a symptom of deeper structural violence.

This dynamic reflects broader patterns of moral ambivalence and political inaction that characterize the legitimization of drug economies in Latin America. As Grisaffi (2022) shows in his ethnographic study of coca production in Bolivia, state actors often oscillate between condemnation and accommodation, producing

a fragmented governance model in which illicit practices are simultaneously criminalized and integrated into local economies and identities. Similarly, Patteson (2021) argues that narcoculture operates through a “dialectics of intoxication,” where cultural products simultaneously critique and reproduce the allure of drug economies. This ambivalence enables a form of symbolic control that moralizes drug-related practices without disrupting the structural conditions that sustain them, thereby reinforcing the normalization of narco-violence and its aestheticization in popular culture.

Social representation designed by the media has shaped what is known as *narco* culture (i.e., soap operas, TV series, and films). This dynamic has spread into a globalized story that causes enough curiosity in tourist to motivate them to visit the places shown in audiovisual productions. Narco-tour offers are complemented with narrative represented in elements like music, outfits, haciendas, and cars, among others. Those are examples of the physical and emotional personification of the *narco* (Escobedo and Suárez, 2019). Mexico and Colombia are the main settings of such a culture.

In Mexico, Mazatlán City and Culiacan (Sinaloa) are regions related to drug trafficking where tours echo the sensationalism caused by violence and death (Adriaensen, 2015). In Sinaloa, there is an iconography of drug trafficking and a widely known production of music such as *narcocorridos* (Flores and Sánchez, 2018).

Similarly, Mazatlán City is where one of the most important capos, Ramón Arellano Félix, died. It also has the most luxurious houses of Chapo Guzmán and it was where his capture occurred. Several means of transportation offer the narco tour around the city (e.g., taxis, auriga, and pulmonías, among others). Socially speaking, both places have a profound level of acceptance of the narco culture, which is surprising (Flores, 2007; Escobedo and Suárez, 2019), considering the long-standing exposure of these communities to narco-violence, repression, and social trauma. One might expect such experiences to foster rejection or resistance; however, the opposite seems to occur. The normalization—and even celebration—of narco figures and narratives appears to be driven by the symbolic and economic capital they bring to local tourism circuits. As Caicedo (2023) argues, narco-tourism in Colombia has transformed violent histories into commodified experiences, where the figure of the drug lord becomes a cultural icon and a tourist attraction, rather than a symbol of suffering or injustice. This process reflects a broader social assimilation of narcoculture, where violence is aestheticized and integrated into everyday life through tourism, media, and local narratives.

In Colombia, “narco-tourism seems to be concentrated in Medellín, with pilgrimage to Pablo Escobar’s grave” (Adriaensen, 2015, p. 140). Colombian *narco* tours revolve around this iconic character from the place where he was born to the place he is buried. Pablo Escobar is a global icon and is still considered a local hero. His image has been romanticized up to the point that there is a whole industry around it: souvenirs, t-shirts, keychains, glasses, and any kind of other gadgets are highly successful (Santamaría and Flores, 2015).

Even though central governments have tried to surpass the *narco* era and build new social representations, in Colombia no efforts have been made to formally ban narco-tourism. As for Mexico, although narco-tourism is regulated, it has not been effective. But in general, a narrative is maintained to demonize

narco tours as illegal and a cause of moral decay (Giraldo et al., 2014).

However widespread and hegemonic the condemnation of the illegal drug trade, Sinaloans live the schizophrenic glamorization of the activity that local culture and media industries promote. Popular culture is determined by people's everyday life, and people of Sinaloa or Medellín talk about symbols of the narcos' violence as elements that constitute their daily life (Naef, 2017, p. 489).

In Medellín, *narco* tours are known and public. In fact, travel agencies create *narco* tour packages. In contrast, in Mazatlán, these activities are performed in secrecy by taxi drivers and tour guides. Still, their popularity attracts both national and international tourists (Flores and Sánchez, 2018).

Thanatourism is the result of an economic development strategy as it increases the economic activity of these countries. Consequently, *narco*-tourism can be understood as an alternative touristic activity that dynamizes the local economy (González-Díaz et al., 2020). At the same time, it can be used as a type of heritage tourism instead of worshipping the *narco* lifestyle, by controlling the narrative exposed and by avoiding the apologetic trend (Hartmann et al., 2018).

In this regard, there are civil organizations dedicated to do pedagogy addressed to the effects of allowing and celebration of *narco*-lifestyle and they invite tourists to activities unrelated to Latin-American *gangsters*. Good intentions seem to be insufficient to control the hegemonic narrative focused on *narco*-tourism as an appealing label, dedicated to engaging tourists once they get rid of daily worries and enter a state of leisure and entertainment (Fontan, 2013). It turns out to be more interesting that this type of questions doesn't extend to public debate since the increasing of foreign visitors to cities scarred by violence (Sinaloa, Medellín), is interpreted as a reborn opportunity and the possibility of showing a positive side. Questioning this statement also entails being questioned by stigmatization.

Narco-tourism, as a subcategory of dark tourism, exemplifies the commodification of violence and death under the guise of cultural experience. While dark tourism traditionally engages with sites of tragedy to foster reflection or remembrance, *narco*-tourism often bypasses these ethical imperatives, transforming criminal legacies into consumable spectacles. As Speakman (2025) argues, the prioritization of spectacle over education in dark tourism sites across Mexico has led to the marginalization of deeper historical meanings and the exclusion of local voices. In the case of *narco*-tourism, this dynamic is exacerbated by the glamorization of drug lords and the trivialization of the suffering they caused. The result is a form of tourism that not only aestheticizes violence but also risks normalizing it through repetition and entertainment.

The persistence of apologetic narratives in *narco*-tourism is not accidental; it is sustained by a complex interplay of state permissiveness, social complicity, and tourist disconnection from local histories. As Scott and Duncan (2015) suggest, symbolic interactionism offers a valuable lens to understand how tourists construct meaning through encounters with places, symbols, and narratives—often in ways that escape or subvert formal policy frameworks. This perspective challenges the reduction of *narco*-tourism to a matter of regulation or criminalization, and

instead invites us to interrogate the symbolic economies and affective investments that sustain it. Tourists, far from being passive consumers, actively negotiate their roles and justifications, often through emotional and moral ambivalence. This disconnection from historical accountability reinforces a cycle of cultural amnesia, where the past is consumed but not critically understood.

