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SOCIAL MEDIA USAGE AMONG SOUTH AFRICAN DMOS TO LINK BRAND IDENTITY AND PROJECTED BRAND IMAGE

by

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ABSTRACT

Tourism plays a significant role in the economies of many countries, with tourism activity fundamentally being a destination-lead initiative. Destination Marketing Organisations (DMOs) are pivotal in strategic planning, policy development, marketing communication and branding. The branding function is a prominent differentiator among contesting destinations, as DMOs wield the capability to create the destination's image based on destination attributes that define its identity. Destinations continually face an arena characterised by escalating competition.

The advancement of information, communication, and technology (ICT) has led to paradigm shifts across numerous sectors. For DMOs, the influence of ICT in the area of marketing and communication is widespread, particularly through social media. Social media has emerged as a significant medium for marketing and communication due to its wide reach and cost-effectiveness in connecting with wide audiences. However, for many destinations, challenges often arise when attempting to strategically align the brand image with the brand identity of the destination. This misalignment undermines the overall branding strategy and objectives. Although many destinations have documented strategic plans, they often struggle to translate them effectively, particularly on social media platforms. Social media is not effectively prioritised and integrated into the overall branding strategy as a core component as DMOs fail to recognise the significance thereof as a strategic branding tool. Resultantly, the pace of social media adoption differs, and there are notable inconsistencies in brand articulation across social media content.

Comprehension of effective strategies to curate appropriate content and placement on social media platforms is crucial for aligning the destination's brand identity with its image. This knowledge presents formidable challenges for DMOs since they must navigate social media complexities while maintaining consistency and authenticity in how they project the destination brand across various platforms. This shortage is particularly noticeable in the deficit of both theoretical awareness and empirical investigations into the precise impact of social media content on destination brands.

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The study investigates how DMOs translate their destination's brand identity, as articulated in their strategic documents, into a brand image projected across various social media platforms. To reach this aim, a multi-phase mixed-methods approach was taken. Three consecutive phases were employed, and each phase attended to a different but interconnected research problem.

Phase 1 applied a Systemic Quantitative Literature Review (SQLR), focusing on destination branding and social media research articles. Publication trends were described using descriptive statistics, chi-square tests, and Two-step Cluster Analysis. Phase 2 and Phase 3 adopted a case study approach using seven South African DMOs. In Phase 2, DMOs' strategic documents were analysed using a deductive thematic analysis to identify content related to strategy, brand identity, and social media implementation. In Phase 3, a social media content analysis determined the extent to which themes derived from the document analysis, featured in the composition of social media content posted on Facebook, Instagram and X. It also measured the nature and extent of user engagement with this content.

The objective of the SQLR in Phase 1 was to provide a description of the existing knowledge in the field by categorising and summarising identified publications using a set of predefined descriptors. The review encompassed 300 publications from 2010 to the first half of 2020, focusing on destination branding, as well as social media within destination branding. The sample included a search on significant databases including the most relevant databases for tourism research [EBSCO Host (Hospitality and Tourism Complete); Science Direct (Elsevier); Emerald; Scopus; Web of Science; ProQuest; and Sage publications and one search engine Google Scholar]. Google Scholar was utilised to classify literature that might have been omitted from the databases. A total of 20 journals from different disciplines (tourism, marketing, business) were included.

This phase systematically distinguished trends in the literature, including the dimension of destination branding under study, social media platforms included in the study of destination branding, scholars' methodological inclinations, as well as the geographical contexts of the studies This phase was instrumental in the development of the themes used to analyse social media usage and strategies; allowing the study to determine strategies that DMOs apply on social media, and evaluate their effectiveness. A key finding is the fact that the

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majority of the research in destination branding originates from the Global North (GN). The disparities noted perpetuate imbalances in the destination branding research narrative, leaving out inherent dynamics in the Global South (GS), and thus, restricting the applicability and generalisability of the findings in a global context.

Phase 2 examined how DMOs articulate brand identity through strategic documents, along with the integration of social media strategy as an element within strategic planning. The process commenced with data collection of seven South African DMOs' strategic documents, which included annual reports, strategic plans, and promotional materials. Data were analysed using ATLAS.ti software, applying deductive thematic analysis based on predetermined themes derived from destination competitiveness models and the literature reviewed in Phase 1. The *strategy* theme covered long-term planning through the categories of *vision* and *mission* as expressed through official statements. *Brand identity*, as the lifeblood of destination competitiveness, focused on how destinations *position* themselves, articulate their *values* and describe their characteristics in terms of *product offerings*. Lastly, the *social media* theme included four categories reflecting DMOs' strategic approach to social media utilisation. These categories were *platforms*, *content strategy*, *promotions*, and *monitoring and analytics*.

Following upon the thematic content identified in the documents, Phase 3 examined DMOs' social media activities through a deductive content analysis to determine whether the thematic content aligned across social media platforms (Facebook, X, and Instagram) with the brand identity articulated in the strategic documents in Phase 2. The study employed systematic sampling where every second post on the respective social media pages was selected retrospectively from 03 March 2022. A total of 1260 posts were collected on each platform, including both textual and photographic formats. Collected data were analysed and captured on a Microsoft Excel Spreadsheet and analysed around three key aspects of social media applications, namely *content composition*, *content format*, and *user engagement*. This analysis provided an evaluation of the extent to which and in what format DMOs communicate their strategic brand identity on the respective platforms and how users engage with the content.

Collectively, results from Phases 2 and 3 indicated instances of alignment and inconsistencies between strategic documents and social media practices within the seven-

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case study DMOs, as well as trends across the total sample. The strategic documents and social media outputs of DMOs demonstrated varying degrees of application when communicating content about vision, mission, positioning, values, and product offerings. While most DMOs showed consistency in aligning social media content to strategic documents, others exhibited gaps and misalignments, indicating the disconnect that exists between brand identity and the image projected on social media. The gap was particularly evident among DMOs that view social media as an add
tional element of marketing rather than a strategic component destination branding.

The main theoretical contributions of the study are captured in a proposed Destination Branding-Social Media Alignment framework. The framework is premised on underlying principles incorporating strategic management, strategic planning, and social media, contextualised within destination branding. The framework emphasises continuous evaluation, agility, and data-oriented decision-making while adapting to the dynamic nature of social media and user engagement. It consists of six interlinked sections that illustrate optimal strategic alignment as a fundamental principle. This alignment is not static but rather a dynamic process with both brand identity and image continually reinforcing each other. This dynamic process is achieved through perpetual monitoring and analytics, thus allowing DMOs to stay abreast of changes in the social media landscape while remaining aligned with their core brand identity. The framework provides a holistic understanding of social media as a core component in strategic planning, creating an avenue for systemic research on how DMOs can maximise social media utilisation to remain competitive in the dynamic tourism landscape.

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GLOSSARY OF TERMS

- **Brand Identity:** Brand identity serves as the bedrock of a brand's essence, encompassing its fundamental principles, defining attributes, and aspirational pursuits, meticulously fashioned through a planning endeavour (Crouch, 2011; Hassan, 2000; Saraniemi & Komppula, 2017). In the context of this study, brand identity represents a destination's positioning, values, and a set of unique attributes that stand as the destination's product offering indicating how destination wishes to be perceived.

- **Brand Image:** Destination brand image is characterised as the consumer's psychological representation of the offering in which the symbolic meaning is associated with the specific attributes of a destination (Dobni & Zinkhan, 1990; Padgett & Allen, 1997; Wisker, Kadirov & Nizar, 2020).

- **Brand Positioning:** Mottos that are created to communicate brand characters are based on terms that speak to tangible destination attributes or affective benefits, and these are effortlessly imitable by competitors (Kotsi & Pike, 2021).

- **Content Format:** Refers to the type of media used for dissemination of social media content which usually occurs in three forms, namely, textual, photographic, and videography (Gough, Hunter, Ajao, Jurek, McKeown, Hong, Barrett, Ferguson, McElwee & McCarthy, 2017; Tuten, 2023).

- **Content Strategy:** Refers to the overall approach in which DMOs outline their utilisation of social media to achieve marketing and communication goals (Kilgour et al., 2015; Perreault & Mosconi, 2018).

- **Destination Competitiveness:** Refers to accomplishment of profitability over a long period of time, the capability to grow tourism expenditure, attracting tourists, and delivering on expectations by offering superior experiences, making tourism destination competitive (Buhalis, 2000).

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- **Global North:** Generally, represents developed economies and highly industrialised countries that exhibit a higher degree of technological infrastructure and resource availability (Anguelovski, Shi, Chu, Gallagher, Goh, Lamb, Reeve & Teicher, 2016; Odeh, 2010).

- **Global South:** Refers to less economically developed regions, comprised of developing nations characterised by heightened levels of poverty and constrained technological capabilities (Morgan, 2015; Odeh, 2010; Omeje, 2017).

- **Strategic Alignment:** The extent to which the brand identity expressed in the strategic documents and social media practices of DMOs correspond.

