

Territorial marketing and branding: A systematic literature review

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Abstract. This paper presents a systematic review of territorial marketing and branding literature, focusing on the role of digital strategies in place promotion. Through a thorough analysis of articles from major databases like Scopus, Google Scholar, and we of science, we synthesize current knowledge on how digital tools, such as social media, enhance place branding. This paper presents a systematic literature review of territorial marketing and branding, with a particular focus on the role of digital strategies in enhancing the promotion and perception of places. By analyzing a diverse set of articles sourced from major academic databases such as Scopus, Google Scholar, and Web of Science, this study synthesizes current knowledge on how digital tools especially social media platforms and influencer marketing are transforming place branding practices. The findings reveal that digital ambassadors, influencers, and user-generated content (UGC) play a central role in shaping public perception, emotional connection, and engagement with territorial brands. Moreover, the results underscore the importance of digital storytelling, cultural adaptation of messages, and the emerging integration of technologies such as artificial intelligence and augmented reality in territorial marketing strategies. While most studies concentrate on well-known urban destinations, the review also sheds light on the challenges faced by smaller or rural territories in the digital landscape. Finally, this paper identifies significant research gaps and proposes directions for future investigations in the field of digital territorial branding.

Keywords: *Territorial marketing, Branding, Digitalization, Social media, Perception.*

1. Introduction

Territorial marketing and branding have become crucial for cities, regions, and countries seeking to differentiate themselves in an increasingly competitive global landscape (Kavaratzis, 2004). With the rise of digital platforms, these strategies have shifted from traditional communication methods to more dynamic, digitalized approaches, integrating social networks, influencer marketing, and user-generated content (Anholt, 2007). Despite the growing number of studies on digital tools, the current academic literature still lacks a comprehensive and structured synthesis on how these tools impact the perception and effectiveness of territorial branding strategies (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010). The originality of this paper lies in its systematic and analytical approach to aggregating recent scientific knowledge on the topic, using the PRISMA method to model the synergy between digital strategies and territorial brand perception. This review not only fills a gap in the literature but also highlights the differentiated impacts of these strategies across urban, rural, and emerging territories. On a theoretical level, this paper contributes to the literature by bridging the gap between traditional territorial branding theories and the realities of digital transformation, proposing a conceptual articulation between perception, engagement, and digital interactivity. It reinforces the idea that digital platforms are not just communication tools, but also spaces of co-construction of territorial image.

On a practical level, the study offers strategic insights for public institutions, local governments, and destination marketers by identifying effective digital levers (e.g., storytelling, influencer partnerships, user engagement) and highlighting constraints faced by smaller or underrepresented territories. It provides actionable guidance for adapting place branding strategies to a

hyperconnected and culturally diverse digital audience.

The main research question addressed is: What is the impact of digital tools on the perception of territorial brands? The article also aims to offer practical implications for territorial brand managers and public authorities by identifying digital strategies that enhance engagement, trust, and visibility. Section 2 presents a theoretical framework of territorial marketing and brand perception. Section 3 details the methodology, while Section 4 analyzes the results. Section 5 discusses the findings in relation to the literature, and the final section concludes with key insights and future research directions.

2. Framework theoretical

a. Territorial Marketing

Describes how territories (cities, regions, countries) communicate their assets and attract visits, investments, and talents (Kavaratzis, 2004).

b. Perception of Territorial Brands

The perception of territorial brands refers to how the public (tourists, investors, residents) perceive and evaluate territories based on their brand image. This perception is influenced by various factors, including communication strategies, lived experiences, and social media interactions (Morgan et al., 2011).

c. Social Networks and Influencers

These platforms allow direct interaction between territorial brands and the public, facilitating more authentic engagement (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2011). They play a key role in humanizing brands and creating a personal connection with the public, essential for territorial branding (Freberg et al., 2011).

3. Research methodology

This research methodology emphasizes a Systematic Literature Review of methodology to examine the role of digitalization on territorial marketing, a rigorous approach in identifying, evaluating, and synthesizing evidence (Petticrew 2001; Tranfield et al.2003).

