

Food tourism, corporate social responsibility and environmental management: a systematic review on contributions to the sustainable development goals

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Abstract

Food tourism is a growing niche within the travel industry that merges gastronomy, culture, and destination branding. Its potential to contribute to environmental sustainability and social development has gained increased scholarly interest, especially in relation to the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). This article presents a systematic review of 139 peer-reviewed publications (2020–2024) indexed in the Web of Science, aiming to evaluate how food tourism and corporate communication strategies—particularly public relations—intersect with sustainability objectives. The study applies bibliometric methods and the PRISMA framework to identify dominant trends, geographical hotspots, key stakeholders, and the most frequently addressed SDGs in this field. Findings reveal that most research focuses on SDG 9 (Industry, Innovation, and Infrastructure), with limited holistic coverage of all 17 goals. Furthermore, companies within the tourism and food sectors are emerging as key corporate actors implementing environmental management practices such as renewable energy use, food waste reduction, and sustainable sourcing. Public relations play a critical role in shaping stakeholder perceptions, enhancing corporate social responsibility (CSR) efforts, and legitimizing sustainability strategies. This review highlights the need for stronger integration of communication, governance, and sustainability frameworks to achieve long-term environmental and social goals in tourism. Future research should explore applied assessments of SDG implementation across tourism-related business ecosystems.

Keywords: food tourism, sustainable development goals, corporate social responsibility, environmental management, systematic review

1. Introduction

Tourism has increasingly been recognized as a vehicle for sustainable and resilient development. The forthcoming International Year of Sustainable and Resilient Tourism in 2027 highlights the sector's potential to drive inclusive growth and opportunity, while underscoring the need to ensure that tourism's expansion remains environmentally and socially sustainable (UNWTO, 2024). Within this broader context, sustainable tourism is defined as optimizing the use of environmental resources, maintaining essential ecological processes, conserving natural and cultural heritage, and ensuring long-term socio-economic benefits that are equitably distributed among stakeholders (UNWTO, n.d.). These principles have become a central focus in both policy agendas and academic research (Antolini et al., 2024; Moreira dos Santos et al., 2024).

Among tourism's various segments, food tourism has emerged as one of the fastest-growing niches. It connects gastronomy, culture, and local identity, becoming a significant driver of economic activity and job creation while also raising complex questions about sustainability and corporate responsibility (BBVA, 2022; Yeoman & McMahon-Beatte, 2016). As travelers increasingly seek authentic culinary experiences, local products, and cultural immersion, food tourism represents more than a leisure activity: it is a vehicle for cultural exchange, regional development, and destination branding (Andersson, Mossberg & Therkelsen, 2017). However, the environmental pressures associated with agriculture, food production, and hospitality

— including water consumption, greenhouse gas emissions, and waste generation—highlight the urgent need for more sustainable practices and governance frameworks (Fraser et al., 2023; Alonso-Muñoz et al., 2022).

Corporate social responsibility (CSR) and environmental management have thus become crucial in shaping the practices of tourism and food enterprises. Recent studies show that the adoption of environmental, social and governance (ESG) strategies in the hospitality and tourism industry is positively associated with improved sustainable performance and reduced corporate risk (Martínez-Falcó et al., 2025; García, Herrero & Morillas-Jurado, 2024). Yet, within much of the tourism sector, especially hospitality, the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) — and particularly environmental sustainability—remain peripheral in CSR initiatives (Moyeen & Mehjabeen, 2024). At the same time, the expectations of travelers and other stakeholders around sustainability are rising, creating both a reputational challenge and an opportunity for companies to differentiate themselves.

Public relations (PR) strategies play a pivotal role in this transformation. PR connects businesses with their audiences and shapes the narratives that frame sustainability initiatives in a digital and multidirectional communication environment (Palau-Sampio & López-García, 2022; Kretschmer & Winkler, 2024). When effectively deployed, PR enhances transparency, educates stakeholders, and legitimizes corporate actions on sustainability, reinforcing the brand's long-term reputation and its contribution to environmental awareness (Marino, 2023; SYNC, 2023). This makes PR an essential component of the governance and communication frameworks needed to advance the SDGs in tourism.

Despite the growing recognition of public relations as a strategic governance and legitimacy mechanism in sustainability transitions, its empirical integration into food tourism research remains limited. This review therefore not only maps sustainability-related practices, but also critically examines the visibility — and absence — of PR and communication within SDG-oriented food tourism scholarship. Few studies have comprehensively analyzed how food tourism is positioned within sustainability frameworks and how its corporate communication strategies intersect with the SDGs. Existing research is fragmented, with a technical emphasis on specific sustainability practices but little holistic assessment of the social good and stakeholder engagement perspectives (Wu et al., 2018; Dube & Nhamo, 2021). In order to provide a wider perspective on the relationship between the food business associated with tourism and the 17 SDGs, it is essential to systematically analyze the sector's impact on each of them and identify linkages between benefits and drawbacks.

This study addresses this gap by presenting a systematic review and bibliometric analysis of academic research on food tourism, sustainability, and public relations between 2020 and 2024. Specifically, it seeks to: (1) detect whether there is an emerging line of research on sustainability and food tourism and its magnitude; (2) identify where the growth of interest in food tourism and sustainability is occurring geographically and thematically; and (3) determine which SDGs are most frequently addressed in food tourism research, with particular attention to the role attributed to communication and public relations in sustainability-oriented strategies. By synthesizing this body of literature, the paper aims to contribute a strategic framework for integrating sustainability communication, stakeholder engagement, and CSR practices within food tourism enterprises.