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

Abbreviation	Meaning
ATTA	The Adventure Travel Trade Association
CBBE	Consumer-Based Brand Equity
CBDBE	Consumer-Based Destination Brand Equity
CGC	Consumer Generated Content
CMT	Coastal and maritime tourism
COVID-19	Coronavirus
DBSMA	Destination Branding-Social Media Alignment framework
DM	Destination Management
DMM	Destination Marketing Management
DMO	Destination Marketing Organisation
DMP	Destination Management Plan
ECPTA	Eastern Cape Parks and Tourism Agency
eWOM	electronic word-of-mouth
FGC	Firm-Generated Content
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
GTA	Gauteng Tourism Authority
ICT	Information and Communication Technologies
IT	Information Technology
LTA	Limpopo Tourism Authority
MRT	Media Richness Theory
MTPA	Mpumalanga Parks and Tourism Agency
NTO	National Tourism Organisations
OGC	Organisation-Generated Content
SAT	South African Tourism
SMA	Social Media Analytics
SQLR	Systemic Quantitative Literature Review
TKZN	Tourism KwaZulu-Natal
TTCI	Travel and Tourism Competitiveness Index
UGC	User-Generated Content

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UN	United Nations
UNWTO	United Nations World Tourism Organisation
WEF	World Economic Forum
WESGRO	Western Cape Tourism, Trade and Investment Promotion Agency
WESP	World Economic Situation and Prospects
WOM	Word-of-mouth

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

The first chapter provides the background of the study to establish the context and serve as a premise upon which the study is grounded. This is followed by the problem statement, as well as the aim and objectives of the research. It then presents a conceptual framework depicting the main theoretical underpinnings of the study. The research methodology is next, followed by an exposition of the study's contribution and relevance. Lastly, this chapter defines the scope on the study in the description of the study's delimitation and assumptions.

1.1 Background of the Study

In the contemporary dynamic tourism landscape, destinations find themselves grappling with an extensive array of challenges as they contend for consideration and allegiance of travellers (Bethune, Buhalis & Miles, 2022; Kankhuni, 2020). Tourism destinations are perpetually trapped in an atmosphere characterised with escalating competition (Foris, Florescu, Foris & Barabas, 2020; Ritchie & Crouch, 2010). The continual emergence of new destinations accentuates the necessity for destinations to sustain competitive edge (Zhang, Zhang & Yang, 2023). The uniqueness of a destination becomes instrumental in shaping its competitive stance, functioning as a discriminating feature in comparison to alternative destinations (Blain, Levy & Ritchie, 2005; Qu, Kim & Im, 2011; Reisinger, Michael & Hayes, 2019; Truong, Lenglet & Mothe, 2018; Woyo & Slabbert, 2021). It is prudent, however, to recognise that destinations do not uniformly exhibit competitive attributes (Stokłosa, Marchiori & Cantoni, 2019). Such characteristics are influenced by diverse factors, encompassing cultural heritage, natural allure, authenticity, maturity, and developmental phase (Dwyer, Dragićević, Armenski, Mihalič & Knežević Cvelbar, 2016; Stokłosa *et al.*, 2019). By strategically harnessing these distinctive features, destinations have the potential to cultivate a unique identity that effectively resonates with intended target markets, ultimately positioning themselves as alluring and sought-after destinations (Pedeliento & Kavaratzis, 2019; Zhang, Fong, Li & Ly, 2019).

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Destination management is a multifarious construct that constitutes a cornerstone in devising enduring strategies for destination marketing (Kubickova & Martin, 2020; Ritchie & Crouch, 2010). At its core, destination management is oriented towards preventing arbitrary and fragmented development of destination projects, instead it promotes commitment to a comprehensive and organised long-term plan (Barney & Hesterly, 2010; Olson, Slater, Hult & Olson, 2018). Within this framework, Destination Marketing Organisations (DMOs) assume a cardinal role in the strategic stewardship of destinations, a role which is instrumental in augmenting a destination's market appeal (Ritchie & Crouch, 2010; Roque & Raposo, 2021). By adopting an astute and strategically robust methodology, DMOs are equipped to adeptly navigate the course and evolution of the destination (Delaney, 2022; He, Deng, Li & Gu, 2022).

Destination management constitutes an essential dimension, encapsulating the proficient enactment of elevated-level policy formulation, planning, and development processes (Honovic & Klapan, 2021; Sheehan, Vargas-Sánchez, Presenza & Abbate, 2016). DMOs take on the significant responsibility of establishing a comprehensive and cohesive tourism blueprint that articulates strategic objectives, meticulous planning, effective management, and targeted marketing efforts, all with the overarching aim of attaining sustained competitiveness over the long term (Dwyer & Kim, 2003; Jani & Minde, 2017; Karadal, Çelik & Saygın, 2013; Seabra, 2017). The resultant strategic tourism schema functions as a pivotal navigational instrument, steering the trajectory of infrastructure evolution, product diversification, brand cultivation, marketing engagement, visitor experience enrichment, and the institutionalisation of sustainable tourism practices (Vu & Ngo, 2019). By implementing efficacious destination management, DMOs hold the capability to sculpt the destination's image, amplify its competitive advantage, and assure long-term prosperity within the global tourism arena (Nadalipour, Imani Khoshkhoo & Eftekhari, 2019).

Branding functions as a salient differentiator among contesting destinations (Beritelli & Laesser, 2016; Marin, Figueroa & Mundet, 2018; Wong & Teoh, 2015). Since the early 1990s, branding has ascended as an integral constituent of the marketing strategy espoused by DMOs (Galí, Camprubí & Donaire, 2017; Pike, Gentle, Kelly & Beatson, 2018). This integration of branding has taken on supreme importance in

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fortifying a destination's appeal (Pham & Pearce, 2019; Pike *et al.*, 2018; Qu *et al.*, 2011). A formidable brand, armed with the intrinsic ability to differentiate a product or service from its competitors, operates as a powerful defence against vulnerabilities brought forth by aggressive marketing tactics (Delgado-Ballester & Munuera-Alemán, 2005). The influence of a well-established brand transcends the monetary domain, as shown by the benefits it avails such as enhanced profitability, fortified partnerships with intermediaries, and the possibility for brand diversification and growth, as noted in previous research (Delgado-Ballester & Munuera-Alemán, 2005; Malhotra & Bhattacharyya, 2021). Moreover, branding assumes an augmented role in effectively communicating intangible products or experiences to potential consumers, a challenge uniquely pertinent to the tourism sector and other service sectors (Leong, Hibbert & Ennew, 2018).

DMOs bear the crucial role of establishing and upholding the destination image, which effectively communicates the unique identity and essence of the destination (Frias, Pereira & Jerónimo, 2021). Brand identity serves as the bedrock of a brand's essence, encompassing its fundamental principles, defining attributes, and aspirational pursuits, meticulously fashioned through a planning endeavour (Crouch, 2011; Hassan, 2000; Saraniemi & Komppula, 2017). This process demands a deliberate approach wherein DMOs strategically synchronise the core characteristics and distinguishing facets of the destination with the intended brand identity, thus creating a seamless and coherent narrative that resonates with the target audience and engenders a lasting and positive brand perception (Baalbaki & Zizka, 2023; Rodrigues, Skinner, Dennis & Melewar, 2020).

In the progression of this phenomenon, the influence of information, communication, and technology (ICT) on the marketing and communication practices of DMOs has been extensive and widespread (Lalicic, Huertas, Moreno & Jabreel, 2020). The advent of ICTs has precipitated substantial shifts within the economic and communicative spheres of DMOs, facilitating engagements and interactions with visitors and stakeholders through innovative channels (Jorge, Sérgio Teixeira, Fonseca, Correia & Gonçalves, 2020). Confronted with finite marketing resources, DMOs are increasingly obliged to recalibrate their communicative approaches to harness the rise of digital technologies. Coupled with the ubiquity of internet

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accessibility, this has radically redefined the manner in which DMOs circulate information, promote destinations, and cultivate engagement with their intended demographics (Uşaklı, Koç & Sönmez, 2019). These technological evolutions have equipped DMOs with the capacity to transcend geographical impediments, thereby affording them the means to interface with prospective visitors on an unprecedented global scale (Leung, 2022). Social media has emerged as an important tool within the digital arena, significantly reshaping how destinations establish their brand and connect with prospective visitors (Nzeki, 2020).

DMOs possess the potential to impact visitor choices, a feat most efficaciously realised through strategic employment of social media platforms (Molina, Gomez, Lyon, Aranda & Loibl, 2020). A salient progression in destination marketing manifests in the harmonious integration of social media with conventional media modalities, encompassing television, radio, print, and outdoor advertising (Castronovo & Huang, 2012; Daou, 2020; Mangold & Faulds, 2009). This synthesis enables DMOs to capitalise on the virtues of both social media and traditional channels, thereby augmenting their penetration and influence on potential visitors (Castronovo & Huang, 2012). Through strategically combining these communication avenues, DMOs can engage with diverse segments of the target audience, catering to their preferences and maximising the overall effectiveness of their marketing efforts (Kumar, Mishra & Rao, 2022). Nevertheless, it is worth noting that social media platforms tend to exhibit unparalleled efficiency and effectiveness when juxtaposed with traditional mediums of communication (Hays, Page & Buhalis, 2013; Kayumovich, 2020; Kiráľová & Pavlíčeka, 2015). This is largely as a result of social media's capacity for real time interaction amongst users, enabling rapid information sharing and formation of perceptions(Nzeku & Duffett, 2021).

The domain of social media research is experiencing a brisk expansion, (Kantamaa, 2020; Kilgour, Sasser & Larke, 2015), with emerging applications within the context of destination marketing (Dedeoğlu, Van Niekerk, Weinland & Celuch, 2019b; Fairley, 2019). Despite this growth, current literature illustrates a constrained understanding of the strategic employment of social media instruments by DMOs (Naeem & Ozuem, 2021; Pino, Peluso, Del Vecchio, Ndou, Passiante & Guido, 2019; Seo, Park & Choi, 2020; Thomaz, Biz, Bettoni, Mendes-Filho & Buhalis, 2017; Uşaklı *et al.*, 2019).