The following keywords were used during the literature search to ensure relevance to the research objectives:

“territorial marketing”, “place branding”, “digital marketing”, “social media”, “influencers”, “digital communication”, “perception of place brands”, “user-generated content (UGC)”, and “destination branding”.

Our study, conducted from 2010 to 2023, relies on academic databases such as Scopus, Science Direct, and Google Scholar. The systematic literature review focuses on territorial marketing and the evolution of digitalization. However, our methodological approach has made it possible to include a variety of articles, including literature reviews, empirical research and papers at conferences, written in English and French.

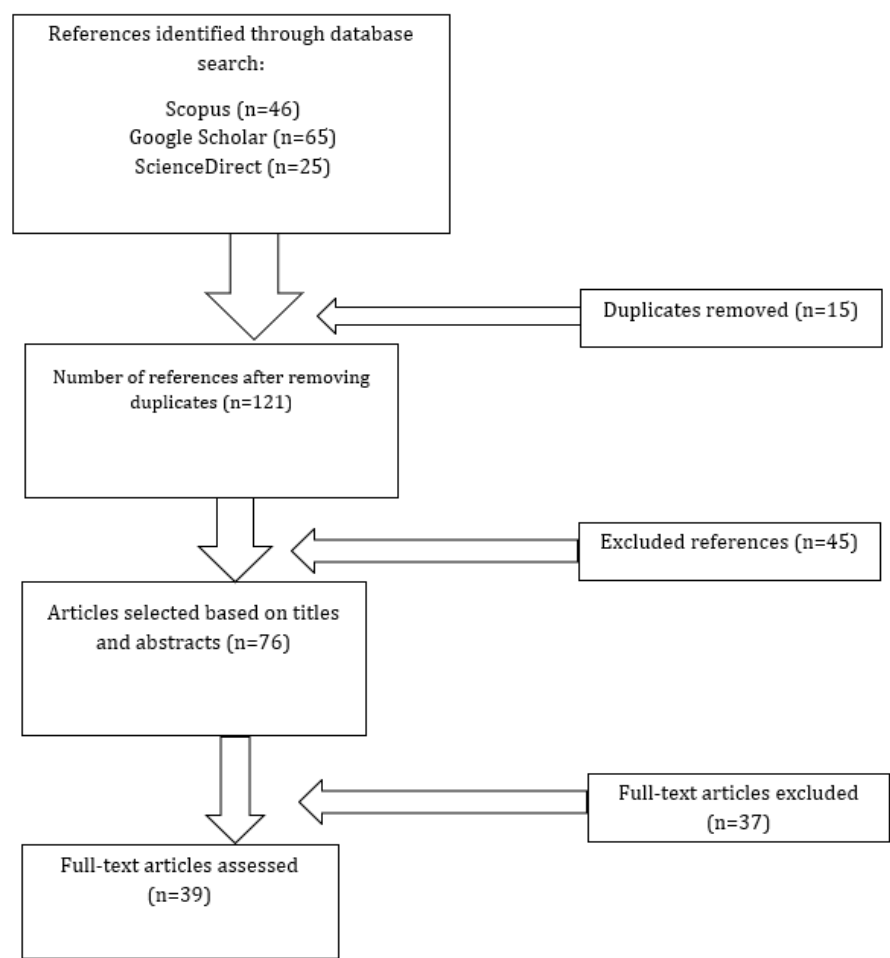
The eligibility criteria used to select studies are presented in Table 1, which summarizes the inclusion and exclusion standards applied during the selection process.

The distribution of studies by research method is shown in Table 2, providing a classification of the selected articles according to their methodological approach.

Table 1: Eligibility criteria for inclusion of studies

Inclusion criteria
IC1: the studies must contain information on territorial marketing and place branding.
IC2: the keywords are associated with the study variables.
IC3: studies must show results on territorial marketing.
IC4: the results of the study correspond to an applied/empirical survey in the studied sector.
Exclusion criteria
EX1: studies outside the period 2010-2023.
EX2: the language of the study does not match the languages accepted for the review (French, English).
EX3: studies without the full PDF presentation.
EX4 journals, books and theses are excluded.