2. Theoretical framework

Corporate social responsibility (CSR) has become a strategic imperative for tourism and food-related businesses responding to growing sustainability challenges. In these sectors, CSR is no longer viewed merely as reputational or philanthropic but rather as a governance framework guiding environmental stewardship, social equity, and ethical conduct (Sheykhan et al., 2024; Moyeen & Mehjabeen, 2024). Companies have increasingly adopted sustainability practices aligned with global goals, including the reduction of food waste (Biber-Freudenberger et al., 2020), local sourcing (Andersson, Mossberg & Therkelsen, 2017), and green marketing strategies aimed at reinforcing brand legitimacy (Sahin et al., 2017).

Despite this evolution, engagement with the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) remains fragmented across the tourism literature. Much of the focus has been placed on technical or environmental dimensions—especially SDGs such as Industry, Innovation and Infrastructure (SDG 9), Responsible Consumption (SDG 12), and Climate Action (SDG 13)—but little attention has been paid to how CSR is communicated or integrated across multiple goals (Wu et al., 2018; Dube & Nhamo, 2021). Moreover, critiques persist around the tendency of some tourism CSR efforts to remain superficial, failing to embed systemic change or include holistic stakeholder engagement (Moyeen & Mehjabeen, 2024; Cavano, 2020).

In this regard, public relations (PR) has emerged as a vital tool in sustainability governance. PR helps organizations translate internal efforts into externally visible commitments, enhance transparency, and promote behavioral change among consumers and other stakeholders (Palau-Sampio & López-García, 2022; Marino, 2023). In the case of campaigns such as “The Scarecrow” by Chipotle, PR became a vehicle for raising awareness about food sustainability through emotionally compelling narratives (Swensen et al., 2016). Similarly, PR plays an increasing role in digital reputation management, helping tourism firms navigate negative reviews related to food and service quality (Sahin et al., 2017), while contributing to broader ESG positioning (Martínez-Falcó et al., 2025).

Food tourism, situated at the intersection of gastronomy, cultural heritage, and environmental resource use, offers a relevant setting for the integration of CSR and PR. As a sector, it fosters economic development and destination branding (Yeoman & McMahon-Beatte, 2016; BBVA, 2022), but it also raises sustainability concerns linked to agricultural pressure, food waste, and over-consumption (Fraser et al., 2023; Shi et al., 2022). Scholars have pointed to the potential of circular food systems and bioeconomy strategies to mitigate these impacts and promote responsible production (Alonso-Muñoz et al., 2022; Rinn et al., 2023).

At the same time, food tourism is deeply embedded in consumer culture, which complicates efforts to drive behavioral change. Visitors are key stakeholders, yet their environmental awareness and sense of responsibility often remain limited (Paskova & Zelenka, 2019). This highlights the importance of effective sustainability communication that can engage consumers emotionally and cognitively, fostering more responsible food-related travel behaviors (Colistra & Passalacqua, 2019; Kretschmer & Winkler, 2024).

Taken together, the literature suggests a growing but still insufficient integration of CSR, PR, and environmental governance in food tourism. While there is increasing attention to ESG metrics and sustainability performance in hospitality (García et al., 2024), systematic reviews of how these strategies intersect—especially in terms of communication, legitimacy, and stakeholder engagement—remain scarce. This study aims to address that gap by synthesizing recent scholarship and mapping out the connections between food tourism, sustainability practices, corporate communication, and the SDGs.

3. Methodology

To map the academic landscape of food tourism in relation to sustainability, public relations, and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), this study applies a systematic review methodology based on the PRISMA framework. The review combines qualitative synthesis with bibliometric analysis to provide an overview of key research trends, influential contributors, and thematic priorities.

The Web of Science (WoS) Core Collection database was selected as the primary source of academic literature due to its coverage of high-impact journals and multidisciplinary indexing. The search strategy included combinations of keywords such as “food tourism,” “sustainability,” “public relations,” “CSR,” and “SDGs,” applied to the title, abstract, and keyword fields. To ensure relevance, the query was limited to peer-reviewed articles and reviews published in English between January 2020 and March 2024. While the Web of Science (WoS) Core Collection was selected due to its rigorous indexing standards, high-quality peer-reviewed coverage, and compatibility with bibliometric tools such as VOSviewer, this choice also ensures consistency in citation and metadata analysis. However, this decision may exclude relevant contributions indexed in Scopus, Google Scholar, or practitioner-oriented outlets, particularly in regional or applied tourism research. Therefore, results should be interpreted as representative of high-impact academic production rather than the entirety of global scholarship.

After initial retrieval, duplicate entries were removed. Records were screened based on title and abstract content to exclude publications unrelated to the thematic scope. The final sample consisted of 139 documents meeting the inclusion criteria (1) explicit reference to food tourism or gastronomic tourism; (2) a focus on sustainability or CSR-related practices; and (3) relevance to communication, public engagement, or stakeholder interaction. Studies focused purely on food science, nutrition, or unrelated tourism segments were excluded.