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Strategic utilisation in this context refers to the deliberate and methodical deployment of an extensive suite of digital tools available within the social media landscape by DMOs (Mariani, Di Felice & Mura, 2016; Mariani, Mura & Di Felice, 2018). The focus of this investigation resides in understanding how DMOs proficiently harness social media platforms, including, but not limited to, Facebook, X, Instagram, YouTube, among others, to augment marketing and branding initiatives, while simultaneously cultivating substantive interactions with stakeholders and targeting audiences (Mariani *et al.,* 2016; Uşaklı, Koç & Sönmez, 2017). The absence of a clear and robust strategy often characterises DMOs' usage of social media, which inadvertently undermines their branding pursuit (Hays *et al.*, 2013). Furthermore, a contentious discourse persists around the dichotomous relationship between corporate culture and social media culture, which profoundly affects the way organisations navigate social media platforms (Mele, Kerkhof & Cantoni, 2021; Munar, 2012; Watkins, 2021). These platforms enable DMOs to promote their unique identity, and communicate their core values (Mostert, 2015).

In the face of formidable challenges precipitated by globalisation, the advent of the digital economy has ushered in significant and invaluable opportunities for DMOs (Harb, 2017; Marčeková, Šebová & Pompurová, 2019; Mbaiwa, Mogomotsi, Mbaiwa & Siphambe, 2019; Quiggin, 2014). Owing to globalisation, DMOs now possess the capacity to engage international audiences, facilitating effective destination promotion (Dwyer & Čavlek, 2019; Stalmirska, 2020). As individuals traverse the increasingly interconnected, globalised world, their engagement with diverse media platforms assumes a pivotal role, the influence of which can differ based on their geographical position within either the Global North or the Global South (Adams, 2018; Imoh, Bourdillon & Meichsner, 2019). The disparity between the Global North and the Global South becomes evident when considering the varying levels of technological advancement and resource sufficiency. The Global North generally exhibits a higher degree of technological infrastructure and resource availability (Anguelovski, Shi, Chu, Gallagher, Goh, Lamb, Reeve & Teicher, 2016; Odeh, 2010). Conversely, the Global South is primarily comprised of developing nations characterised by heightened levels of poverty and constrained technological capabilities (Morgan, 2015; Odeh, 2010; Omeje, 2017). Consequently, numerous destinations within the Global South may find it challenging to rival their Northern counterparts, which are situated within more

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advantageous conditions for enticing tourists (Saarinen & Rogerson, 2021). Nevertheless, irrespective of these disparities, administration and implementation of destination practices across both the Global North and the Global South remain the same (Brown & Hall, 2008; Haelewaters, Hofmann & Romero-Olivares, 2021; Imoh *et al.*, 2019; Saarinen & Rogerson, 2021).

Tourism has emerged as a significant catalyst for economic revitalisation, employment generation, place promotion, urban transformation, and the formation of identity within the Global North-South spectrum (Hagen, 2010; Perkins & Mackay, 2022). Significantly, in certain nations within the developing world, especially within Africa, tourism assumes an instrumental role in stimulating economic progression (Brown & Hall, 2008; Rogerson & Van der Merwe, 2016; Saarinen & Rogerson, 2021). Although the African contribution to the worldwide tourism economy remains comparatively modest, the region's relevance is escalating (UNWTO, 2020).

1.2 Problem Statement

Tourism plays an instrumental role in creating the image of countries and regions. Yet, particularly for African destinations, a formidable challenge persists in dispelling negative preconceptions that tarnish their destination brands (Anholt, 2007; Seyfi, Rastegar, Rasoolimanesh & Hall, 2023). Such adverse perceptions may emanate from diverse factors including entrenched stereotypes, media depictions, political volatility, economic discrepancies, and cultural misinterpretations (Adetokunbo-Edmund, 2016; Anholt, 2016; Nworah, 2009). Adding to the complexity, sporadic incidences of disturbances in certain regions often provoke misleading generalisations about the entire continent, further emphasising negative connotations among potential visitors (Keim & Somerville, 2017). Consequently, numerous African nations are facing the challenging endeavour of strategically positioning their destination brand image to highlight their potential and distinctive attributes (Fyall, 2019; Woyo & Slabbert, 2020). Social media offers a significant tool for African destinations to showcase aunthentic experiences and drive positive narratives (Madondo, 2016).

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Tourist perceptions of a destination can be paralleled to consumer brand perceptions in the marketplace (Lim, Chung & Weaver, 2012; Luo, Dey, Yalkin, Sivarajah, Punjaisri, Huang & Yen, 2020). These perceptions guide visitors in making travel choices (Ezeuduji & Mlambo, 2019). Resultantly, tourist destination selection is primarily shaped by these pre-existing perceptions (Chen, Li & Joo, 2021; Ekinci, Sirakaya-Turk & Preciado, 2013).

The existing scholarly discourse on African destinations is marked by a dominance of publications that characteristically portray the continent as a brand associated with negative connotations, including impoverishment, underdevelopment, corruption, and destruction (Osei & Gbadamosi, 2011). Notwithstanding the escalating global interest in destination branding research, there is a shortage of academic attention specifically aimed at African destinations (Girma & Singh, 2019; Hurombo, Muzondo & Kaseke, 2014). Similarly, the role and influence of social media in shaping destination marketing strategies remains underexplored in the African context (Mostert, 2016).

Several studies have briefly explored certain dimensions of destination branding from African perspective such as brand image (Avraham & Ketter, 2017; De Klerk & Haarhoff, 2019; Girma & Singh, 2019; Sigwele, Prinsloo & Pelser, 2018), brand identity (dos Santos, 2014), personality (Kankhuni, 2020; Klabi, 2012), positioning (Trimeche, Wakabayashi & Trimeche, 2012), perception (Tukamushaba, Xiao & Ladkin, 2016), brand essence (Ezeuduji & Mlambo, 2019) and destination branding in general (Amara, 2017; Marczak & Borzyszkowski, 2020). Yet a comprehensive exploration of these dimensions, specifically within the African context, remains noticeably absent in the existing research corpus (Brown & Hall, 2008; Haelewaters *et al.*, 2021; Saarinen & Rogerson, 2021). Dearth of such literature is particularly pertinent given the key role destination branding plays in moulding the perception and image of destinations. In the case of African destinations, this deficit of scholarly focus undermines the development of efficacious branding strategies, which could challenge prevailing stereotypes and misconceptions related to the continent.

Strategic application of social media in destination branding, specifically focusing on emerging destinations in the Global South, has been minimally examined. The landscape of social media research is rapidly expanding, (Jorge, Teixeira, Fonseca,

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Correia & Gonçalves, 2020; Kantamaa, 2020; Kilgour *et al.*, 2015), encapsulating destination marketing (Dedeoğlu *et al.*, 2019b; Fairley, 2019). In the prevailing digital epoch, a diverse array of social media platforms demonstrates unique functionalities and varying degrees of popularity (Bhandari & Bimo, 2022; Kietzmann, Hermkens, McCarthy & Silvestre, 2011), resulting in discrete opportunities for DMOs to engage target audiences.

Current literature highlights a confined understanding of the strategic utilisation of social media platforms by DMOs (Naeem & Ozuem, 2021; Pino *et al.*, 2019; Seo *et al.*, 2020; Thomaz *et al.*, 2017; Uşaklı *et al.*, 2019). The strategic utilisation involves an evaluated and deliberate deployment of an assortment of digital tools available within the realm of social media (Hays *et al.*, 2013). DMOs adeptly leverage these platforms, inclusive of, but not limited to, Facebook, X, Instagram, YouTube, to enhance branding efforts whilst fostering significant engagement with stakeholders and targeted audiences (Mariani *et al.*, 2016; Uşaklı, Koç & Sönmez, 2017). However, the absence of a clear strategy often undermines these efforts (Hays *et al.* (2013). Concurrently, an ongoing discourse continues to exist on the frictional relationship between corporate and social media culture, which substantially influences the way in which organisations utilise social media platforms (Mele *et al.*, 2021; Munar, 2012; Watkins, 2021).

As underscored by Hays *et al.* (2013) and Uşaklı *et al.* (2017), a significant number of DMOs currently integrate social media platforms into their promotional campaigns, but lack a defined strategic framework. This prevailing paradigm significantly challenges DMO's branding initiatives, diluting the effectiveness of their efforts to present a unique and persuasive brand image for their respective destinations (De las Heras-Pedrosa, Millan-Celis, Iglesias-Sánchez & Jambrino-Maldonado, 2020).

Comprehension of effective strategies for curating appropriate content and placement on social media platforms is crucial for aligning destination's brand identity with its image, this knowledge presents formidable challenges for DMOs (Hay, Chien & Ruhanen, 2022; Munar, 2012), since they must manoeuvre social media complexities while maintaining consistency and authenticity in how they project the brand across the platforms. This shortage is particularly noticeable in the deficit of both theoretical

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awareness and empirical investigations into the precise impact of social media content on destination brands (Dhanesh, Duthler & Li, 2022; Oliveira & Panyik, 2015).

The ubiquitous nature and influence of social media platforms have attracted significant scholarly attention towards the concept of user engagement and its role in destination branding initiatives (Aydin, 2020). Study by Archer (2018) noted that social media assumes an integral role in establishing connection with target audience. Therefore, understanding how DMOs can strategically navigate the dynamic nature of social media platforms, where content updates occur continuously, is essential (Shao, Rodriguez & Gretzel, 2016). DMOs must explore innovative approaches that focus on content composition rooted in destination's identity in order to optimise user engagement. Effective user engagement with content disseminated on social media platforms has become a hallmark of a successful destination marketing efforts (So, Wei & Martin, 2021).