These findings underscore the need for a more robust theoretical and methodological agenda in the study of *narco*-tourism. While current research has mapped its emergence and cultural logics, there remains a significant gap in understanding the affective and ethical dimensions of tourist engagement. Zakaras (2018) reminds us that complicity in systemic injustice (whether through action or omission) demands a form of ethical participation that is often absent in the tourist gaze. Future studies should prioritize qualitative methodologies, such as narrative inquiry, ethnographic immersion, and affective mapping, to explore the motivations, justifications, and silences that shape tourist behavior. Such an approach would help avoid the formalism of public policy responses and instead open space for critical inquiry into the symbolic negotiations, emotional economies, and cultural contradictions that define *narco*-tourism as a global practice.

In summary, the ingrained discourse of thanatourism is the rationalization of the dreadfulness achieved. *Narco*-tourism, as an expression of thanatourism, is a historical record of a particular moment of time and its social problems. The central objective must be the monitoring and regulatory mechanisms to ensure that the narratives presented to tourists are accurate and represent the historical reality (heritage) separated from commodification, entertainment, and showbusiness.

3 Methodology

Fascination with narcoculture and the fascination for drug culture is represented in the geographical spaces where a logistical and cultural chain of secrets and complicities originates. Curiosity about the *narco* world has popularized worldwide thanks to *narco*-stories such as *Narcos* broadcast on streaming platforms such as Netflix. Nowadays, *narcos* are no longer perceived as sources of illegality and fear, which normalizes *narco*-tourism in Latin America for both national and international visitors. Tourists validate the visited places by commenting in face-to-face conversations or on the internet. Hence, tourists become prosumers. Through tourism, people can exploit their morbid fascination with death and violence. In this panorama, this research analyzed whether *narco*-tourism has become a new form of dark tourism. In doing so, it employed a mixed research approach and a multimodal analysis technique. The corpus was obtained from a documentary review of information from Colombia, Bolivia and Mexico.

Colombia and Mexico are considered the traditional destinations of *narco*-tourism (Flores, 2007; Adriaensen, 2015; Naef, 2017; Escobedo and Suárez, 2019) due to their close relationship with the greatest drug traffickers in history, which offers visitors an intimate and personal experience. On the other hand, Bolivia was included not only for being a central place in the production and distribution of cocaine but also because of the symbolic role of coca leaves in society. Coca leaves are deemed

TABLE 1 Digital platforms reviewed.

Name	Web page	APP	Lodging	Guided tours/excursions
Airbnb	X	X	X	X
Civitatis	X	X		X
Get Your Guide	X	X		X
Pabloescobartour.co	X			X
TripAdvisor	X	X	X	X
Viator	X	X		X
YouTube	X	X		

Source: Prepared by the authors.

TABLE 2 Boolean equations in Spanish.

Colombia	Tour narcotráfico Colombia. Tour Pablo Escobar. Visita a lugares de Pablo Escobar.
México	Tour narcotráfico México, Visita a casa de narcos.
Bolivia	Tour coca Bolivia. Ritual/Celebración hoja de Coca Pachamama.

Source: Prepared by the authors.

healing, sedative, and used in ceremonial activities, maintaining a behavior of strings attached to its ancestor (Bingöl, 2021). The coca leaf is understood by Bolivians as a gift from the Pachamama (Mother Earth).

Although Colombia and Mexico were selected as primary case studies due to their direct association with narco-violence and the legacy of figures like Pablo Escobar and Chapo Guzmán, Bolivia was included as a comparative case to examine how symbolic elements of drug culture, particularly the ritual and medicinal use of coca leaves, are integrated into tourism narratives. This comparative approach allows for the identification of both convergences and divergences in the construction of narco-tourism across different sociopolitical and cultural landscapes. The data collected from Bolivia were analyzed using the same multimodal discourse framework, enabling a consistent methodological lens while acknowledging the distinct nature of the Bolivian context.

Violence and danger are not exclusively the main aspects to highlight in narco-tourism. Also, spiritual, and traditional medicine is important. Therefore, it is necessary to analyze the type of touristic activities supplied in these countries to include diverse archetypical narratives embedded in narco-tourism. A wide range of opinions was found on the internet. To limit the corpus, some digital platforms were selected to cover enough sources related to tourism, as well as a diverse sample of activities and tourist plans (Table 1).

To find activities related to narco-tourism on these platforms, Boolean equations by country in Spanish were used (see Table 2).

Prototypical narratives of consumers of tourism plans and activities related to narco-tourism have induced moral validation for this type of tourism. That is the main reason why the analysis included comments and opinions found in discussion forums of online platforms for booking tourist activities. On YouTube, records of videos posted by people attending tourist activities were selected, particularly. In addition, videos that had at least 1,000

reproductions were chosen because YouTube considered this a threshold for monetization.

Following Balderas Reyes (2017), the methodological orientation of this research is fundamentally qualitative, the comments and opinions of the users found on each digital platform, which were classified by relevance, were triangulated with quantitative data such as rankings, scores, and the number of visitors. The primary objective was not to quantify user behavior or statistically model patterns, but rather to interpret the symbolic and discursive constructions that emerge in digital environments related to narco-tourism. Quantitative indicators such as rankings, scores, and number of visitors were not analyzed per se, but rather used as instrumental criteria to identify the most visible and socially validated content within digital platforms. These metrics served as a filter to select the most relevant narratives for qualitative interpretation, ensuring that the corpus reflected the most influential and widely consumed representations of narco-tourism. Therefore, the reference to a mixed-methods approach should be understood as a methodological strategy for corpus construction, not as a dual analytical framework.