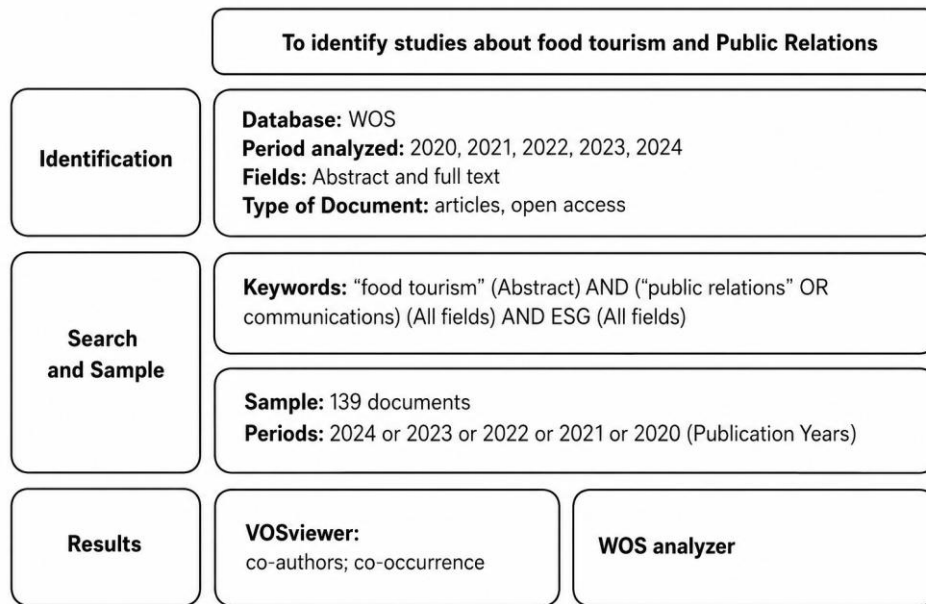
For the bibliometric component, the dataset was exported in plain text format compatible with VOSviewer software. Co-occurrence analyses were performed on keywords, authors, and countries to visualize the intellectual structure and geographic distribution of research activity. Thematic clusters were identified based on keyword proximity, while citation mapping highlighted the most influential works and journals.

This mixed-method approach allows for both depth and breadth in analyzing how food tourism research engages with sustainability discourses and corporate practices. It also enables the identification of research gaps and emerging areas of inquiry relevant to CSR, environmental management, and communication strategies within the tourism and food sectors.

The article selection process followed the PRISMA methodological framework, as shown in Figure 1. From an initial set of 367 documents retrieved from the Web of Science database, duplicate and irrelevant studies were removed through a multi-stage selection process (identification, screening, and eligibility). Only articles containing at least one of the defined keywords and explicitly addressing one or more Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) were included in this review. As a result of this process, a final sample of 139 peer-reviewed articles met all the established inclusion criteria.

Although this review identifies communication-related keywords, a more granular sub-analysis focusing exclusively on PR-oriented studies could further refine understanding of communicative strategies in food tourism sustainability. This represents a promising avenue for future research.

Figure 1: PRISMA flow diagram illustrating the selection process of the reviewed literature.



Source: Own elaboration

Building on this literature, it is possible to synthesize the dual role of tourism and food-related businesses in contributing to or hindering progress towards the SDGs. While the sector offers opportunities for innovation, employment, and cultural preservation, it also generates risks linked to inequality, resource depletion, and environmental degradation. Table 1 summarizes these potential positive and negative impacts, providing a conceptual foundation for the subsequent empirical analysis. The table presents a conceptual synthesis, listing the authors who address the SDGs in their work related to the study topic. It also provides the key studies and authors used to inform the interpretation of the bibliometric findings.

Table 1: Conceptual synthesis of relevant authors and studies on the SDGs in the field of study.

SDG	Systematic review	Impacts of achieving the SDG	Impacts of not achieving the SDG
1. Poverty	Scheyvens & Hughes (2019)	Inclusion of small producers Encourage the reduction of food waste	Unequal access to healthful foods Environmental Impact
2. Zero Hunger	Biber-Freudenberger et al. (2020) Scheyvens & Laeis (2021) Khan et al. (2020)	Tourism can help to promote local food Create revenue and jobs for rural households Maintain genetic variety among seeds, cultivated plants, and animals Increase rural infrastructure	Energy poverty Environmentally unsustainable food production
3. Good health and well-being	Bertella (2020) Tahiri et al. (2022)	Encourage equal access to healthful, nutritious foods Reduce pollution-related fatalities and illnesses Provide food experiences to encourage healthy and ethical eating habits	Pesticide and chemical residues pose risks to food safety Use ultra-processed foods with chemicals and preservatives