1.3 Study Aim and Objectives

The study aim was to investigate how DMOs translate their destination's brand identity, as articulated in their strategic documents, into a brand image projected across various social media platforms.

The study was guided by four main objectives, built around a phased approach. Firstly, a comprehensive analysis of the existing body of literature pertaining to destination branding and the intersection with social media (Phase 1). Secondly, an analysis of DMOs' strategic documents (Phase 2). Thirdly, an examination of DMOs' social media content and user engagement (Phase 3).

Objective 1: Phase 1

To examine the existing literature on destination branding and the integration of social media to establish the state of destination branding research by identifying branding dimensions that have drawn scholarly attention. Objective 1 was linked to the following sub-objectives:

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- Describe the existing body of literature and provide a profile of destination branding and social media articles published between 2010 and 2020.
- Identify research methodologies utilised to study destination branding and social media.
- Identify destination branding dimensions and social media platforms studied.
- To gain a regional perspective on the destinations receiving research attention (Global North/Global South).

Objective 2: Phase 2

To analyse the strategic documents of seven case study DMOs to determine whether and how the key elements of destination strategy and brand identity feature, as well as to evaluate the extent to which social media is integrated as part of the strategy. Objective 2 was linked to the following sub-objectives:

- Determine how strategy-related content is communicated in the strategic documents.
- Determine how brand identity-related content is articulated in the strategic documents.
- Determine the extent to which social media features as a strategic priority as expressed in DMOs' strategic documents.

Objective 3: Phase 3

To conduct an analysis of the composition of social media content to determine whether content strategically aligned with the brand identity articulated in strategic documents and evaluate the resulting user engagement. Linked to objective 3, are the following sub-objectives:

- Analyse thematic composition of DMOs' social media content to determine the occurrence of the themes, categories and codes identified in the strategic documents.
- To analyse the content format utilised to disseminate social media content related to the different themes, categories and codes identified in the strategic documents.
- To analyse user engagement with social media content related to the different themes, categories and codes identified in the strategic documents.

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Objective 4: Conceptual framework

To develop a conceptual framework depicting the alignment between DMOs' social media practices and destination brand identity with the aim to guide DMOs in leveraging social media as a critical branding tool that falls within the overall branding strategy.

1.4 Conceptual Framework

Figure 1 presents the proposed conceptual framework, which is a theoretical premise of this study. The framework illustrates the relationship between two themes, destination branding and social media. The framework is based on established research in strategic planning, branding, and social media domains. The framework will be refined in the final chapters of the study based on empirical findings. Each component of this framework corresponds to a distinct research phase, as outlined below.

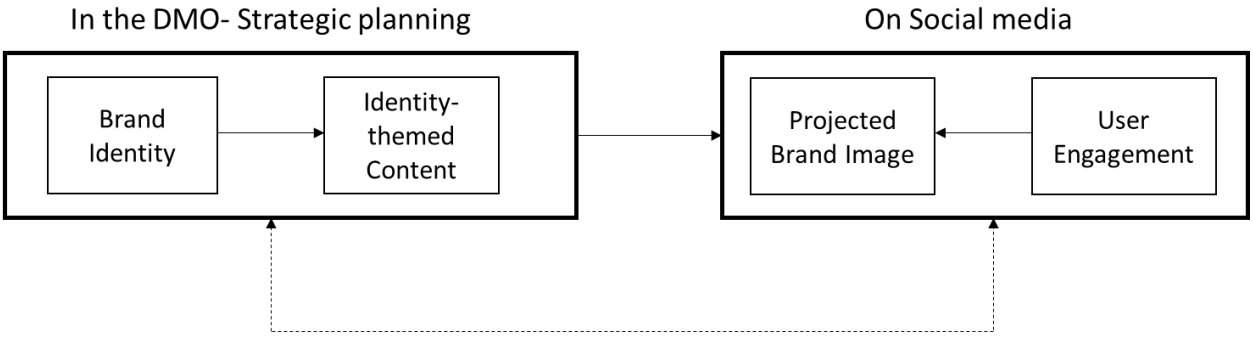
Literature review: The framework's foundation is reliant on the comprehensive literature review, which guides both the 'In the DMO' and 'Social Media' components. This section involves systematic quantitative literature review to establish key destination branding concepts and social media platforms that have attracted scholarly attention.

Document Analysis: The 'In the DMO' side, analysis of DMOs' strategic documents is conducted. This phase will reveal how DMOs express their identity in the documents.

Social Media Analysis: On the 'Social Media' side, this side focus on nature of the content disseminated by DMOs on social media platforms.

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Figure 1: Conceptual model



Source: Author's conception.

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1.5 Research Approach and Methodology

The study utilises a mixed-methods approach, combining both quantitative and qualitative methodologies.

1.5.1 Case study research

The study utilises a case study approach as it provides a descriptive and exploratory analysis of a specific context to enhance the understanding of the subject matter (Cousin, 2005; Yin, 2018). South Africa is used as a case study because it demonstrates a comparable tourism growth pattern, and the economic role that the sector contributes into the national fiscus (Du Plessis, Saayman & Van der Merwe, 2015; Prayag, 2007; Rogerson & Visser, 2017). South Africa is classified as an emerging and developing economy and stands out as one of the most populous countries in Africa, with an estimated population of 60.14 million by mid-year 2021 (StatsSA, 2021b). South Africa ranked as one of the admired destinations in Africa (SAT, 2021c; Visser, 2003). It is commonly regarded as the gateway to Africa from various perspectives, encompassing economic, geographical, and tourism aspects (Games, 2012; Kahn, 2011; Pollet, Staffell & Adamson, 2015; Scholvin & Draper, 2012). Serving as the official DMO for the nation and the tourism marketing entity of the South African government, South African Tourism (SAT) promotes the country as preferred destination for tourism and business events, both domestically and globally (SAT, 2021c). In terms of administrative divisions, South Africa is made of nine provinces, each province possesses its own local DMO known as a tourism agency (SAT, 2020b; SAT, 2021a).

1.5.2 Sampling and data collection

Phase 1 involves a search on database to gather and review relevant articles published between 2010 and 2020 from which focus on destination branding and social media integration. The final sample was composed of 300 articles. Phase 2 involves collecting 62 strategic documents from source DMOs. The process commenced with gathering documents from seven DMOs', including annual reports,

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strategic plans, and promotional materials. The Phase 3 of the study involves collecting social media posts for analysis. The study employs systematic sampling, selecting every second post on DMOs' social media from 03 March 2022 going backwards covering 60 posts on each platform, in textual and photographic formats.

1.5.3 Data analysis

Phase 1 data analysis employs descriptive statistics to explore differences between the different elements identified in each sampled article (publishing profile, methods applied, social media inclusion). Chi-square is also used to determine whether there are significant differences between the categories. In addition, a Two-Step cluster analysis is conducted to discern distinct article types, considering an amalgamation of the variables (Kent, Jensen & Kongsted, 2014). Phase 2 data analysis employs deductive thematic content analysis to assess DMOs' strategic documents. This involves developing an initial coding scheme based on predetermined themes and categories (informed by the findings from Phase 1) using Atlas.ti . Phase 3 data analysis involves social media content analysis wherein an extensive volume of DMOs' social media posts on Facebook, X and Instagram is systematically categorised into themes, categories and codes aligned to those identified in Phase 2.

1.6 Academic Contribution of the Study

This scholarly investigation contributes to the academic domains of destination branding and social media, exploring regional distinctions between the Global North and the Global South. The study sheds light on the geographical focus of destination branding and social media research to highlighting gaps and conceptual areas that requires scholarly attention. In this manner the study advances the discourse on global disparities in the two fields. Another contribution of the study involves the research methodological approaches employed in destination branding and social media studies, by way of drawing attention into scholars' methodological preferences when studying destination branding and social media. This highlights potential gaps where different methods may provide additional insights, apart from that which is gained from the mostly repeated forms of research methods employed. On the perspective of

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social media study in destination branding research, the study's contribution is in the identification social media platforms that have attracted varied scholarly attention. In this manner, the study aids in painting a picture reflecting trends, opportunities within this research domain.

The study presents a unique exploration and description of the manner in which DMOs navigate the challenge of crafting social media strategies that are consistent with their overall strategic goals and further reflect the destination's brand identity. To maintain the alignment, DMO's overall strategy must integrate social media strategy into their broader strategy order to ensure continuous alignment. As established in the study's findings, achieving strategic alignment is of critical importance for projecting a consistent destination on social media.

The study contributes to the literature through examining the different approaches and levels of adoption of social media within strategic marketing efforts, thus, providing a comprehensive explanation regarding how DMOs adopt and integrate social media strategies.

The current study provides platform-specific insights through examining how the categories of strategy and brand identity themes—vision, mission, positioning, values, and product—are exhibited on various social media platforms in different content formats (textual, photographic). Furthermore, the study isolates thematic elements that garner most user engagement, distinguishing the most effective ways to represent strategic dimensions given each platform's features.

The study introduces a revised theoretical framework, the Destination Branding-Social Media Alignment Framework (DBSMA) which serve as a guiding compass in the strategic utilisation of social media. Informed by the current study, the framework brings together key concepts of strategic formulation and destination branding with insights on the effect of social media. The framework's contribution lies on providing the understanding of the dynamics that underlie effective destination branding strategies and the seamless integration of social media. The DBSMA model presents a structured approach for ensuring that DMOs' strategic planning is effectively aligned with their social media efforts. The model outlines how a DMO's identity, based on the destination's key attributes and offerings, is articulated in strategic documents and

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subsequently reflected in social media activities. It highlights the significance of consistent content creation, ongoing monitoring and evaluation of user engagement, and the ability to adapt to the dynamic changes in the social media environment. The practical contribution of the study highlights the framework as a potent tool for DMOs, and destination marketers. The model serves as a practical guiding apparatus for DMOs to ensure that their destination's identity is accurately and coherently represented across social media platforms.