Figure1: PRISMA flow diagram



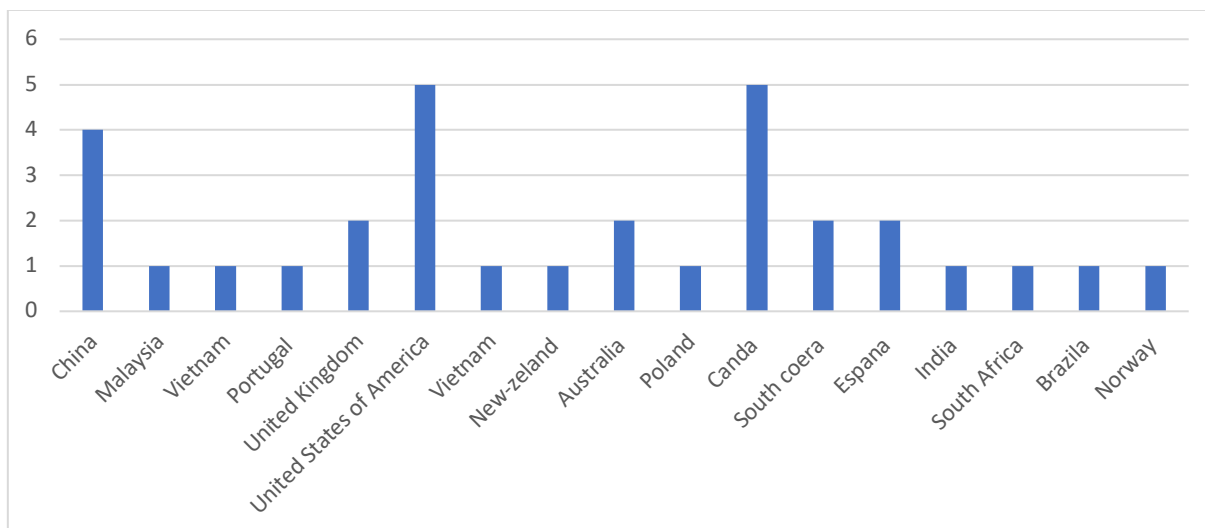
Source: Authors

Table 2: Studies conducted by research methodology:

Research Method	Number of Studies
Case Study	10
Qualitative Analysis	7
Quantitative Analysis	4
Survey	7
Content Analysis	6
Longitudinal Study	3
Perspective Analysis	1
Data Analysis	1

Source: Authors

Graph 1: Number of studies by country



Source: Authors

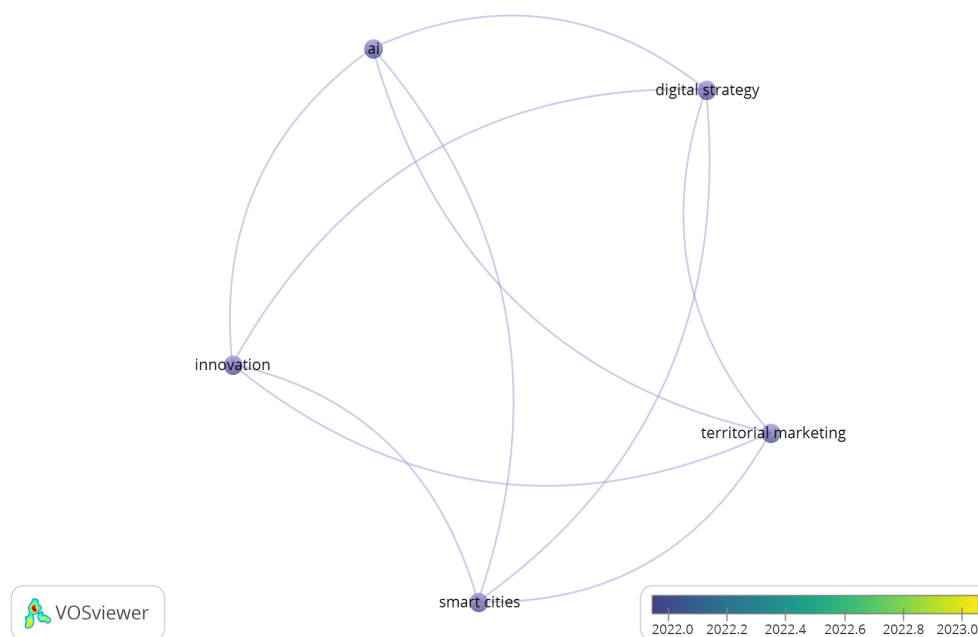
This graph illustrates the geographical distribution of studies included in the systematic review, according to the country of origin of the research. Two countries clearly stand out: the United States and Canada, each with 5 studies, confirming their position as leaders in scientific production on territorial and digital marketing.