SDG	Systematic review	Impacts of achieving the SDG	Impacts of not achieving the SDG
4. Quality Education	Berry (2019)	Identify harmful foods Identify local production Increase availability to healthful foods in restaurants and public areas	Healthy foods are expensive (at the grocery or in restaurants)
5. Gender Equality	Moreno Alarcón & Cole (2019)	Encourage equitable employment and decision-making in the sector	Discrimination in access to high-paying jobs
6. Clean water and sanitation	Li (2018) Berry (2019) Martínez-Arce et al. (2018) Ricart et al. (2021)	Implementation of recirculation and reuse of water in production processes, as well as adoption of irrigation systems Prioritise investments to reduce the direct and indirect impacts from water uses within the production of goods and services Water exchange occurs between agricultural and urban-tourist water demands, as well as wastewater reuse	The availability of water for human consumption, agricultural irrigation, and aquatic environment conservation Waste throughout the supply chain Reducing high-calorie diets in tourist offerings
7. Affordable and clean energy	Khan et al. (2020)	Tourism can promote the use of renewable and low-carbon energy sources throughout the food chain	High energy usage can lead to the depletion of energy resources Reliance on non-renewable energy sources may be susceptible to price volatility The use of outmoded equipment is a waste of energy
8. Decent work and economic growth	Khan et al. (2020)	Create local jobs in rural villages and tourist-friendly places Promoting local foods creates job chances for small producers	"Fashionable" places can increase the cost of living for the residents
9. Industry, innovation and infrastructure	Khan et al. (2020)	Encourage research and innovation within the food business	Artisanal procedures for preparing and producing raw materials are disappearing
10. Reduced inequalities	Rubio-Mozos et al. (2020)	Promote egalitarian food systems	Places where the cost of living increases
11. Sustainable cities and communities	Marini Govigli et al. (2022)	Restore cultural heritage through tourism efforts that promote farming practices	Overexploitation based on cultural and/or food heritage
12. Responsible consumption and production	Dolnicar (2023); Alonso-Muñoz et al. (2022), De Visser-Amundso (2022); Scheyvens, & Cheer (2022). Chawla et al. (2022)	Encourage the use of bioplastics, biogas, and other materials in production Efficient use of natural resources and safeguarding cultural heritage	Encourage responsible consumption in touristy locations

SDG	Systematic review	Impacts of achieving the SDG	Impacts of not achieving the SDG
13. Climate action	Bertella (2020); Tahiri et al. (2022)	To integrate approaches to food tourism that include innovative, "green" food manufacturing	Not very inclusive procedures that do not consider local and seasonal commerce
14. Life below water	Scheyvens & Cheer (2022).	Awareness regarding the preservation of marine and terrestrial life Increase in local fish output	Overuse of beaches and land
15. Life on land	Delgado et al. (2023)	Income generation for the conservation of these ecosystems	Overexploitation of ecosystems
16. Peace, justice and strong institutions	Higgins-Desbiolles et al. (2022)	Diplomatic excursions bring meals closer to the nation's culture	Inequality in access to resources can lead to peace conflicts
17. Partnerships for the goals	De Visser-Amundson (2020) Khan et al. (2020)	Collaboration and cooperation among various parties, including local producers and tourism authorities Promoting relationships with hotels and food chains	Unequal partnership leads to overexploitation

Source: Authors' own elaboration

3.1. Bibliometric Analysis

To complement the systematic review, a bibliometric analysis was conducted to map the intellectual structure and research dynamics of food tourism, sustainability, and corporate responsibility. This method allows the identification of thematic clusters, influential authors, and collaboration networks, offering a quantitative overview of the field in addition to the qualitative synthesis provided by the review.

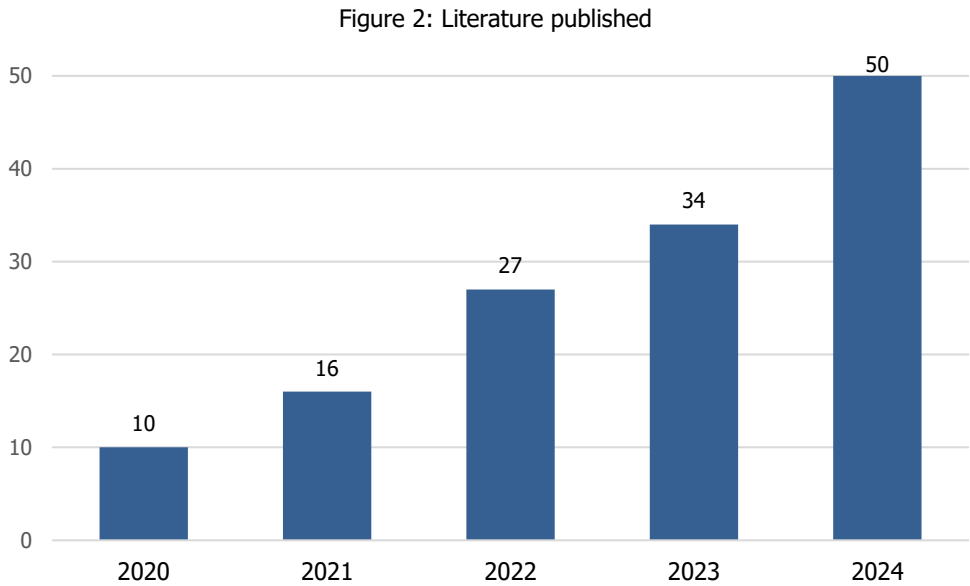
The metadata from the 139 selected articles were exported from the Web of Science Core Collection in plain text format and analyzed with VOSviewer. This software was chosen because of its capacity to generate visualizations of co-authorship networks, keyword co-occurrence, and citation mapping, which are widely used in bibliometric research across the social and environmental sciences.

For the keyword analysis, a minimum occurrence threshold was established to ensure that only the most relevant terms were included in the maps. Terms with fewer than five co-occurrences were excluded. Similarly, for co-authorship and citation networks, thresholds were applied to highlight authors, institutions, and countries with significant contributions to the field. These parameters were defined to balance comprehensiveness with interpretability, avoiding excessive fragmentation of clusters.

The bibliometric analysis produced three main types of networks:

- **Keyword co-occurrence maps** are used to detect thematic clusters and emerging topics.
- **Co-authorship and country collaboration maps**, which identify leading contributors and international research hubs.
- **Citation and co-citation networks**, which highlight the most influential works and journals shaping the field.