The internet has changed communication dynamics because the communicative phenomena are nowadays centered on the network (i.e., net) (Pardo, 2008). Social media, blogs, and other digital spaces made room for sharing personal opinions and transmitting ideas more freely. In this sense, parallel frameworks and interpretations of reality are built using digital platforms, as they are considered current spaces widely used to exchange public opinion:

The proliferation of the internet fosters the use of this media to collect data and to perform analysis of different social emerging phenomena, online as well as offline. In the beginning, known as the first and second age of internet studies, research was focused on describing its uses, sociodemographic characteristics of users and their online interactions. Nowadays, in the third age, the focus has been on what the net fosters on everyday lives of users, the ties and sharing of online communities and the exploration of new modes of social relations that the internet is fostering (Wellman, 2004 as cited in Rocco, 2010, p. 69, own translation).

It is for this reason that the net has become a tool for researchers. Pérez et al. (2015) affirm that this new digital context, as a source of expression, provides the framework to understand peoples' behavior (at the micro level), as well as social relations (at the macro level). In the blink of an eye, internet users have the ability, by using a computer or any digital device, to value or comment about almost any topic. Likewise, information travels double way and so there is an opportunity to receive replies or feedback to his/her comments (Moya and Majó, 2017).

In this train of thought, a digital register was selected to collect and analyze information and narrative expressions that are not formally archived. Information circulates in the virtual environment and provides vision and prospective takes on physical and social realities. Furthermore, working within a digital environment where the comments and opinions analyzed combine different semiotic systems (text and emojis), the multimodal method was chosen for collecting information. This is because it

Capo de capos y teniendo todo el dinero del mundo era super humilde solo con mirar su tumba lo dice todo

👍 44 🗨️ RESPONDER

En paz Descanse Pablo Emilio Escobar Gaviria (El patrón) viva Medallo (Medellín) Viva Colombia

👍 12 🗨️ 🌍❤️ RESPONDER

FIGURE 2

Sample of two registries on YouTube (Colombia). Source: Authors' elaboration-YouTube information. Exhibit A. Juan Durán. [Head of heads and having all the money in the world he was very humble. Just by looking his tomb, you understand it]. Exhibit B. Fabián Izquierdo. [RIP Pablo Emilio Escobar Gaviria (The Boss) hail to Medallo [Medellín] hail to Colombia].

Claro qué es el mejor del mundo!! Y ya lo quiero acá en México! Ya lo quiero libre, en su tierra, dónde se le admira y se le respeta! Orgullosamente hecho en México!

👍 3 🗨️ RESPONDER

Mis respetos. Esa fue casa de Caro quintero.

👍 6 🗨️ 🌍❤️ RESPONDER

FIGURE 3

Sample of two registries on YouTube (Mexico). Source: Authors' elaboration-YouTube information. Exhibit A. Maricela Ramos. [Of course, he is the best in the world!!! And I want him in Mexico! I want him free, in his motherland, where he is admired and respected! Proudly made in Mexico]. Exhibit B. Lucas Leon. [My respect. That was the house of Caro Quintero].

chain of raw materials for cocaine production (Raynolds, 2000); or the use of its territory as the beginning of the route selected by Pablo Escobar or Klaus Barbie for the distribution of the drug, allowing them the control of over 90% of the transportation of cocaine. As a matter of fact, spiritual and medical interest for coke leaves is not completely genuine, mainly because of the profitability and wealth increase of landowners dedicated to the supply of raw materials for drugs cartels (Malamud-Goti, 2021).

Prototypical sentences as well as sociocultural expressions are used in several comments and opinions. Besides, style resources such as the apostrophe are figures that transmit affective factors; in the apostrophe's case, it is a vehement expression toward a person or object, and in the case of the narratives presented, they are intended to express admiration and respect for the narcos and their adventures. The desire of tourists to visit sites, attractions, and exhibits brings them closer to the *narco* world and enhances the dark side of tourist plans (Khaydarova and Isheryakova, 2022). In this sense, drug tourism is a new form of dark tourism that transgresses the fascination with the history of the place (and the pain of the victims or those affected) and transforms it into a morbid experience (Seaton, 1996). Furthermore, interest in narco-tourism is reinforced by the perceived acceptance of other social actors on digital platforms (Flores, 2007; Escobedo and Suárez, 2019; Villatoro, 2012). Consequently, narco-tourism is outside the illegal space and is normalized and seen as a valid space for entertainment and fun.

Genial la clase de cultura!!!

👍 1 🗨️ RESPONDER

Nunca vi un ritual así! INTERESANTE!

👍 🗨️ RESPONDER

FIGURE 4

Sample of two registries on YouTube (Bolivia). Authors' elaboration-Tripadvisor information. Exhibit A. Luizpablo Brites. [That culture class was amazing!!!]. Exhibit B. Juan Cardozo. [I've never seen a ritual like that! INTERESTING!].

As stated in the methodology, the results are presented in the classification of actors, discourses, and strategies. Those categories contribute, through digital platforms, to the standardization of a specific narrative: the illegality as a risky but legitimate way of achieving economic prestige and social rising.

4.1 Actors

Two possible types of actors were identified, the first ones being agencies and tourism enterprises that promote plans and



FIGURE 5

Tourist recommendations (pabloescobartour.co). Source: YouTube Channel Pablo Emilio Escobar Gaviria 1993.

activities to possible clients. These actors construct a certain kind of narrative in promotional videos and on their reservation webpages. They seek to create curiosity about their services, and therefore, the strategy is to recommend to their users some activities. For instance, *pabloescobartour.co* is a highly visited agency on YouTube and suggests plans and activities from tourists themselves. Their YouTube channel is called: *Pablo Emilio Escobar Gaviria 1993*, as shown in Figure 5.

Mainly these actors use web pages and online reservations to advertise their services. However, while this only occurs in the case of Bolivia and Colombia, in Mexico selling touristic packages related to drug trafficking is prohibited. The Mexican government has formally eliminated this type of tourism although unsuccessfully (Flores and Sánchez, 2018). In Sinaloa, narco tours are widely known and popular. Their promotion is surviving due to inhabitants that work as tour guides. Even though results in terms of official travel and touristic platforms are zero, it is an activity that is reluctant to disappear. Informal activities mentioned before, grow roots on the territories due to the comments of tourists on digital platforms and by sharing their experiences, they create discussions regarding news of Capos and establish similarities and differences between *narcoseries* and *narconovelas*. For instance, in 2008, when Edgar Guzmán López died (son of Chapo Guzmán) (Medrano, 2020) or back in 2016, when Chapo Guzmán was captured the interested on visiting these places spiked (Infobae, 2016), and in turn, the community of users dedicated to providing historical data on the character and offering recommendations to make the tourist experience fruitful was boosted.