1.7 Delimitations

The delimitations of the study include the timeframe, language, selected case studies, and social media platforms. The study's literature review and document analysis consider those published between 2010 to 2020 for data collection and analysis. This time limitation excludes data post-2020. The study deliberately exclusively considers articles, and documents written in English-language, omitting research and documents in other languages. This is imposed to maintain linguistic consistency and researcher's other languages proficiency. DMO case studies: the study is limited to South African DMOs, including only the National and seven Provincial DMOs. Regional and local DMOs are not considered. Lastly, the study deliberately focuses on specific social media platforms used that appeared to garner scholarly research attention due to their prominence, thus omitting consideration of least-prominent platforms. These delimitations set parameters of the study, thus defining its scope and focus areas.

1.8 Assumptions

The present research is underpinned by certain foundational principles and assumptions regarded as true within the context of this study. These are articulated as follows:

The study assumes that the timeframe chosen for data collection, from 2010 to 2020, is appropriate for providing insights into the state of destination branding research over this period. The study assumes that majority of destination branding literature are articulated in the English-language, and that it is enough to present the state of

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destination branding research. The study assumes the social media posts selected provides a representative sample and reflection of the selected DMOs' social media practices. The analysis of sampled posts thus provides reflection of DMOs' broader social media strategy for projecting their brand image.

1.9 Conclusion

As illustrated in this Chapter, strategic destination competitiveness relies on effective destination branding and its integration into the organisations' strategies. Branding is essential for developing distinctive positioning for a destination in the minds of potential visitors. Social media assumes a significant role in this process through increasing brand visibility and fostering user engagement. The main problem is that the strategic application of social media in destination branding, specifically focusing on emerging destinations in the Global South, has been minimally examined.

The chapter provided an overview of the background, aims and objectives, and methods employed to execute the study. The next three chapters will unpack the literature on destination management (chapter 2), destination branding (chapter 3) and social media (chapter 3) as the theoretical foundations of the study.

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CHAPTER 2: STRATEGIC DESTINATION MANAGEMENT

A destination transcends its geographical boundaries, embodying both tangible sites and intangible perceptions, enriched by unique values and connotations, and immersed in cultural, social, and economic resonance (Campelo, Aitken, Thyne & Gnoth, 2014). This intricate confluence of physical attributes and symbolic elements emphasises the role of effective destination branding in shaping its identity, and image (He, Deng, Li & Gu, 2022; Marques, da Silva & Antova, 2021).

A destination is comprised of combinations of tourism product solutions and experience to consumers (Buhalis, 2000; Susilowati & Sugandini, 2018). The natural and socio-cultural environments of a destination are valuable resources for tourism and are owned by the local community (Mihalic & Kuščer, 2021). The tourism industry is extensive and multifaceted (Sedarati, Santos & Pintassilgo, 2019), with fierce competition that necessitates destinations to enhance their competitiveness, efficiency, and effectiveness (Kim & Kim, 2013; Lasso & Dahles, 2018). DMOs play a critical role in coordinating tourism-related activities and achieving better organisational and destination performance at various levels, such as city, region, or national (Sotiriadis & Shen, 2017). Through strategic collaboration and coordination of various entities, DMOs create destination management systems that work efficiently (Emmer & Holešinská, 2019).

The forthcoming chapter embarks upon a detailed scrutiny of the scholarly works centred around destination management, competitiveness, and marketing within the African landscape. This review provides a comprehensive understanding of the topic and facilitates a profound appreciation of the premise necessary for laying the groundwork for the problem statement and hypothesis. The discourse then methodically evaluates select facets of destination competitiveness frameworks, with an accentuated emphasis on the dynamics of destination management and the strategies of destination marketing.

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2.1 Destination Management: African Context

This section offers an all-encompassing investigation into the existing body of literature concerning African tourism. Specifically focusing on three crucial aspects, namely, destination management, destination competitiveness, and destination marketing (Hankinson, 2015; Kavaratzis, 2005; Melewar & Dennis, 2014). Place branding surpasses conventional domains of inbound investment and leisure tourism to encompass a broader function in luring tourists towards a destination (Hankinson, 2005). Place branding is not limited to cities, regions, and countries but also applies to smaller-scale destinations such as shopping destinations and leisure parks (Ashworth & Kavaratzis, 2009; Hankinson, 2015). The concept of place branding is expansive, encompassing not only vast geographical areas such as cities and nations but also specific locales like shopping precincts and recreational parks (Ashworth & Kavaratzis, 2009), and has become a significant area of academic interest, including destination branding (Dioko, Harrill & María Munar, 2011; Hankinson, 2001).

The significance of tourism in African development planning has garnered significant attention in various countries, owing to its potential role in contributing to economic growth and development (Hawkins & Mann, 2007; Signé, 2018; Snyman, 2012; Stauvermann & Kumar, 2017). However, tourism growth is not evenly distributed across destinations, and managing destinations is critical to ensuring sustainable growth (Adeola, Boso & Evans, 2018; Mahadevan & Suardi, 2019; Rogerson, 2007). Africa's tourism growth requires the aptitude to manage destinations (Pike & Page, 2014; Volgger & Pechlaner, 2014). DMO is responsible for strategic planning, managing, identifying, and organising key destination resources (Presenza, Sheehan & Ritchie, 2005; Sheehan *et al.*, 2016; van Niekerk, 2014a). In the case of numerous developing nations such as Aruba, Turkey, and South Africa, destination management is as yet determined by a solitary public authority (van Niekerk, 2014a; Van Niekerk, 2014b).

South Africa is a highly competitive tourist destination in the African region, occupying the 61st position globally (WEF, 2019). The South African government has shown considerable interest in promoting tourism as a catalyst for national development, as

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documented in the policy discourse (Visser & Hoogendoorn, 2011). Schedule 4 and 5 of the Constitution of South Africa clarifies that tourism development, planning, and local tourism are local government capacities (South Africa, 1996a). The public sector is the DMO with a significant number of destinations, and this sector plays a fundamental role in strategic destination development and marketing (van Niekerk, 2014a).

To establish a unique destination brand, the elements of African tourism destination brands must be unified (Anholt, 2007; George, 2017; Lin, Pearson & Cai, 2011). Wildlife and other natural attractions play a crucial role in African and South African tourism, attracting a substantial number of tourists (Dube & Nhamo, 2020). A significant number of international tourists from all over the globe are particularly drawn to tourism that has its focus on wildlife. The bulk of Africa's revenue is earned through wildlife tourism (Lubbe, Du Preez, Douglas & Fairer-Wessels, 2019). Experiencing wild animals first-hand, observing their natural behaviours, and admiring their natural beauty, is what makes wildlife tourism so enticing. (Tapper, 2006). Another aspect is that urban spaces have emerged as a focal point in South Africa's overall tourism product portfolio, however, the choice of destinations by overseas visitors to South Africa is heavily influenced by nature-based tourism products (Rogerson & Visser, 2017).

A tourist destination's arts, culture and heritage can play a critical role in boosting tourism (Alberti & Giusti, 2012). There has been a rapid growth in culture tourism in Africa in recent years, with museums and art galleries offering various experiences (Mohale, McKay & Van der Merwe, 2020). With so many cultural products on offer in South Africa, the country is actively promoting cultural tourism due to the way in which its cultural products contribute to local economic development and job creation (Mohale *et al.*, 2020). There are a number of different cultures in South Africa, making it a unique, rainbow nation (Chivandi, Samuel & Muchie, 2020; Mokoena, 2020). Dozens of cultural villages have been constructed as a result of preserving these cultures (Mokoena, 2020).

Cultural tourism is the pursuit and involvement in activities related to cultural experiences that are new and deep, be it aesthetic, intellectual, emotional, or

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psychological (Chivandi *et al.*, 2020; Stebbins, 1996). Tourists are having a greater desire to consume indigenous cultures/experiences due to new tourism trends (Chivandi *et al.*, 2020). A focus on both cultural and creative assets is argued to be critical from the standpoint of development, as it opens up potential pathways out of poverty by expanding the benefits of urban tourism, which has recently grown exponentially into peripheral township areas (Booyens & Rogerson, 2019).

The rich and diverse heritage embedded within the global South has exerted a profound influence on the trajectory of development for countless destinations (Drummond, Drummond & Rogerson, 2021). The field of heritage tourism represents a distinct sector within the broader tourism industry and is experiencing significant and rapid growth (Bhowmik, 2021). In addition to its competitive tourism offerings, South Africa is also home to a rich array of heritage sites, further enhancing its appeal as a destination (Viljoen & Henama, 2017). There is an inextricable connection between tourism and heritage (Sun, Timothy, Wang, Min & Su, 2019). Heritage consists of collective memories of the past rooted in local identities (Marschall, 2019). The post-apartheid planning process identified heritage tourism as a critical niche market for tourism promotion and diversification of product mix, as well as providing untapped potential for local and regional tourism (van der Merwe, 2019).

South Africa's physical resources have long been recognised as one of the country's primary attractions, particularly in the realm of adventure tourism (McKay, 2016). Adventure tourism has undergone significant expansion since the 1990s and is currently regarded as a prominent industry (McKay, 2018). A range of exhilarating and physically demanding experiences entice tourists to venture beyond their accustomed limits (McKay, 2018; Rantala, Rokenes & Valkonen, 2018). A summed up definition is provided by The Adventure Travel Trade Association (ATTA) and Janowski, Gardiner and Kwek (2021) who distinguish the concept "adventure tourism" as a journey that encompasses a combination of at least two out of the following three components: engaging in physical activities, exploring natural landscapes, and experiencing cultural immersion. The adventure tourism market in South Africa is not yet saturated in comparison to other regions worldwide. Major adventure tourism operators are presently concentrated in metropolitan areas such as Western Cape, KwaZulu-Natal, and Gauteng (McKay, 2018).