Together, these bibliometric outputs provide the basis for the descriptive and interpretive results presented in the next section. In particular, they reveal how research on food tourism connects with sustainability discourses, environmental management, and corporate responsibility, while also showing the degree of fragmentation and interdisciplinary integration in the literature. Figure 2 illustrates the number of publications per year.



Source: Web of Science (2024)

4. Results

The systematic review identified 139 peer-reviewed publications addressing food tourism, sustainability, and corporate responsibility between 2020 and 2024. The following results are structured according to the three research questions.

Regarding RQ1 (growth and thematic evolution of the field), the number of publications has increased significantly since 2020, with a marked rise in 2022 and 2023, confirming growing academic interest in the topic. The bibliometric mapping revealed four main clusters: (1) food tourism and destination branding; (2) sustainability and the SDGs; (3) public relations and stakeholder communication; and (4) governance and CSR frameworks. These clusters suggest that while food tourism is firmly linked to cultural identity and destination image, there is an emerging strand of research addressing corporate sustainability practices and environmental management (Figure 2).

In relation with RQ2 (influential authors, countries, and journal, in terms of geographical distribution), China (23%), the United States (14.3%), and Spain (12.9%) were the most productive countries, followed by Australia and Portugal (Table 2). The collaboration networks also show regional clusters, with Spain and Portugal forming one of the strongest hubs in Europe. English is the predominant language of publication (98.6%) (Table 3).

Table 2: Publications by country

Countries/Regions	Record Count	% of 139
China	32	23.022%
USA	20	14.388%
Spain	18	12.950%
England	12	8.633%
Canada	11	7.914%
Italy	11	7.914%
Australia	10	7.194%

Source: Web of Science, 2024

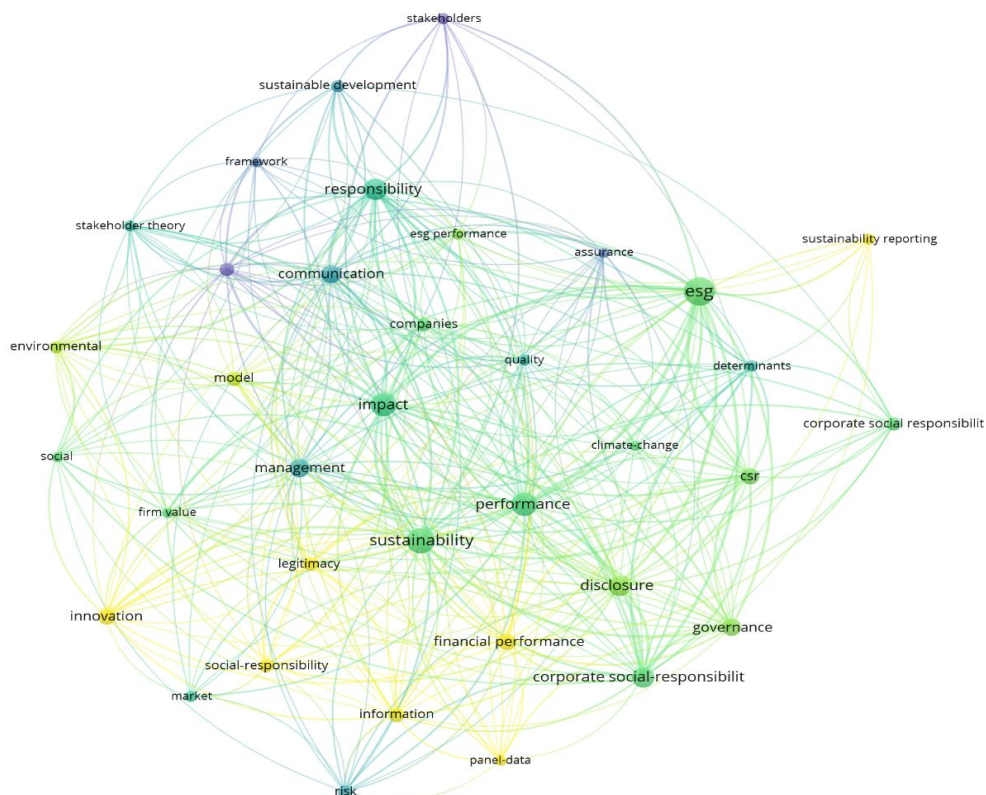
Table 3: Publication language

Languages	Record Count	% of 139
English	137	98.561%
Spanish	2	1.439 %

Source: Web of Science, 2024

With respect to research domains, the leading areas are environmental sciences and environmental studies, followed by hospitality and tourism (Figure 3). The most cited authors include García et al. (2024), whose work connects sustainability performance with governance frameworks in the tourism and food sectors. The most active outlets are tourism and sustainability journals, although few publications appear in explicitly CSR-oriented journals, suggesting a disciplinary gap.

Figure 3: Works with the most citations in the last five years across all fields of expertise.



Source: Authors' own elaboration

These results confirm the central role of authors such as García et al (2024), Alonso-Muñoz et al, 2020 and Andersson et al. (2017) in linking sustainability performance with food tourism and environmental governance.

With respect to RQ3 (contribution to the Sustainable Development Goals [SDGs]), the analysis of SDG coverage (Table 4) shows that SDG 9 (Industry, Innovation and Infrastructure) is the most frequently addressed (61.8% of the sample), followed by SDG 13 (Climate Action, 9.3%), SDG 11 (Sustainable Cities and Communities), SDG 3 (Good Health and Well-Being), and SDG 12 (Responsible Consumption and Production). By contrast, SDG 5 (Gender Equality) and SDG 10 (Reduced Inequalities) appear only marginally. This suggests that while research has emphasized technological innovation and environmental action, social justice dimensions remain underexplored.