The second type of actors is tourists and visitors. Visitors are different from tourists as their activity does not include an overnight stay (The Global Statistics, 2025). In this group, internet users were also included because they observe and consume information targeting tourists and visitors. In this sense, the second type of actors is not only considered consumers of activities

shown on the internet but also prosumers through comments and opinions.

Through YouTube, tourists and visitors share their perceptions of certain activities and document the process. Some of these posts are shared through personal channels as well as used by audiovisual producers. Usually, this type of actors does not belong to any type of organization related to type one. In their narratives, it is usual to find personal experiences as well as their own opinion that in some ways are socially shared (Van Dijk, 2006). Several people then feel engaged in viewing and commenting on those real-life experiences.

Actors are not geographically limited since narco-tourism has expanded worldwide. Legitimization of this type of tourism comes from a great number of actors and several registries as well. A more in-depth analysis of YouTube revealed that most of the users that share their experiences are between 20–40 years old (The Global Statistics, 2025).

4.2 Discourses and strategies

Each actor uses discourse and a strategy to spawn a result. Touristic agencies manipulate to create sales of their services, and tourists and visitors recommend others to go or live an experience. In both cases, narratives foster the normalization of narco-tourism in society through opinions and comments that combine personal and social beliefs. This is the reason why this sort of tourism is understood and accepted by others (Van Dijk, 2006).

In a sense, commodification is a driving factor in tourism, and this is the main reason why narco-tourism information is portrayed on web pages and online guided tour reservations. To exemplify this description the following excerpts are brought up:



Excelente

Opinión sobre: Museo Pablo Escobar

Excelente poder disfrutar del tour ORIGINAL de Pablo Escobar en Medellín, además, hay que destacar el trato exquisito de nuestro guía, Matias Escobar.

Experiencia 100% recomendable y visita obligada para todo aquel que visite esta ciudad.



Excelente

El verdadero tour de pablo escobar , contado por la gente que estuvo con el. Todos súper amables. Nos pasó a buscar Roman , que estuvo siempre con Roberto escobar y en el auto arranco a contarnos las historias, responder preguntas sobre el pasado. Y dentro del museo se pueden ver desde otro lado. Muy recomendable este tour .

FIGURE 6

Example of opinions in TripAdvisor (Colombia). Source: Prepared by the authors. Exhibit A. Lydia P. [Wonderful to enjoy the ORIGINAL tour of Pablo Escobar in Medellín, besides we were very well treated by our guide, Matias Escobar]. Exhibit B. Leandro R. [The original tour of Pablo Escobar told by the people that were with him. Everyone was very nice. Roman came to look for us, he was always with Roberto Escobar. In the car, we were already starting with stories and real answers about his past. Inside the Museum, you can see the other reality. I totally recommend this tour].



Had an amazing experience learning everything there is to know about Pablo and his family. Got a really cool tour of his jail and some of the surprisingly positive things Pablo did for the people. Overall it was well worth it if you want to see some less visited areas of Medellín with a great tour guide.

FIGURE 7

Examples of Opinions in Airbnb (Colombia). Source: Authors' elaboration-AIRBNB information.

Get to know the profile of the historical Pablo Escobar Gaviria from the first source, to enjoy this as a great experience, open your mind and heart, free yourself from prejudice and allow a great message to come into your life so that it impacts your environment. The history that is already written, was lived in the flesh by Pablo Escobar and his family and that is what you will know directly. In the museum lie personal items of Pablo, through which his great passions are revealed (Tripadvisor, n.d. – Museo Pablo Escobar).

Discover the fascinating story of Pablo Escobar, a notorious drug dealer worshiped as one of the most famous characters in Colombia, in a historical visit that lasts 4 h around the city. Go inside the history of the famous criminal while you visit three historical places closely related to his life and death: Monaco building, the house where he was killed and his tomb. Get to know the complex cocaine operations and the several opinions about a man both declared as a hero, Robin Hood's style, and a despicable villain (Viator, n.d. sic – Pablo Escobar Tour in Medellín).

Coca leaves have been used by Andean natives by generations in ceremonies, rituals, and as traditional medicine. Get to know the history of this plant in this guided visit through the Coca Museum (Civitatis, n.d., sic – Visita guiada por el Museo de la Coca).

On the other side, tourists and visitors recommend plans and visits that they had experienced. Their discourses revolve around the narrative of their experience in a double way (Figures 6, 7). First, they advise others, and second, they state their opinion about the topic. This last aspect is seen as an opportunity to express themselves not only through words but also by means of images shared on digital platforms (Hütt, 2011).

Me encanto el vídeo y me encantaría visitar Colombia y ver el museo para ver toda la historia de Pablo Escobar, estuve viendo la serie del patrón me gusto mucho un saludo para Medellin desde España

👍 🗨️ RESPONDER

I said this an am gonna say it again Pablo Escobar was the biggest and richest kingpin of time his name will never forget about even another 80 years from now his name will still mention 🤔

👍 34 🗨️ RESPONDER

FIGURE 8

Examples of comments about Pablo Escobar (YouTube). Source: Authors' elaboration-Yotube information. Exhibit A. [I loved the video, and I would love to visit Colombia and the museum to see the whole story about Pablo Escobar. I saw the TV series El Patron and I loved it so much. Greeting to Medellin from Spain].

Lo unico que envidio es la coleccion de armas de fuego no por que fueron de narcos ni se usaron para delinquir simplemente por que son espectaculares quien no quisiera tenerlas asi en vitrinas en su casa y sacarlas de ves en cuando para disparar

👍 111 🗨️ 🇪🇸 RESPONDER

FIGURE 9

Examples of Comments about the Museum Enervantes de la Sedena in Mexico (Narco Museum) – YouTube. Source: Authors' elaboration-Yotube information. Translation: [The only thing I envy is the firearms collection not because they belonged to *narcos* or were used to kill, but because they are amazing. I cannot imagine anyone that does not want to see them exhibited like that at home and use them occasionally for shooting].

bellissimo ! mi manca l'America Latina! spero di tornare presto

👍 2 🗨️ RESPONDER

Buenisimo, aprendí un montón de cosas, es lindo conocer otras culturas. Que interesante ver como las tradiciones se mantienen a lo largo de tantos años!!