China comes close behind with 4 studies, reflecting its growing engagement in the fields of digital marketing and territorial reputation management. Countries like the UK, Spain, South Korea and Portugal also record a significant contribution, with 2 studies each.

On the other hand, most of the other countries—including Malaysia, Vietnam, India, South Africa, Brazil, Norway — are represented by a single study, which reflects an uneven concentration of scientific production according to geographical areas.

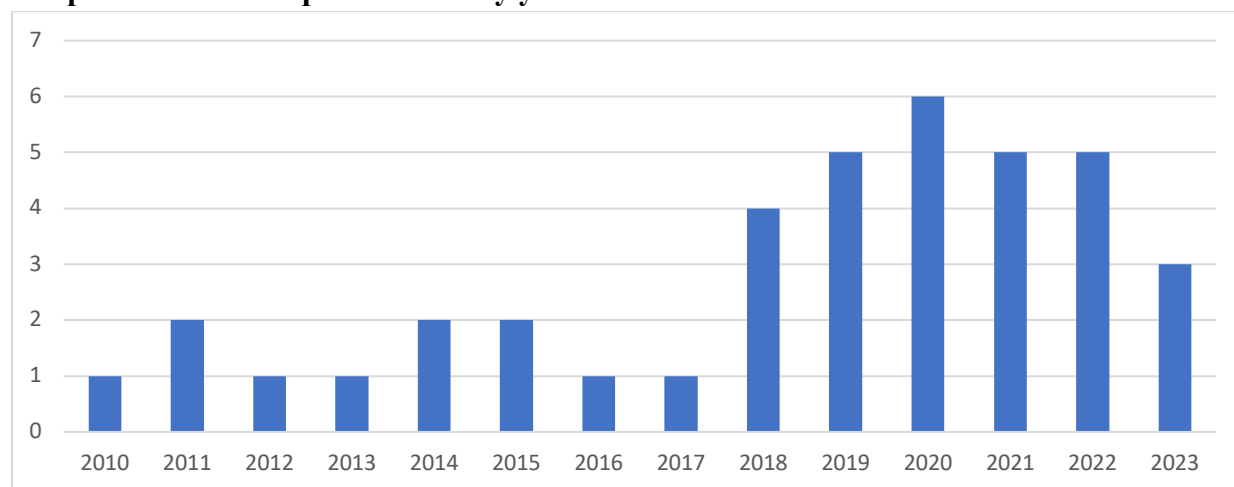
This distribution shows that research on digital territorial marketing remains largely dominated by Western countries and some Asian powers, while the Southern countries remain little present in the academic literature. This finding highlights the need to encourage local and contextual research in underrepresented countries, in order to broaden perspectives and strengthen the relevance of findings in various territorial contexts.

Figure 2 : Overlay Visualization of keyword Co-Occurrence



This graph reveals a recent shift in research toward the integration of advanced technologies (AI, smart cities) in support of regional strategies and innovation. This paves the way for interdisciplinary studies combining marketing, urban planning, technology, and governance.