Figure 4: Publications by areas of knowledge



Source: Web of Science (2024)

Table 4: Sustainable development objectives are included in articles about food tourism and PR written in the last five years in all fields of expertise¹

Sustainable Development Goals	Record Count	% of 139
01 No Poverty	1	0.719
02 Zero Hunger	6	4.317
03 Good Health And Well Being	11	7.914
04 Quality Education	3	2.158
05 Gender Equality	1	0.719
06 Clean Water And Sanitation	4	2.878
07 Affordable And Clean Energy	5	3.597
08 Decent Work And Economic Growth	2	1.439
09 Industry Innovation And Infrastructure	86	61.871
10 Reduced Inequality	1	0.719
11 Sustainable Cities And Communities	11	7.914
12 Responsible Consumption And Production	7	5.036
13 Climate Action	13	9.353
14 Life Below Water	8	5.755
15 Life On Land	10	7.194

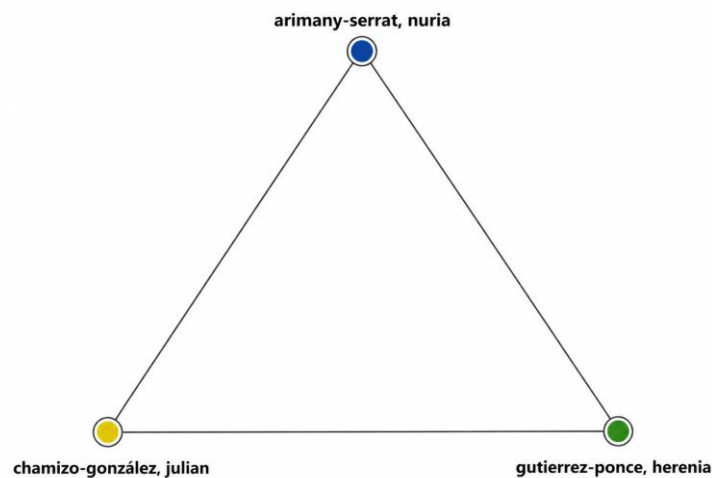
Source: Web of Science (2024)

Beyond frequency counts, the analysis highlights the dual role of the tourism and food sectors in achieving the SDGs. Positive contributions include innovation, cultural preservation, and the promotion of sustainable consumption, while negative externalities relate to overconsumption, inequalities, and environmental pressures. These findings align with the conceptual synthesis presented earlier in Table 1.

Finally, the communicative dimension of sustainability remains underdeveloped. Although terms such as “awareness,” “engagement,” and “stakeholders” frequently appear in abstracts, only 16% of the reviewed articles explicitly analyze public relations, corporate communication, or marketing strategies in relation to food tourism. This confirms that communication is acknowledged as important but is not yet systematically integrated into sustainability research in this field. Overall, the results show an emerging but fragmented body of knowledge. Research on food tourism and sustainability is expanding rapidly but remains limited in its integration with CSR, environmental management, and communication practices.

¹ No significant studies were found addressing SDG 16 and SDG 17.

Figure 5: Authors who have published on food tourism in the last five years in any field of study



Source: Authors' own elaboration

5. Discussion

This systematic review confirms that the food industry within tourism has the potential to act both as a driver and as a constraint in the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). As previous studies emphasize (Leyva & Parra, 2021; Tarashkar et al., 2024; Sheykhan et al., 2024), food-related businesses can contribute to sustainable transitions when adopting models inspired by the bioeconomy, reducing resource dependency, and embedding sustainability into value creation. Territories that adopt these approaches are more likely to strengthen resilience and unlock new development opportunities. In this context, public relations (PR) emerges as a strategic tool to raise awareness, foster stakeholder engagement, and reinforce the legitimacy of sustainability-orientated initiatives.

The results of this review also demonstrate that the agri-food sector linked to tourism plays a largely positive role in advancing the 2030 Agenda, yet gaps remain in terms of scope and integration. Echoing Romero Martín et al. (2023), this study extends prior knowledge by combining theoretical and empirical insights to clarify the obstacles and opportunities of embedding sustainability in food tourism. The role of tourism and food enterprises as corporate agents of sustainability is particularly significant: by influencing extensive supply chains, these firms are in a position to implement ESG-aligned practices such as local procurement, circular food systems, reduction of single-use plastics, and investment in green infrastructure. Recent evidence confirms that hospitality and tourism firms adopting robust ESG strategies experience reduced corporate risk and greater financial resilience, in addition to reputational benefits (García et al., 2024; Martínez-Falcó et al., 2025).

To further explore the role of communication within food tourism sustainability, a sub-analysis of the reviewed literature was conducted focusing on the types and functions of public relations (PR) and communication strategies.

The findings reveal three dominant communication approaches. First, awareness-oriented communication, which aims to inform stakeholders about sustainability issues through campaigns, storytelling, and branding strategies. Second, behaviour-change communication, which seeks to influence consumer practices, for

instance by promoting responsible consumption or reducing food waste. Third, legitimacy-driven communication, where PR is used to reinforce corporate reputation, transparency, and trust through sustainability reporting, certifications, and ESG disclosures.