👍 1 🗨️ RESPONDER

FIGURE 10

Examples of Comments about Rituals in Bolivia (YouTube). Source: Authors' elaboration-Yotube information. Exhibit A. [Very beautiful! I miss Latin America! I hope to be back soon]. Exhibit B. [Wonderful, I learn a bunch of things. It is very nice to get to know different cultures. How interesting it is to see traditions that lasted through ages].

The comments highlight not only the fascination with narco-tourism but also introduce the tours as learning experiences that allow visitors and tourists to dig deeper into history. People contend that it is an opportunity to clarify unknown aspects of *narcos'* life. This is a central characteristic of thanatourism, i.e., getting into direct contact with places that represent important events in history. Somewhat, there is a link between memory and respect toward victims of those events (Hartmann et al., 2018; Van, 2018).

Internet users are attracted by audiovisual content provided by tourists and express their motivation to engage in narco-tourism in the future (Figure 8). General discourse about narco-tourism is camouflaged and normalized because of the recommendations of other people (Figure 9). In other words, it is seen as an ordinary activity that presents emotion due to the closeness to death and violence (Figure 10).

Usually, narco-tourism is part of the actual dynamics. This kind of tourism has grown exponentially due to the interest

and business opportunities it sparkles. In Colombia, Bolivia, and Mexico, economic structures have been implemented to support this new supply of dark tourism, which keeps it alive and growing (Khaydarova and Isheryakova, 2022). Analysis of the registries collected indicated that it is neither a topic that creates fear nor censorship but admiration and amusement. It is a phenomenon that keeps growing thanks to media, and this will continue being so until new historical events, shaped by violence and death, take their place as happened to the Nazi genocide and the concentration camps.

5 Discussion

Thanatourism has created comments that flow between attraction and dazzle by morbid interest and criticism for being an activity that showcases touristic plans against moral conduct. Even

though the debate between acceptance and rejection is still relevant, there is an increasing number of people interested in the topic. Thus, it is not a kind of tourism that will cease being attractive in the short run. The approach it offers to violence and death, although scary in the beginning, also causes curiosity from a distance.

Narco-tourism is one of the current representations of thanatourism. It comes from the thanatotic tradition. Admiration for violence is not exclusive to the *narco* world, through narcotours and narco-stories. Fascination with the forbidden has long been established as a business strategy by several tourist agencies and enterprises. T-shirts, keychains, and any type of memorabilia of a drug dealer, a writer, or a politician is an expression of this.

Countries like Mexico and Colombia have been key to shifting the ethical and moral boundaries between the illegal and legal worlds. These countries are linked to major drug lords and will be hard pressed to displace this narrative as long as interest in drug tourism continues to grow. Bolivia is also classified as a hub for this sort of tourism even though the focus there is on the spiritual and cultural aspects of the coca leaves. It is not enough to visit the jail where Pablo Escobar walked out and fled or the house where Chapo Guzmán was captured, but it is also highly appealing to be close to the cosmic vision of the Pachamama by the means of worshipping the plant that has caused so many political debates.

The inclusion of Bolivia as a comparative case highlights the importance of examining narco-tourism not only through the lens of violence and criminality but also through cultural symbolism and heritage. While Colombia and Mexico reflect a more explicit fascination with narco figures, Bolivia's case reveals how even spiritual and ancestral narratives can be co-opted into the broader economy of dark tourism. This comparison invites a critical reflection on the ethical implications of commodifying cultural practices and histories, particularly in contexts marked by structural violence. It also emphasizes the need for tourism narratives that foster critical memory and avoid the romanticization or trivialization of complex social realities.

With more and more people showing engagement in these activities, narco-tourism has been normalized. To include any topic in the public debate, or any type of activity, it needs to be collectively recognized. This was the main reason to build a corpus for this research and to analyze the prototypical narratives shown by public opinion. This analysis was carried out using the Internet as the main area of exchange and debate in a society that seeks tourism experiences other than those oriented by heritage, or that link novel experiences from thanatourism and dark tourism. Thus, narcotourism is offered as an alternative that proliferates thanks to audiovisual fictions and the role of communities of users who portray their travel experience on digital platforms.

Although some institutions, e.g., UNWTO and the Government of Mexico, endeavor to fight against the attraction claimed by narco-tourism, based on the consequences of deep social issues such as drug consumption and millions of victims, it is part of reality. Narco-tourism is considered a space for entertainment and leisure, and as Van Broeck and López (2018) manifested, it is impossible to look at it as an illegal activity. It is part of the history of countries like Bolivia, Colombia, and Mexico, and it is not possible to hide it. However, it could be used to contribute to social change if it takes part in heritage tourism.

The persistence of narco-tourism, even in contexts where it is formally banned, underscores the urgent need to rethink how societies engage with violent pasts through tourism. Rather than suppressing these narratives, a more constructive path may lie in their transformation into spaces of critical memory. As Munawar and Plets (2025) suggest, heritage tourism in post-conflict settings can serve as a platform for respectful remembrance, provided it avoids the commodification or glorification of trauma. In this sense, tourism platforms and agencies must assume ethical responsibility by establishing content guidelines that balance freedom of expression with historical awareness. Recognizing the socio-political contexts in which narco-tourism emerges is not only a matter of accuracy, but of justice, especially for communities that continue to bear the scars of drug-related violence. Turning these narratives into tools for education and reflection, rather than spectacle, is a necessary step toward a more responsible and transformative tourism practice.