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South Africa boasts an extensive coastline spanning more than 3000 kilometres, from the arid border shared with Namibia along the Atlantic western coast, extending northeast all the way to the subtropical border with Mozambique on the Indian Ocean (Friedrich & Stahl, 2019). Ocean and coastal tourism is recognised as a fast-growing and highly prominent sector in today's tourism industry. This form of tourism entails recreational activities and experiences that take place in and around the oceanic and coastal environments (Leposa, 2020; Rogerson, 2020). Coastal and Maritime Tourism (CMT) offers a tremendous opportunity for South Africa, is an important part of the ocean economy, can also create employment and foster sustainability (Bob, Swart, Ngalawa & Nzimande, 2018). It is estimated that by 2033, oceans in South Africa will contribute between R129 billion and R177 billion to the Gross Domestic Product (GDP) (Bob *et al.*, 2018).

A variety of activities are available for visitors to coastal and maritime destinations (Carvache-Franco, Carvache-Franco, Carvache-Franco & Hernández-Lara, 2020). The product base of South Africa enables it to attract international beach vacationers, including additional attractions that support its beach product and match market trends (Bob *et al.*, 2018). According to Wong (1986), tourism related to coastal areas tends to stand out among other forms of tourism. Coastal tourism covers every aspect of tourism, leisure, and recreational activity occurring along the coast and in the coastal waters (Drius, Bongiorni, Depellegrin, Menegon, Pugnetti & Stifter, 2019; Hall, 2001). The definition of coastal tourism is: land-based tourism that involves activities such as swimming, surfing, sunbathing and other coast-related recreation which is dependent upon proximity to the sea and its services (Drius *et al.*, 2019; Munien, Gumede, Gounden, Bob, Gounden & Perry, 2019; Wilks, 2021).Maritime tourism includes activities such as sailing, yachting, cruising, nautical sports, as well as land-based services and infrastructure related to those activities (Munien *et al.*, 2019; Nabi & Salimullah, 2022).

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2.2 Destination Competitiveness

The significance of destination management in maintaining competitiveness of destinations has been emphasised by numerous scholars and researchers (Altinay & Kozak, 2021; Khan, Khan, Lim, Tan & Ahmed, 2021; Zhu, Zhan & Li, 2021). It is widely acknowledged that effective destination management plays a crucial role in ensuring the sustained appeal and desirability of a destination in the face of increasing competition in the global tourism market (Dredge & Jenkins, 2007; Dwyer & Kim, 2003). The concept of competitiveness has been explained by numerous authors and researchers as a multidimensional and relative concept and can be investigated from various angles be it from country, industry, or organisations (Camagni, 2017; Dwyer & Kim, 2003; Porter, 1980).

Competere, a Latin word from which the term competitiveness is derived, refers to engagement in a competition for business markets (Ajitabh & Momaya, 2003). According to Waheeduzzaman and Ryans Jr (1996), competitiveness has connotations on both microenvironmental and macroenvironmental levels and its definition is highly subjective to how a nation perceives itself. The level and fierceness of competition in each industry determines the extent of investment returns, and consequently, the capacity to attain high returns (Flammer, 2015; Kirzner, 2015; Porter, 1980).

The resilience of the five fundamental competitive forces is contingent upon the financial and technological characteristics prevalent within the industry (Porter, 1997). These forces, which shape the competitive landscape, are intricately intertwined with the financial and technological aspects, ultimately influencing the industry's steadfastness (Porter, 1980). Porter (1980) and Ajitabh and Momaya (2003) point out that competitive forces influence the extent of industry rivalry and profitability. The significance of different competitive forces varies with time and context, the most prominent forces being crucial for the formulation of the strategy. Formulation of a competitive strategy should align the organisation to best deal with or influence competitive forces, as well as elucidate where strategic changes may produce a

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favourable outcome against competitive forces (Bryson & George, 2020; Donnellan & Rutledge, 2019).

Competitive advantage (Porter, 1980) is broadly acknowledged as being an aspect significant to the success of various forms of entities. Rugman and D'cruz (1993) and Porter and Van der Linde (1995) explain that competitiveness emanates from exceptional efficiency through offering products at lower costs than competitors or offer products at a premium price with superior value.

The concept of competitiveness has become intertwined with the discourse in tourism literature, serving as a pivotal element in determining the triumph of tourism destinations (Cucculelli & Goffi, 2016; Dwyer & Kim, 2003). Consequently, this subject has garnered considerable attention from scholars, resulting in a proliferation of definitions and models aimed at elucidating the intricacies of destination competitiveness (Cucculelli & Goffi, 2016; Dwyer & Kim, 2003). Destination competitiveness has been defined by authors and researchers through diverse perspectives and viewpoints. Nevertheless, there seems to be a shared underlying theme among these definitions. Dwyer and Kim (2003) prescribe destination competitiveness as related to the capability of the destination to provide a product offering that offers higher experience satisfaction when compared to an alternative destination on aspects that are deemed to be crucial by tourists. Buhalis (2000) adds that destination competitiveness contributes to the accomplishment of profitability over a long period and that the capability to grow tourism expenditure, attracting tourists, and delivering on expectations by offering superior experience, makes tourism destination competitive. Closely linked to this thought is that which is provided by Ritchie and Crouch (2003) who clarify that it is the capability to increase tourism expenditure profitably, by attracting a larger number of tourists and satisfying them with memorable experiences. Adding to the definition of destination competitiveness, Hassan (2000) promulgates sustainability-focused description that aims to establish capability to develop and assimilate a value-added offering that sustains resources, while simultaneously preserving the market position of competitors within the industry.

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2.2.1 Destination competitiveness models

Dwyer and Kim (2003) prescribe that competitiveness of a destination is contingent upon its ability to offer a product that yields higher levels of experiential satisfaction compared to alternative destinations. Destination competitiveness contributes to the accomplishment of profitability over a long period of time, the capability to grow tourism expenditure, attracting tourists, and delivering on expectations by offering superior experiences, making tourism destination competitive (Buhalis, 2000) . Ritchie and Crouch (2003) clarify that it is the capability (by attracting a larger number of tourists and satisfying them with memorable experiences) to increase tourism expenditure profitably. Adding to the definition of destination competitiveness Hassan (2000) promulgates sustainability-focused description that aims to establish capability to develop and assimilate a value-added offering that sustains resources while simultaneously preserving the market position in relation to competitors within the industry. Destination competitiveness models proposed by different authors are presented in the accompanying passages.

Ritchie and Crouch's destination competitiveness model

The model established by Ritchie and Crouch (2003) is the most prominent and widely applied model in destination competitiveness and many authors have anchored their studies on it (Cucculelli & Goffi, 2016). The model is premised on the set of five fundamental aspects (qualifying and amplifying determinants; destination policy, planning and development; destination management; core resources and attractors; and, supporting factors and resources) which are sub-categorised to make a total of 36 determinants that assume a pivotal function in destination competitiveness.

The model presents destination policy, planning, and development as the second main component that contributes to destination competitiveness and sustainability, values and branding are sub-categories of destination policy, planning, and development, making values and branding to be the most important aspects of destination competitiveness in the scope of the proposed study. Organisation of the destination (structure of the DMO) and marketing are sub-categories of the third main component which is destination management.

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Dwyer and Kim's destination competitiveness model

Dwyer and Kim (2003) established a model and indicators of destination competitiveness that allows contrast amongst countries and tourism industries. It shares similarities with that of Ritchie and Crouch (2003) as it studies the main elements of competitiveness. The model highlights core elements of competitiveness and clusters all elements of the current study at the level of destination management, which is different to Ritchie and Crouch (2003). The sub-categories are destination marketing organisation; destination marketing management; and destination planning, policy, and development.