Most studies emphasize external communication directed at consumers and stakeholders, particularly through digital channels such as social media and online platforms. In contrast, internal communication processes—such as employee engagement or organizational culture transformation—are rarely addressed. Similarly, while awareness-raising is common, fewer studies assess the effectiveness of communication strategies in driving measurable behavioural change.

These findings suggest that communication in food tourism sustainability is predominantly reputational rather than transformational, highlighting a critical gap between communication practices and sustainability outcomes.

Nonetheless, few studies explicitly link food tourism practices to specific SDGs. While SDGs 2 (Zero Hunger), 3 (Good Health and Well-Being), 8 (Decent Work and Economic Growth), 12 (Responsible Consumption and Production), and 13 (Climate Action) are relatively well covered in the literature (Dolnicar, 2023), other goals such as SDG 4 (Quality Education), SDG 5 (Gender Equality), and SDG 16 (Peace, Justice, and Strong Institutions) remain marginally addressed. These findings point to the fragmented treatment of the SDGs in tourism research, with greater attention paid to environmental and economic dimensions than to issues of equity, governance, or institutional strength. As Buczaccki et al. (2021) argue, systemic perspectives are essential for understanding interdependencies among SDGs and for designing strategies that go beyond isolated interventions.

Beyond the academic analysis, the implications for practice are substantial. Tourism and hospitality firms that integrate gastronomy into their core offerings act as facilitators of the SDGs when they embed sustainability into business operations—through sustainable sourcing, reduction of packaging waste, or transparent communication of ESG commitments. These businesses influence wide value chains, impacting not only environmental outcomes but also rural development, food security, and social equity (Scheyvens & Laeis, 2021; Moreno Alarcón & Cole, 2019). Embedding sustainability in corporate strategies and reinforcing these commitments through authentic PR narratives strengthens organizational legitimacy and accountability in sustainability discourse.

For instance, several hospitality businesses have implemented food waste reduction programmes aligned with SDG 12, using digital monitoring systems and consumer awareness campaigns to minimise surplus. Others have adopted local sourcing strategies, supporting rural producers and contributing to SDGs 2 and 8 by strengthening local economies and reducing supply chain emissions.

In terms of environmental management, initiatives such as the adoption of renewable energy systems or the reduction of single-use plastics have been increasingly integrated into tourism operations. From a communication perspective, companies are employing storytelling-based branding, sustainability reports, and social media campaigns to communicate their ESG commitments and engage stakeholders. These examples illustrate how the integration of CSR practices and communication strategies can translate sustainability principles into tangible business actions.

The interconnections identified in this review highlight both opportunities and blind spots. While the economic goals (SDG 8 and SDG 12) and ecological goals (SDG 14 and SDG 15) are recurrent in food tourism research, social goals such as SDG 5 and SDG 10 remain underexplored.

Finally, partnerships (SDG 17) are mentioned but not systematically assessed. This uneven coverage confirms the need for interdisciplinary approaches that capture the systemic role of food tourism across the 17 goals, bridging environmental management, CSR, and stakeholder communication.

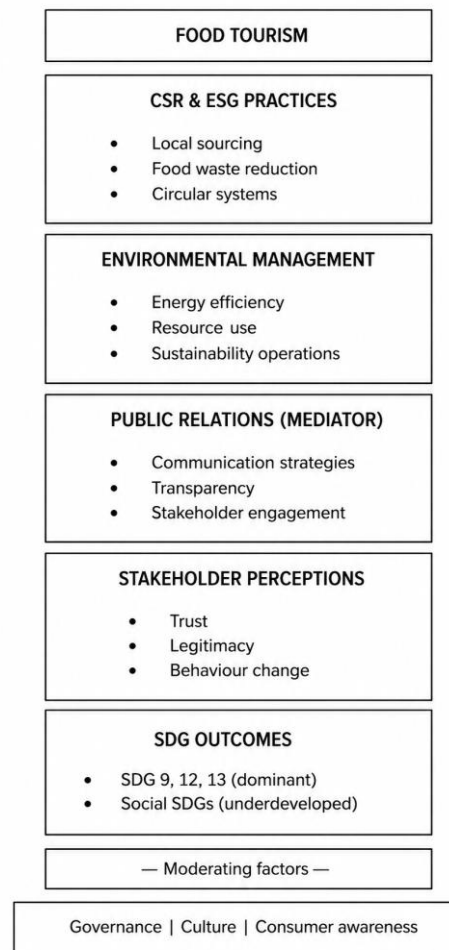
The sustainability practices identified in the reviewed literature—such as food waste reduction, local sourcing, renewable energy adoption, and circular food systems—can be systematically aligned with established CSR and ESG frameworks. Environmental practices correspond primarily to the “E” dimension of ESG, while stakeholder engagement and transparency relate to governance and social responsibility. However, the limited role assigned to communication suggests that governance mechanisms are often operationalized without a parallel communicative strategy.

Rather than constituting a limitation, the low visibility of communication and public relations within the reviewed literature should be interpreted as a significant finding. It reveals a structural gap in food tourism sustainability research, where governance and operational practices advance more rapidly than the communicative mechanisms needed to legitimize, scale, and institutionalize them.

This gap calls for a more integrative perspective that connects operational practices with communication and governance mechanisms. Building on the previous discussion, and particularly on the identified gap between operational sustainability practices and communication mechanisms, a conceptual framework is proposed to illustrate how food tourism, corporate social responsibility (CSR), environmental management, and public relations contribute to the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). The model conceptualises food tourism as a driver of CSR and environmental management practices, including sustainable sourcing, waste reduction, and energy efficiency. Public relations and communication strategies mediate and amplify these practices, playing a critical role in shaping stakeholder perceptions, trust, and engagement.