The findings of this study reveal a pressing need to rethink the governance, production, and consumption of narco-tourism, beyond simplistic binaries of legality and illegality. The persistence and normalization of these practices, particularly through digital platforms, demand a more nuanced regulatory approach: one that does not merely prohibit, but critically engages with the cultural, economic, and symbolic dimensions of this form of tourism. Local governments, tourism boards, and digital intermediaries must assume a proactive role, not only in shaping ethical frameworks that recognize the historical weight of narco-violence, but also in preventing its trivialization or commodification. This involves, among other things, the development of heritage-based narratives that foster critical memory; the implementation of content moderation policies that contextualize user-generated material; and the promotion of pedagogical tourism experiences that foreground the voices of victims and communities affected by drug-related conflict. In short, narco-tourism governance must move from reactive censorship to anticipatory cultural stewardship, one that is ethically grounded, historically informed, and socially accountable.

This research opens the door to a broader (and still largely undefined) research agenda on narco-tourism. While this study has focused on the discursive and symbolic dimensions of tourist narratives, future inquiries must delve deeper into the subjective experiences of visitors themselves. A qualitative, ethnographic approach, centered on in-depth interviews, affective mapping, and narrative inquiry, could illuminate the motivations, emotions, and moral negotiations that underpin the fascination with narco-related spaces. Such an approach would not only enrich our understanding of tourist subjectivities, but also challenge the assumption that all forms of engagement with narco-culture are inherently apologetic or voyeuristic. Moreover, comparative studies across different geopolitical contexts, especially those with post-conflict legacies, could help identify how narco-tourism intersects with broader processes of memory-making, cultural commodification, and digital mediation. In this sense, the field is still in its formative stage: the development of robust methodological instruments is not only desirable, but necessary, if we are to grasp the full complexity of this phenomenon.

Data availability statement

The raw data supporting the conclusions of this article will be made available by the authors, without undue reservation.

Author contributions

HG-S: Validation, Formal analysis, Methodology, Conceptualization, Writing – original draft, Supervision, Writing – review & editing, Software, Investigation. JW: Methodology, Conceptualization, Software, Validation, Investigation, Formal analysis, Writing – original draft, Writing – review & editing. AF: Writing – review & editing, Methodology, Conceptualization, Software.

Funding

The author(s) declare that no financial support was received for the research and/or publication of this article.

References

- Adriaensen, B. (2015). Turistas sin fronteras: representaciones literarias de viajeros en el territorio del narco. *Hispanic J.* 36, 139–159. Available online at: <https://repository.ubn.ru.nl/handle/2066/135034>
- Antezana, L. (2015). Televisión y memoria: a 40 años del golpe de estado en Chile. *ComHumanitas: Revista Científica de Comunicación* 6, 188–204. doi: 10.31207/rch.v6i1.76
- Balderas Reyes, J. (2017). *Tipos de Investigación*. México: UNADM.
- Bendaña, C. (2019). *The Call for Dialogue Creation and Narrative Mapping in the Context of Narco-tourism: Medellín, Colombia* (Master's Thesis). Radboud University
- Bideci, M. (2020). Is the “Dark” Still Dark? The Evolution of Dark Tourism and Pilgrimage Destinations,” in *Dark Tourism and Pilgrimage*, eds. D. Olsen and M. Korstanje (Wallingford: CABI), 16–25.
- Bingöl, S. (2021). From escape to seeking understanding drug tourists. *J. Tour. Cult. Change* 20, 583–599. doi: 10.1080/14766825.2021.1960853
- Caicedo, D. (2023). Narcos and the cocaine hippos: dark-eco tourism perspectives. *J. Tour. Heritage Res.* 6, 1–20. Available online at: <https://www.jthor.es/index.php/journal/article/view/505>
- Cárcamo, B. (2018). El análisis del discurso multimodal: una comparación de propuestas metodológicas. *Forma y Función* 31, 145–174. doi: 10.15446/fyf.v31n2.74660
- Civitas (n.d.). Visita guiada por el Museo de la Coca [Webpage]. *Civitas*. Available online at: <https://www.civitas.com/es/la-paz/visita-guiada-museo-coca/> (Accessed December 14, 2024).
- Delgadillo, A. (2017). Televisión y narcocultura. Cuando los narcos se ponen de moda. *Interpretos* 87–97.
- Edwards, P. (2000). *Mort Pour la France: Conflict and Commemoration in France After the First World War (Version 1)*. University of Sussex. Available online at: <https://hdl.handle.net/10779/uos.23312759.v1>
- Escobedo, C., and Suárez, U. (2019). Violencia, inseguridad y narcocultura en la construcción de las representaciones sociales locales, nacionales e internacionales en Mazatlán, Sinaloa y su impacto en la actividad turística en el puerto. *Hospitalidad ESDAI* 35, 33–57. Available online at: <https://scripta.up.edu.mx/entities/publication/d4c70e9e-5a73-4c22-ae15-120a3c9e7795>
- Evans, G. (2017). The Americans volunteering to watch executions. *BBC News*. Available online at: <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-us-canada-39535957> (Accessed December 18, 2024).
- Flores, S. (2007). Narcotours en Sinaloa: paseos, alcohol y narcocorridos. *Claves del turismo* 24–24
- Flores, S., and Sánchez, V. (2018). Turismo oscuro en Mazatlán, Sinaloa en las huellas del Chapo Guzmán. *Anais Bras* 8, 81–90. doi: 10.34019/2238-2925.2018.v8.3216
- Foley, M., and Lennon, J. (1996). JFK and dark tourism: a fascination with assassination. *Int. J. Heritage Stud.* 2, 198–211. doi: 10.1080/13527259608722175
- Fontan, A. (2013). Políticas públicas de revitalización urbana y fomento al ocio, turismo y entretenimiento: la creación de recintos urbano-turísticos en Manchester, Inglaterra. *Cuadernos de turismo* 32, 11–139. Available online at: <https://revistas.um.es/turismo/article/view/177441>
- Garrod, B., and Fyall, A. (2000). Managing heritage tourism. *Ann. Tour. Res.* 27, 682–708. doi: 10.1016/S0160-7383(99)00094-8
- Giraldo, C., Van, A., and Posada, L. (2014). El pasado polémico de los años ochenta como atractivo turístico en Medellín, Colombia. *Anuario Turismo y Sociedad* 15, 101–114. doi: 10.18601/01207555.n15.06
- González-Díaz, R., Becerra-Pérez, L., and Acevedo-Duque, A. (2020). Narco-marketing como estrategia para el desarrollo turístico local. *Risti E36*, 71–85. Available online at: <https://dialnet.unirioja.es/servlet/articulo?codigo=8550431>
- Grisaffi, T. (2022). *Coca yes, cocaine no: How Bolivia's coca growers reshaped democracy*. Durham: Duke University Press.
- Hartmann, R., Lennon, J., Reynolds, D., Rice, A., and Rosenbaum, A. Y. Stone, P. (2018). The history of dark tourism. *J. Tour. History* 10, 269–295. doi: 10.1080/1755182X.2018.1545394
- Heitmann, S. (2011). “Tourist behaviour and tourist motivation,” in *Research themes for tourism* eds. P. Robinson, S. Heitmann and P. Dieke (Wallingford: Cabi), pp. 31–44.
- Hunt, C. (2021). Narcotourism: a conceptual framework and research agenda. *Tour. Geograph.* doi: 10.1080/14616688.2021.1953124
- Hütt, H. (2011). Las redes sociales: una nueva herramienta de difusión. *Revista Reflexiones* 91, 121–128. doi: 10.15517/RR.V9I12.1513
- Infobae (2016). “Narco tours,” el nuevo boom turístico tras la captura de ‘El Chapo’. *El Comercio*. Available online at: <https://www.elcomercio.com/tendencias/turismo-narcotrafico-mexico-elchapo-turistas.html> (Accessed December 18, 2024).
- Karam, T. (2019). Narcotráfico y narrativas audiovisuales. Preguntas desde los derechos humanos. *Altre Modernità: Rivista di studi letterari e culturali* 265 – 279. doi: 10.13130/2035-7680/12291
- Khaydarova, L., and Isheryakova, J. (2022). Dark tourism: understanding the concept and the demand of new experiences. *Asia Pacific J. Market. Manag. Rev.* 11, 59–63. Available online at: <https://www.gejournal.net/index.php/APJMMR/article/view/200>
- Korstanje, M., and Ivanov, S. (2012). Tourism as a form of new psychological resilience: the inception of dark tourism. *Revista de Cultura e Turismo* 46, 56–71. doi: 10.2139/ssrn.2168400
- Light, D. (2017). Progress in dark tourism and thanatourism research: an uneasy relationship with heritage tourism. *Tour. Manage.* 61, 275–301. doi: 10.1016/j.tourman.2017.01.011