Hassan's destination competitiveness model

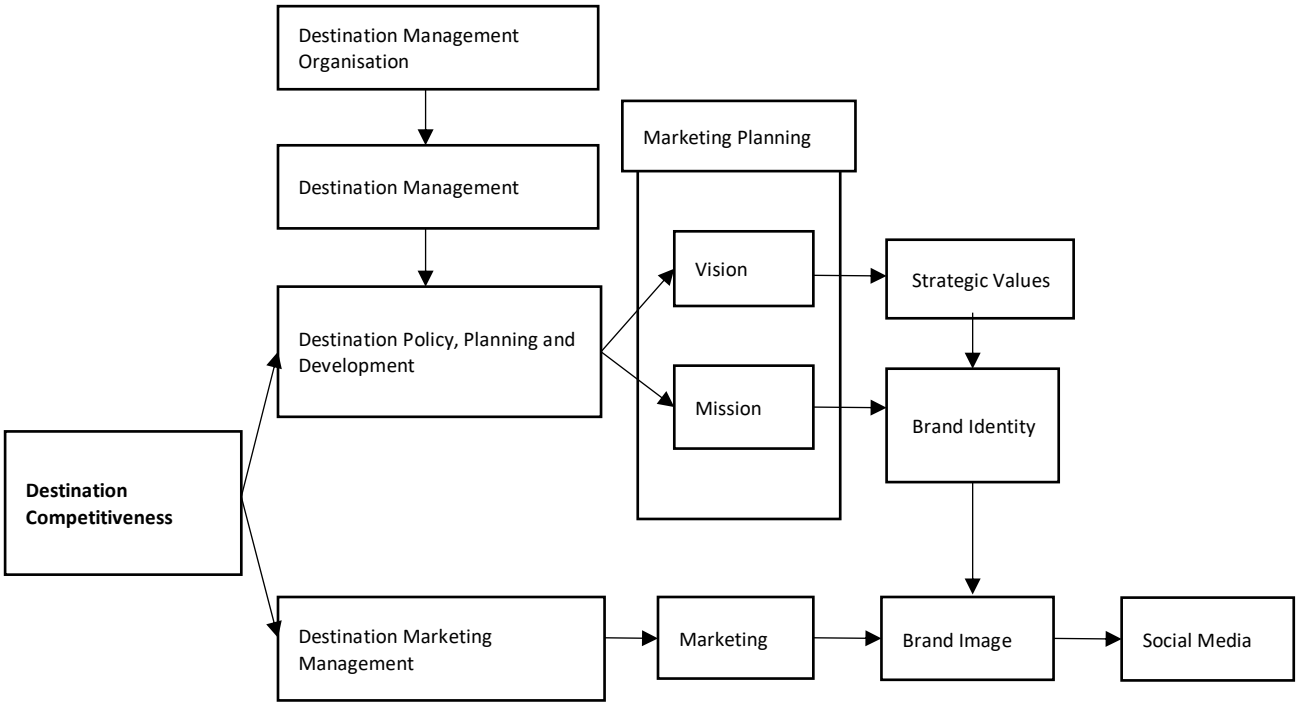
Most competitiveness models have paid specific attention to organisation as an item of examination for a wide spectrum of industries (Cronjé & du Plessis, 2020). Hassan (2000) developed a model of destination competitiveness that acknowledges environmental sustainability elements linked to tourism destinations. The model focuses on establishing a strategic competitiveness basis for the tourism industry. The model underscores that tourism policy, destination marketing campaign and enforcement organisation are determinants of environmental commitment, which is one of the four contributors into market competitiveness.

In the different models of destination competitiveness discussed there was a notable comparability, although there was contrast in approach, application, and context of each model. There is a common thread in definitions and in the deployment of the main elements of destination competitiveness. In the greater parts of the models, the aspects of destination management, DMO, policy, planning and development, and destination marketing feature as key components of destination competitiveness. The subsequent discussions will expand on these components to describe the connection between the higher-level tasks of management and strategy formulation to the tactical functions of destination marketing. These distinctive components work interchangeably, and it is this interaction that forms the basis of the proposed study's question to understand how communication of strategic brand values align with the preceding strategic tasks through closely focusing on elements of destination competitiveness such as destination management, policy, planning and development and branding.

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Fusion of above destination competitiveness is depicted in Figure 2, bringing about the conceptual model of the literature review as shown in Figure 2.

Figure 2: Fusion of destination competitiveness models



Source: Adapted from Ritchie and Crouch (2003), Dwyer and Kim (2003) and Morrison (2013).

2.3 Destination Management

The field of tourism encompasses a vast array of stakeholders, each with their own set of interests, which can be highly varied and multifaceted (Haukeland, Daugstad & Vistad, 2011). The intricate nature of tourism necessitates the pivotal role played by DMOs in guaranteeing the effective governance of tourist destinations. (Høegh-Guldberg, Seeler & Eide, 2021; Sotiriadis & Shen, 2017). The growth and success of the tourism sector in any given region rely heavily on the vital aspect of engaging stakeholders efficiently throughout the entire process of planning, development, and management of destinations (Sotiriadis & Shen, 2017; Tosun, 2006). The involvement of stakeholders allows for the integration of different perspectives, which can lead to the development of more comprehensive strategies that cater to the diverse needs of the industry and the community (Nomm, Albrecht & Lovelock, 2020). Therefore, DMOs

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must carefully balance the interests of various stakeholders and ensure that their input is integrated into the decision-making process (McGrath, Lockstone-Binney, Ong, Wilson-Evered, Blaer & Whitelaw, 2020). DMOs can play a pivotal role as mediators in the tourism industry by coordinating with diverse stakeholders and fostering collaborations that guarantee the sustainability of tourism while simultaneously promoting the economic, social, and cultural development of the area.

2.3.1 Overview

The field of destination management and marketing has experienced considerable growth, encompassing the examination of tourism destination development, management, and planning from various disciplinary angles such as marketing and policy (Avila-Robinson & Wakabayashi, 2018; Beritelli & Laesser, 2016; Morrison, 2013).

One of the central ideas derived from models focused on the competitiveness of tourist destinations is the initial topic of exploration, namely, destination management. Given the economic, social, and environmental impacts that tourism creates, destinations require understanding and careful guidance in the development and management of the brands that represent them (Campelo *et al.*, 2014). Buhalis (2000) states that destinations are combinations of tourism products, offerings, and incorporated experiences to consumers. In the integrated model of destination competitiveness by Dwyer and Kim (2003), destination management consolidates perspectives that shape and impact the competitive strength of the destination and aspects that form a conducive environment for tourism to thrive.

Destination management is defined by Franch and Martini (2002) and Vernon, Essex, Pinder and Curry (2005) as an aggregate effort that requires different associations and organisations in a topographically restricted territory to agreeably cooperate to accomplish shared strategic objectives, organisational and operative decisions. Similarly, Mill and Morrison (2012) describe destination management as the function of combining and coordinating components of the destination mix (these include infrastructure, events, and attractions) in a specific geographic zone characterised by tourism strategy and plan. Destination management is largely described as an

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overarching process or approach that addresses the necessity to manage the diverse sides of a destination entailing multiple functions to be assumed in a harmonised and integrated way (Pearce, 2015). Destinations involve a combination of tourism products and services, rendering an integrated experience under the umbrella of a brand name (Buhalis, 2000; Campón-Cerro, Hernández-Mogollón & Alves, 2017; Pike & Page, 2014).

Governments faced a significant hurdle in dealing with the intricate nature of the tourism sector, its fragmented structure posing a formidable challenge. In order to address this issue effectively, policymakers established the DMO as a strategic mechanism to facilitate the efficient administration of a given destination (Dredge, 2016). Over time, the acronym DMO has progressed from a connotation positioned on marketing (i.e. Destination Marketing Organisation) to one centred on management (i.e. Destination Management Organisation, for the purpose of the current study the acronym DMO refers only to Destination Marketing Organisation) (Sheehan *et al.*, 2016). The current study looks at the DMO from the perspective of marketing. In satisfying the role of destination management, DMOs do not construct or claim the destination's tourism product and service (Volgger & Pechlaner, 2014). In fact, DMOs embrace strategies and activities of co-ordinating the different stakeholders and role-players of the tourism industry to facilitate destination development (Volgger & Pechlaner, 2014). DMOs have a critical task to carry out in the administration of tourism destinations, in managing destination networks, and in facilitating good collaboration with stakeholders (Foris *et al.*, 2020).

DMOs have faced increasing criticism due to their failure to adapt and reconsider their approaches in light of the profound transformations occurring in the external environment (Sheehan *et al.*, 2016). It is essential for DMOs to embrace an agile and responsive mindset in order to effectively respond to these changes, necessitating the development of strategies that can accommodate and leverage the transformative power of technology, which is arguably the most influential catalyst for change in the tourism industry (Göymen, 2000; Gretzel, Fesenmaier, Formica & O'Leary, 2006; Hannam, 2004).

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Heath and Wall (1991) propose that DMOs satisfy four assignments including articulating strategies and marketing. In the same breath, Sainaghi (2006) classifies DMOs' tasks into fundamental processes which, amongst others, includes communication and support processes. Furthermore, DMOs are responsible for coordination and integration of the destination mix components, thereby assuming a critical role of marketing, management and planning (Bornhorst, Ritchie & Sheehan, 2010; Morrison, 2013; WTO, 2004). Munar (2012) provides a concise overview of the fundamental roles carried out by DMOs. The author argues that DMOs fulfil several key functions, which include the synchronisation of marketing strategies, encompassing the development and promotion of the destination brand, as well as the efficient management of information and knowledge pertaining to the tourism destination.

Dredge (2016) extends the discourse by affirming that the functions of Destination Management Organisations (DMOs) can be categorised into three overarching domains intended to amplify the desired outcomes of the tourism industry. These domains encompass market-enhancing policies, including strategic initiatives such as marketing, promotion, and branding; product-enhancing policies, which focus on refining and enhancing the tourism offerings; and policies specifically aimed at addressing market failures, thus rectifying any deficiencies within the tourism market. Marketing activity of a DMO spreads over catchment areas that may include the whole nation, province, region, or city/town (Blain *et al.*, 2005). The WTO (2004) provides a comprehensive breakdown of tourism categorisation, presenting it in an associated manner as follows:

- National Tourism Authorities or Organisations - have a scope to manage and market tourism at a national level
- Regional, provincial DMOs - are accountable to manage and/or market tourism in a geographic district which can be a province or metropolitan municipality
- Local DMOs - manage tourism activity in a smaller catchment zone such as a local municipality

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2.3.2 Strategic destination planning, policy, and development

Tourist destinations can be perceived as strategic entities within the business realm (Foris *et al.*, 2020). Consequently, destination management is regarded as a comprehensive framework encompassing strategic, organisational, and operational choices that aim to effectively oversee the process of defining and promoting tourism offerings across an entire region (Benvenuto, Sambati & Viola, 2020; Della Corte, D'Andrea, Savastano & Zamparelli, 2017). Morrison (2013) proposes that DMOs assume crucial responsibilities in the realms of leadership and coordination, planning and research, product development, marketing and promotion, as well as stakeholder relations. Expanding upon this notion, Sotiriadis and Shen (2017) contend that the successful management of destinations and the attainment of competitive advantage hinge upon the DMOs' ability to perform their professional leadership role effectively.