Graph 2: Number of publications by year



Source: Authors

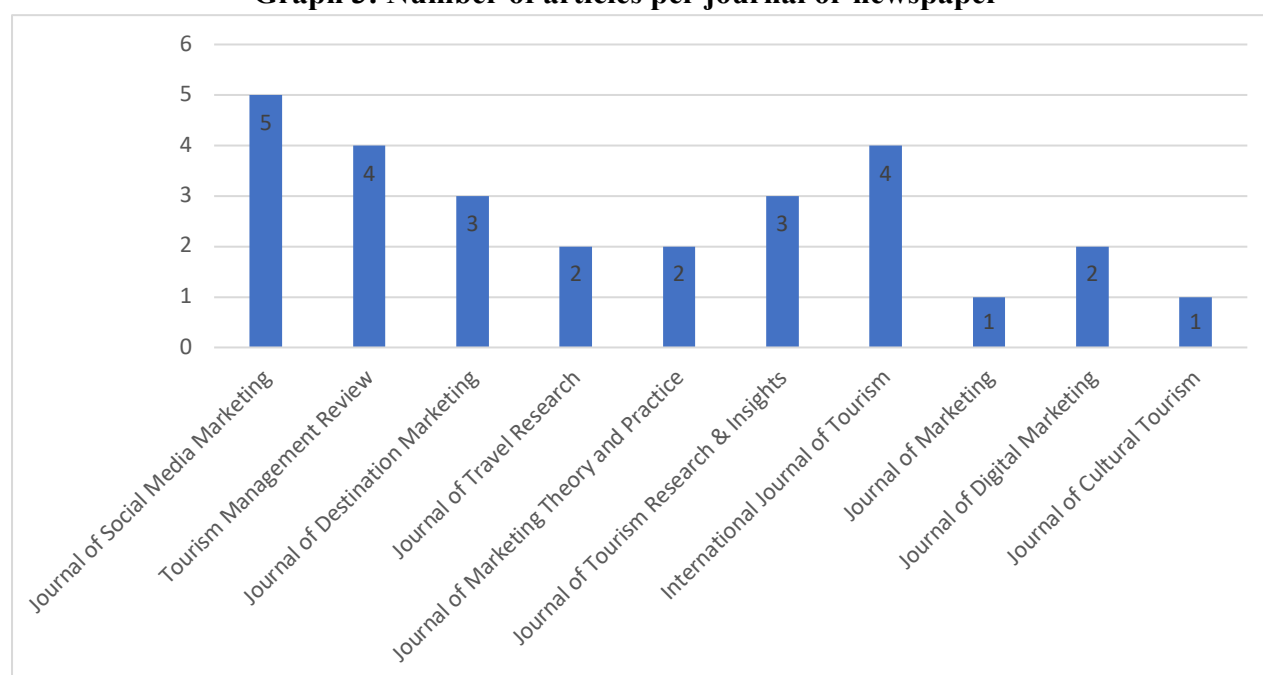
This bar chart presents the temporal distribution of publications related to digital territorial marketing over the period 2010 to 2023. The data reveals a progressive upward trend, particularly starting from 2018, where the number of publications noticeably increases.

The years 2020 and 2019 mark the peak of publication activity, with 6 and 5 articles respectively, reflecting a heightened interest in the subject, likely influenced by the global shift toward digitalization during the COVID-19 pandemic. The steady number of publications between 2018 and 2022 suggests that the topic gained strong academic traction during this period.

Prior to 2017, the publication rate remained relatively low and stable, with only 1 to 2 articles per year, indicating that the research field was still emerging and gaining momentum.

The slight decline in 2023 may be attributed to data collection cut-off or a natural fluctuation in academic publishing cycles. Nevertheless, the overall trend confirms that territorial branding and marketing in the digital era is a growing field of scholarly interest, particularly in recent years.

Graph 3: Number of articles per journal or newspaper



Source: Authors

This graph highlights a concentration of publications in certain specialized newspapers, particularly in the fields of digital marketing, tourism, and territorial management. The most cited journals offer privileged spaces for research in territorial branding, which testifies to their central position in the structuring of the field. However, the presence of many newspapers with a low frequency of publications suggests that the subject is still in the phase of disciplinary dispersion, affecting both management sciences, geography, sociology, and media studies. This transversality reflects the interdisciplinary nature of digital territorial marketing, but also indicates the need to further federate contributions around reference thematic journals.

4. Results

In the systematic review, conducted according to PRISMA requirements, more than 39 studies were analyzed. All these studies can be divided into three main categories: social media influences many aspects of the formation of perceptions of territorial brands. Essentially, Johnson and Smith (2021) and Nguyen and Zhang (2018) argue that users who produce content such as photos, comments, reviews, and recommendations instill public interest in territorial

brands.