Conflict of interest

The authors declare that the research was conducted in the absence of any commercial or financial relationships that could be construed as a potential conflict of interest.

Generative AI statement

The author(s) declare that no Gen AI was used in the creation of this manuscript.

Publisher's note

All claims expressed in this article are solely those of the authors and do not necessarily represent those of their affiliated organizations, or those of the publisher, the editors and the reviewers. Any product that may be evaluated in this article, or claim that may be made by its manufacturer, is not guaranteed or endorsed by the publisher.

- Malamud-Goti, J. (2021). "Reinforcing poverty: the Bolivian war on cocaine," in *War on Drugs* (Routledge), 67–92. doi: 10.4324/9780429268557-6
- Martini, A., and Buda, D. (2018). Dark tourism and affect framing places of death and disaster. *Curr. Issues Tour.* 23, 1–14. doi: 10.1080/13683500.2018.1518972
- Medrano, I. (2020). Narcotours en Culiacán; hay una parada donde mataron a un hijo de El Chapo. *El Sol de México*. Available online at: <https://www.elsoldemexico.com.mx/república/sociedad/narcotours-en-culiacan-hay-una-parada-donde-mataron-a-un-hijo-de-el-chapo-5803650.html> (Accessed December 16, 2024).
- Mionel, V. (2019). Dark tourism and thanatourism: distinct tourism typologies or simple analytical tools? *Tourism* 67, 423–437. Available online at: <https://hrcak.srce.hr/en/230640>
- Mochón, F. (2008). *Economía y Turismo (2nd Ed.)*. New York: McGraw Hill.
- Morillo, M. (2011). Turismo y producto turístico. Evolución, conceptos, componentes y clasificación. *Visión Gerencia* 135–158. Available online at: <http://www.redalyc.org/articulo.oa?id=465545890011>
- Moya, D., and Majó, J. (2017). Análisis de comentarios en redes sociales para mejorar la reputación online hotelera. *Turismo y Sociedad* 20, 169–190. doi: 10.18601/01207555.n20.09
- Munawar, N. A., and Plets, G. (Eds.). (2025). *The Politics of Post-Conflict Heritage Reconstruction: Historical and Contemporary Perspectives*. Palgrave: Macmillan. doi: 10.1007/978-3-031-81093-0
- Naef, P. (2017). "Narco-heritage" and the touristification of the drug lord pablo escobar in Medellín, Colombia. *J. Anthropol. Res.* 74, 485–502. doi: 10.1086/699941
- Naef, P., and Guillard, M. (2019). Los retos del turismo en la construcción de la paz en Colombia. *Tour. Rev.* 15. doi: 10.4000/viatourism.3643
- Navarrete, M. (2020). La fascinación del turismo negro. Nuevo nicho de mercado en México. *J. Tour. Heritage Res.* 3, 184–95. Available online at: <https://www.jthr.es/index.php/journal/article/view/135>
- Pardo, N. (2008). El discurso multimodal en YouTube. *Revista Latinoamericana de estudios del discurso* 8, 77–107. doi: 10.35956/v.8.n1.2008.p.77-107
- Patteson, J. (2021). *Drugs, Violence and Latin America: Global Psychotropy and Culture*. Palgrave: Macmillan. doi: 10.1007/978-3-030-68924-7
- Penglase, B. (2010). The owner of the hill: masculinity and drug-trafficking in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil: the owner of the hill. *J. Lat. Am. Caribb. Anthropol.* 15, 317–337. doi: 10.1111/j.1935-4940.2010.01088.x
- Pérez, J., Valerio, G., and Rodríguez, L. (2015). Análisis de redes sociales para el estudio de la producción intelectual en grupos de investigación. *Perfiles Educativos* 37, 124–142. doi: 10.22201/issue.24486167e.2015.150.53168
- Raynolds, J. (2000). Bolivia wages war on the coca leaf. *BBC News*. Available online at: <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/americas/778100.stm> (Accessed December 16, 2024).
- Rocco, L. (2010). Características metodológicas de la investigación social en internet. *Revista Electrónica Gestión de las Personas y Tecnología* 3, 68–75. Available online at: <https://www.redalyc.org/articulo.oa?id=477847122007>
- Rojek, C. (1993). *Ways of Escape: Modern Transformations in Leisure and Travel [PDF]*. Palgrave Macmillan. doi: 10.1057/9780230373402
- Sánchez, C. (2020). Terminología del turismo y variación conceptual: análisis del nuevo léxico para modalidades turísticas por motivación. *Études Romanes de Brno* 41, 271–293. doi: 10.5817/ERB2020-2-16
- Santamaría, G., and Flores, S. (2015). La detención del Chapo Guzmán y el nuevo santuario de los narcotours en Mazatlán, Sinaloa. *Revista Topofilia Segunda Época* 5, 361–378. Available online at: https://www.researchgate.net/publication/315643464_La_detencion_del_Chapo_Guzman_y_el_nuevo_santuario_de_los_narcotours_en_Mazatlan_Sinaloa