In this framework, public relations acts not only as a communication tool but as a governance mechanism that translates corporate sustainability actions into socially legitimised practices. Effective communication can foster behavioural change among consumers and reinforce accountability, thereby enhancing the contribution of tourism activities to the SDGs. The model also incorporates contextual factors such as governance structures, cultural dynamics, and consumer awareness as moderating variables that influence the effectiveness of these relationships. By integrating operational, communicative, and institutional dimensions, this framework provides a holistic perspective on how food tourism can contribute to sustainable development.

Figure 6: Conceptual framework linking food tourism, CSR practices, environmental management, public relations, and their contribution to the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)



Source: Authors' own elaboration

6. Conclusions

This study demonstrates that food tourism is not only a driver of cultural and experiential value but also a significant vector of sustainability transitions. By linking gastronomy to the material and immaterial heritage of destinations, food tourism contributes to the achievement of several SDGs, particularly those related to innovation (SDG 9), climate action (SDG 13), sustainable communities (SDG 11), health and well-being (SDG 3), and responsible consumption (SDG 12). The bibliometric evidence—139 articles published between 2020 and 2024—confirms that interest in sustainable food tourism and its communicative dimensions is rapidly expanding, with strong contributions from China, the United States, and Spain. These findings highlight the emergence of research communities addressing the intersection of tourism, food systems, and sustainability.

The analysis also underscores the role of food and hospitality companies as corporate actors with wide-reaching impacts on sustainability. By embedding ESG-aligned practices—such as sourcing local ingredients, reducing single-use plastics, and investing in green infrastructure—firms in the sector can reduce environmental footprints while reinforcing resilience and competitiveness. Public relations plays a strategic role in this process, not only by amplifying sustainability messages but also by embedding them in governance frameworks that connect corporate practice with institutional expectations. Transparent

communication strategies foster accountability, build stakeholder trust, and position food tourism businesses as responsible actors within the 2030 Agenda.

At the same time, the review reveals important gaps. Research continues to emphasize environmental and economic dimensions of the SDGs, while goals related to equity, education, and institutional strength (e.g., SDG 4, SDG 5, and SDG 16) remain underexplored. This uneven coverage points to the need for more holistic approaches that consider social justice, governance, and systemic interconnections among SDGs. In particular, the integration of food tourism into multi-stakeholder partnerships (SDG 17) remains an open field for future inquiry and practice. This uneven coverage is a reflection of the fact that in current literature the study of some SDGs predominates over others, and this is one of the findings that we wanted to show.

While the search and selection process identified a total of 139 articles that met the established inclusion criteria, a subset of 80 studies was selected for the literature review. This decision was based on the need to ensure an in-depth and conceptually coherent analysis, prioritizing articles with greater thematic relevance, methodological clarity, and substantial contribution to the study's theoretical framework. In particular, studies that explicitly addressed the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) in relation to the analyzed topic were considered, as well as those that presented theoretical or empirical approaches directly linked to the research objectives. The remaining articles, although relevant from a bibliometric perspective, were excluded from the narrative review because they presented a tangential treatment of the topic or a limited contribution to the study's conceptual development.

This study is limited by its reliance on the Web of Science database, which, although comprehensive, excludes relevant contributions from other sources. The keyword strategy may also have restricted coverage, as the use of "PR" as an abbreviation for public relations may have omitted some relevant studies. Furthermore, the analysis focused on food tourism, but similar approaches could be applied to related sectors such as green or adventure tourism. Future research would benefit from mixed methodologies that include consumer and citizen perspectives across cultures, as well as longitudinal analyses of SDG-oriented interventions at territorial and institutional levels. Such extensions would enrich our understanding of how food tourism can contribute to both corporate responsibility and environmental governance. Additionally, this work identifies future lines of research that could focus on analyzing how gastronomic tourism influences gender relations and perspectives within local communities, especially in terms of economic participation, labor distribution, and cultural representation. It would also be relevant to study whether the increased tourist demand for local products affects the availability and accessibility of nutritious and affordable food for the resident population, potentially generating social and food inequalities. Furthermore, it would be pertinent to explore how public policies and tourism development strategies can simultaneously contribute to the preservation of gastronomic heritage and the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals related to gender equality, the reduction of inequalities, and food security.

This review demonstrates that public relations is not a peripheral complement to sustainability in food tourism, but a central governance mechanism for aligning corporate practices with the SDGs. The systematic underrepresentation of PR in existing research highlights an urgent need to integrate communication more explicitly into sustainability assessment frameworks. Advancing the 2030 Agenda in food tourism will depend not only on what companies do, but also on how they communicate, legitimize, and co-create sustainability with stakeholders.

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Conflict of interest

The author(s) declare no conflict of interest.

Ethical statement

This study was conducted in accordance with the principles of scientific research and did not require additional ethics committee approval.

Declaration of AI usage

No generative AI tools were used in the preparation of this manuscript.

Data availability

The data supporting the findings of this study are available upon request.

Author contributions

	Cristina Gallego Gómez	Carmen Llovet	Pedro Dourado
Conceptualization	x	x	x
Data curation	x	x	
Formal analysis	x		
Investigation		x	
Methodology		x	
Project administration	x		
Software	x		
Supervision	x		
Validation	x	x	x
Visualization			x
Writing - original draft	x	x	x
Writing - review & editing	x	x	x

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