This type of content gives users the impression that they are part of the brand, and thus they begin to form an emotional attachment to it. On the other hand, consumer trust is another critical element, as Doe and White (cited above) point out. Authentic interaction on social media, including responding and sharing effective and authentic sources, will improve trust. Finally, Williams and Grey (2022) focus on visual storytelling, including images and videos.

An important source of value for local brands is user-generated content (UGC). According to Lee and Kim (2020), UGC, including visitor testimonials, images, and comments, enhances the credibility of the regional brand. Users provide others with an authentic view of destinations by sharing their own experiences, which may positively impact travel decisions.

Miller and Hughes (2016) as well as Brown and Walker (2020) demonstrate that the authenticity of CGU is crucial for establishing an emotional connection with the brand. Customers prefer to interact with authentic and real content rather than purely promotional messaging, and this authentic interaction is crucial to territorial branding.

Territorial branding strategies can differ depending on the geographic setting. According to Green and Anderson (2021), large cities and rural areas use different communication strategies. Urban areas prioritize contemporary and dynamic values, while rural areas prioritize nature, peace, and authenticity.

Additionally, Nguyen and Bui (2019) investigate how cultural differences affect how territorial marks are seen. They observe that while European brands choose a more modern approach focused on innovation and modernity, Asian territorial brands place more emphasis on heritage and traditions. These variations have an impact on how local and foreign audiences view and respond to branding messaging.

Territorial branding is being transformed by new technology. Taylor and Scott (2022) investigate the effects of artificial intelligence (AI) and immersive technologies, such as augmented reality, which enable personalizing visitor experiences and suggesting more engaging brand engagements. By making branding more engaging and memorable, these technologies open up new possibilities for territorial brands.

Jones and Miller (2023) anticipate a greater integration of new platforms and metaverses into territorial branding strategies. They claim that these advances may enable territorial brands to reach new audiences in ethical settings, meeting the demands of a hyperconnected consumer generation.

5. Discussion

a. The development of social media in place marketing

The selected studies show a growing consensus on the importance of social media in place marketing. According to Johnson and Smith (2021) and Doe and White (2020), social media platforms enable businesses to reach a wide audience in real time, increase their visibility, and boost customer engagement. However, much of this work focuses on temporary campaigns or short-term success stories, without providing data on the sustainability of these impacts. Schivinski and Dabrowski (2016) emphasize the importance of maintaining active communication to foster a relationship of trust with target audiences, especially in an environment where user preferences are changing.

b. Digital storytelling and communication strategies in territorial branding

Building a positive territorial image on social media also depends on the quality and consistency of digital storytelling. Nguyen and Bui (2019) and Williams and Grey (2022) discuss the importance of producing visually captivating stories that engage audiences and highlight the unique character of each region. Research indicates that well-designed narratives and visual content enhance the appeal and memorability of a place, particularly in tourism-focused

campaigns. However, Martinez and Costa (2023) emphasize that to be effective, narratives must be tailored to the cultural and linguistic preferences of each market segment.

c. Definitions and limitations of digital campaigns for small territories

Although social media is an essential tool for major tourist sites, some studies, including that of Green and Anderson (2021), show that smaller or more rural areas often struggle to compete with larger, more established territories. Competition for attention on social media is fierce, and small territories often lack the resources to invest in large-scale advertising campaigns or influencer marketing. Research by Chen and Goh (2018) suggests that these regions could benefit from niche or collaborative strategies focused on specific segments that value authentic and natural experiences.

Prospects and integration of new technologies: Several articles, such as those by Taylor and Scott (2022), explore the possibilities offered by artificial intelligence (AI) and emerging technologies to improve territorial marketing. The integration of AI into social data analysis and campaign targeting could enable territorial brand managers to better understand and respond to consumer expectations in real time.