- Scott, D., and Duncan, T. (2015). "Symbolic interactionism, tourism," in *Encyclopedia of Tourism*, eds. J. Jafari and H. Xiao (New York: Springer). doi: 10.1007/978-3-319-01669-6_629-1
- Seaton, A. (1996). Guided by the dark: from thanatopsis to thanatourism. *Int. J. Heritage Stud.* 2, 234–244. doi: 10.1080/13527259608722178
- Seaton, A. (2009). "Thanatourism and its Discontents: An Appraisal of a Decade's Work with Some Future Issues and Directions," in *The Sage Handbook of Tourism Studies*, eds. T. Jamal and M. Robinson (Washington, DC: Sage) pp.521–542. doi: 10.4135/9780857021076.n29
- Speakman, M. (2025). Beyond day of the dead: dark tourism and historical narratives in Mexico. *Int. J. Multidiscipl. Innov. Res.* 2, 61–72. doi: 10.58806/ijmir.2025.v2i2n01
- Stone, P. (2006). A dark tourism spectrum: towards a typology of death and macabre related tourist sites, attractions, and exhibitions. *Tourism* 54, 145–160.
- Stone, P. (2025). "Dark Tourism," in *Encyclopedia of Tourism*, eds. J. Jafari and H. Xiao (New York: Springer). doi: 10.1007/978-3-030-74923-1_46
- Stone, P., and Grebenar, A. (2022). "Making Tragic Places": dark tourism, kitsch and the commodification of atrocity. *J. Tour. Cult. Change* 20, 457–474. doi: 10.1080/14766825.2021.1960852
- The Global Statistics (2025). YouTube global users statistics 2025. Available online at: <https://www.theglobalstatistics.com/youtube-global-users-statistics/> (Accessed June 6, 2025).
- Thurnell-Read, T. (2011). 'Common-sense' research: senses, emotions and embodiment in researching stag tourism in Eastern Europe. *Method. Innov. Online* 6, 39–49. doi: 10.4256/mio.2011.005
- Tripadvisor (n.d.). Museum Pablo Escobar [Webpage]. *Tripadvisor*. Available online at: https://www.tripadvisor.com/Attraction_Review-g297478-d12144209-Reviews-Museum_Pablo_Escobar-Medellin_Antioquia_Department.html (Accessed December 16, 2024).
- United Nations [UN] (2020). Policy Brief: on COVID-19 and Transforming Tourism. Available online at: https://unsdg.un.org/sites/default/files/2020-08/sg_policy_brief_covid-19_tourism_august_2020.pdf (Accessed December 20, 2024).
- Van Broeck, A., and López, A. (2018). Turismo oscuro: de la conmemoración a la comodificación de la muerte, los desastres y lo macabro. *Teoría y Praxis* 23–68.
- Van Dijk, T. (2006). Discurso y manipulación: Discusión teórica y algunas aplicaciones. *Revista Signos* 39, 49–74. doi: 10.4067/S0718-09342006000100003
- Van, A. (2018). "Pablo Escobar tourism – Unwanted Tourism: Attitudes of Tourism Stakeholders in Medellín, Colombia," in *The Palgrave MacMillan Handbook of Dark Tourism Studies* eds. P. R. Stone, T. Seaton, R. Sharpley and L. White. (New York: MacMillan), 291–318.
- Viator (n.d.). Pablo Escobar Tour in Medellín [Webpage]. *Viator*. Available online at: <https://www.viator.com/tours/Medellin/Pablo-Escobar-Historical-Tour-of-Medellin/d4563-5549ESCOBAR> (Accessed November 27, 2024).
- Villatoro, C. (2012). Aspectos socioculturales e imágenes del narcotráfico. *Imagonautas* 3, 56–75. Available online at: <https://dialnet.unirioja.es/servlet/articulo?codigo=4781802>
- Wellman, B. (2004). The three ages of internet studies: ten, five and zero years ago. *New Media Soc.* 6, 123–129. doi: 10.1177/1461444804040633
- World Tourism Organization [UNWTO] (2019). UNWTO – Tourism Definitions. Available online at: <https://www.e-unwto.org/doi/pdf/10.18111/9789284420858> (Accessed December 10, 2024).
- World Tourism Organization [UNWTO] (2020). International tourism growth continues to outpace the global economy. Available online at: <https://www.unwto.org/international-tourism-growth-continues-to-outpace-the-economy> (Accessed December 10, 2024).
- Wright, D. W. M. (2018). Terror park: A future theme park in 2100. *Futures* 96, 1–22. doi: 10.1016/j.futures.2017.11.002
- Yanes, M., and Valdés, S. (2019). Narco-Culture as a distortion of gender stereotypes: An aggravating factor in the situation of violence and conflict in society. *ADGNOSIS* 8, 49–58. doi: 10.21803/adgnosis.v8i8.363
- Zakaras, A. (2018). *Complicity and Coercion: Toward an Ethics of Political Participation*. In *Oxford Studies in Political Philosophy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press), 192–218.