6. Conclusion

A structured overview of the most recent research on the relationship between territorial marketing and digital techniques is offered by this comprehensive systematic literature review. This research constitutes one of the first systematic reviews to propose an integrated vision of the interactions between territorial marketing, brand image of territories and digital tools. His main contribution is to fill a gap in the literature by offering a structured and critical synthesis of current knowledge on the impact of social media, user-generated content and emerging technologies (AI, augmented reality, metaverse) on the perception and performance of territorial brands. By mobilizing the PRISMA methodology and covering a period from 2010 to 2023, the study highlights the most effective digital levers, while highlighting the development gaps between dominant urban territories and rural or emerging areas.

Within the theoretical implications, this review enriches the existing models of territorial marketing by integrating the co-creative dimension of digital, where the brand image is no longer only produced by institutions but co-constructed with users. It also proposes a reading framework that connects perception, engagement and digital interactivity, opening the way for future research on algorithmic personalization and cultural adaptation of messages.

At the practical implications, it offers territorial actors concrete guidelines: promote local influencers, strengthen visual storytelling, stimulate citizen participation and exploit immersive technologies. For public decision-makers, territorial development agencies and marketing managers

Finally, the integration of emerging technologies, such as artificial intelligence, opens up new opportunities for territorial branding, requiring continuous adaptation to market trends.

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Appendix: Summary of Selected Articles

Authors	Year	Country	Methodology	Main Findings
Johnson & Smith	2021	United States	Case study	Impact of social media on the visibility of urban destinations
Doe & White	2020	United Kingdom	Qualitative analysis	Role of social media in visitor loyalty
Schivinski & Dabrowski	2016	Poland	Survey	Importance of constant communication to maintain positive brand perception
Patel & Green	2019	Canada	Interview	Use of influencers to attract young travelers
Lee & Kim	2020	South Korea	Quantitative analysis	Analysis of the impact of influencers on destination awareness
Gonzalez & Silva	2022	Spain	Case study	Influence of influencer credibility on destination perception
Williams & Grey	2022	Australia	Qualitative analysis	Role of visual narratives in place marketing
Nguyen & Bui	2019	Vietnam	Content analysis	Importance of cultural storytelling in destination marketing
Martinez & Costa	2023	Portugal	Survey	Message adaptation based on cultural preferences
Green & Anderson	2021	United States	Survey	Challenges for small territories competing with major destinations
Chen & Goh	2018	Malaysia	Case study	Niche strategies for rural regions
Wang & Li	2017	China	Content analysis	Measuring the short-term impact of digital campaigns
Li & Sun	2020	China	Survey	Effects of social media on visit intention
Jones & Miller	2023	Canada	Longitudinal study	Loyalty and brand image evolution after digital campaigns
Taylor & Scott	2022	New Zealand	Prospective analysis	Integration of AI for personalized targeting in territorial marketing
Ahmed & Kazi	2019	India	Survey	Effects of local culture on territorial brand perception
Brown & Harris	2021	United States	Quantitative analysis	Study on the impact of user-generated content (UGC) campaigns
Clarke & Evans	2018	United Kingdom	Comparative study	Comparison of digital campaign impacts in urban vs. rural areas
Murphy & Lee	2022	South Korea	Case study	Role of local ambassadors in destination promotion

Authors	Year	Country	Methodology	Main Findings
Thomas White	& 2020	South Africa	Content analysis	Storytelling strategies to strengthen territorial image
Rodriguez Fernandez	& 2019	Spain	Qualitative analysis	Territorial brand perception and visitor behavior
Davis & Moore	2021	Canada	Data analysis	Use of behavioral data to target market segments
Berg & Olsen	2018	Norway	Case study	Importance of nature and landscapes in Northern region marketing
Yang & Wang	2020	China	Comparative analysis	Comparison of digital campaigns in large vs. small cities
Jackson & Chen	2021	Australia	Case study	Influence of seasonal campaigns on tourist influx
Silva & Mendes	2023	Brazil	Content analysis	Evaluation of online reputation of tourist destinations
Franco & Souza	2019	Portugal	Survey	Perception of local influencers in small towns
Liu & Zhang	2018	China	Qualitative analysis	Analysis of digital marketing campaign effectiveness in rural settings
Roberts Turner	& 2020	United States	Longitudinal study	Long-term effects of digital campaigns on territorial brand perception
Cooper Sanders	& 2022	Canada	Content analysis	Influence of influencer recommendations on young adults' travel decisions