The domain of destination management is becoming increasingly complex due to a range of factors, including the growing importance of information and communication technologies, the emergence of new competitors, the global environmental challenges, ongoing economic crises, heightened concerns regarding personal safety and security, and evolving consumer expectations. These multifaceted issues are contributing to the intricate nature of destination management (Andrades & Dimanche, 2017; Neupane, 2019; Sotiriadis & Shen, 2017). To effectively address these challenges, it is imperative for DMOs to adopt a strategy-centric approach and actively engage in every stage of planning, research, development, and marketing (Čorak & Živoder, 2017).

Tourism planning and policy have a notable influence on how tourism develops (Dredge & Jamal, 2015; Dredge & Jenkins, 2007). Gržinić and Saftić (2012) suggest that accomplishing development of the destination is conceivable through rational action plans (Gržinić & Saftić, 2012). Destination action plans intend to establish endeavours to be undertaken following predefined objectives and are of strategic value to the development of the destination (Tanrisevdi, Ozdogan, Acar & Kilicdere, 2021; Vernon *et al.*, 2005).

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Tourism policy-making is viewed as a social activity that distillates on investigating how actors such as institutions, groups, organisations and individuals, relate to one another (Dredge, 2019). Essentially, it is a social process comprising communication and negotiations (Farsari, Butler & Szivas, 2011; Stevenson, Airey & Miller, 2008). Tourism policy sets the context within which competitive destinations can be developed (Crouch & Ritchie, 1999; Ritchie & Crouch, 2010). During planning, strategic orientation is essential for destinations to become competitive and win a superior position in the practical world (Novais, Ruhanen & Arcodia, 2018; Poon, 1993). A policy-lead or strategic agenda for planning and development of a destination can deliver the path to envisioned results (Saqib, 2019; Tewdwr-Jones, Morphet & Allmendinger, 2006). The main purpose of strategy is to highlight key issues and align the organisation to fit into its environment (Bryson & George, 2020; Evans, 2015).

Hassan (2000) states that destination planning, and development is concerned with the systematic investigation of the resource-based qualities of the destination that present a unique comparative advantage. Tourism destination planning and marketing are essentially place-making activities proposed to outline the image and imageability of a place (Lew, 2017). Interpretation of tourism policy portrays it as a composite paradigm that is at the intricate nexus of government, businesses, and not-for-profit organisations (Dredge & Jamal, 2015; Saqib, 2019). The policy involves the government taking a position on or adopting a strategy from the beginning of concepts and development to implementation (Dredge & Jenkins, 2007; Saqib, 2019; Wang & Pizam, 2011). In the summary by Dredge and Jenkins (2007), some of the features of the policy include a commitment to an activity that brings forth an outcome. Once the policy is in place, there must be a process to implement that policy. Dredge and Jenkins (2007) further state that policy implementation is the process through which policy ideas and plans are translated into actionable items and is focused on the development of a system of knowledge.

Policy and planning are interrelated concepts and are in some cases applied reciprocally without distinction, although they are separate terms with distinctive meaning (Barzelay, Andrenacci, Seabra & Yan, 2022). Similar to policymaking, planning includes contending interests and thoughts (Dredge & Jenkins, 2007). In its most basic form, planning is characterised as the action of defining objectives and

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distinguishing ventures to satisfy those objectives (Schwarz, Ram & Rohrbeck, 2019; Wang & Pizam, 2011). Dredge (1999) adds that planning is a process of defining strategic vision. DMOs are progressively moving towards enhancing destination competitiveness through incorporating strategic planning (Phillips & Moutinho, 2014). Longjit and Pearce (2013) suggest that destination management is premised on three inter-related aspects of management, namely, purpose or goals, activities or functions, and structures or organisation.

One of the most basic aspects of destination management is the Destination Management Plan (DMP) which directs performance (Coban & Yildiz, 2019; Hristov & Petrova, 2018). DMP entails strategic vision, objectives, and various long-term interventions to be set up (Hristov & Petrova, 2018; Pearce, 2016; Soulard, Knollenberg, Boley, Perdue & McGehee, 2018), being a strategic policy-driven statement of intent to guide and manage a destination throughout an expressed timeframe, articulate the roles of the various stakeholders and identify the link between strategy and actions (Coban & Yildiz, 2019; Hristov & Petrova, 2018; Neupane, 2019). DMPs promote the implementation of a strategic policy network approach to destination planning, management, and development (Hristov & Petrova, 2018; Pearce, 2016) and directs identification of destination management priority zones to profile the strategic course of both tourism and visitor-oriented destinations (Hristov & Petrova, 2018). DMP is designed to meet the developmental and marketing requisites of a destination, aligning to the needs of the target market (Canosa, Graham & Wilson, 2020; Queensland, 2006). Therefore, the execution of DMPs is of strategic significance because of the changing role of the government in tourism (Hristov & Petrova, 2018; Mamutova, 2020).

Numerous DMOs have embraced strategic planning, which has proven to be one of the key tools in management (Phillips & Moutinho, 2014; Soulard *et al.*, 2018), characterised as setting objectives and arranging them into action items that can be implemented almost automatically (Foris *et al.*, 2020; Mintzberg, 1994). Ghemawat (2002) and Witzel (2004) explain that the Greek term, strategia, is a precursor of the word, strategy. The term, strategy, is utilised in business within a competitive context (Korhonen, Hurmekoski, Hansen & Toppinen, 2018). Strategic management as a discipline has developed to become a central point in many organisations within the

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competitive environment. Its genesis can be traced in the national and global expansion of organisations during the twentieth century (Eden & Ackermann, 2018). Strategic management entails an assessment of the business's internal and external environments, identifying challenges and developing solutions through strategic approaches (Michael, Storey & Thomas, 2017). Therefore, the scope of a strategy is to control market forces and shape the competitive environment of the business (Kızıloglu & Serinkan, 2015; Michael *et al.*, 2017; Pröllochs & Feuerriegel, 2018).

Strategy is clarified as a pattern in a stream of decisions amalgamated into a plan that narrates an action to a purpose or specific goal to guarantee that decisions taken deliver future projected results (Gkoltsiou & Mougiakou, 2021; Kulkarni, Verma & Mukundan, 2019). Confined in the purpose of an organisation are aims, targets, and procedures to realise targets (Breuer, Janetschek & Malerba, 2019). It involves asking key questions that probe the character of business trade, and what it ought to be (Drucker, 1954; Michael *et al.*, 2017; Mintzberg, 1979; White, 2004). The heterogeneity nature of an organisation's goals informs the strategies from organisation to organisation (Burns, 2017; Kızıloglu & Serinkan, 2015). Other views uphold that strategic management is a product of strategic planning and practice of management of every facade of an organisation (Valjevac, Sorak & Sorak, 2018). Strategy formation is observed as a method of conceptual design, formal planning, and of analytical positioning (Češnovar, 2006; Mišanková & Kočišová, 2014; Ritchie, 1993; Sołoducho-Pelc, 2015). It is crucial to visualise planning as entailing long-term (strategic - defined as ranging from three to five years) and short-term (tactical - defined as ranging from one to two years) dimensions (Morrison, 2013; Valjevac *et al.*, 2018). Destination strategic planning is generally recognised as a fundamental element to enhance destination competitiveness (Dwyer & Kim, 2003; Knežević Cvelbar, Dwyer, Koman & Mihalič, 2016; Ritchie & Crouch, 2010).

Future destination development plans need to be strategically aligned to market and environmental needs to sustain the economic viability of the destination (Hassan, 2000; Khalifa, 2020). DMOs have recognised the importance of their non-marketing roles in developing, improving, and sustaining destination competitiveness and highlight that one of the responsibilities of DMOs is the strategy formulation aspect (Heath & Wall, 1991; Hieu & Rašovská, 2018). Morrison (2013) denotes that the DMO

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has a crucial role of formulating tourism policy, plans, and strategies for the destination. Additionally, planning of destination marketing is a significant facet of a DMO's functions, which necessitates a systematic approach and should be completed extensively and professionally (Campón-Cerro *et al.*, 2017; Dwyer, Forsyth & Rao, 2000; Enright & Newton, 2004; Miličević, Mihalič & Sever, 2017).

Tourist satisfaction is an element of a few reliant aspects, accentuating the necessity of strategic and integrated planning (Virkar & Mallya, 2018). The development of a strategic tourism plan for a destination is an enunciation of the strategic priorities and direction that have been acknowledged by stakeholders for the planning, development, management, and marketing of a destination (Martins, 2018; Sedarati *et al.*, 2019). The objective and importance of a strategy is to increase destination competitiveness (Kiráľová & Pavlíčeka, 2015).

Flowing from policy and planning, the last aspect of the discourse is development. Tourism destination development involves establishing an overarching strategy for the destination that brings value (Haugland, Ness, Grønseth & Aarstad, 2011; Koens, Smit & Melissen, 2021). The concept of destination development will not be discussed further, as it falls outside the ambit of the current study.

Destination marketing management is arguably a major component of the DMO's budget (Dore & Crouch, 2003; Stalmirska, Whalley & Fallon, 2019). DMOs frequently face the persistent hurdle when financing marketing activities (Metcalfe & Fallon, 2022; Pike, 2005). Transition towards constricted funding model necessitates DMOs to develop robust marketing management strategies that deliver value to destinations (Hristov & Zehrer, 2017; Morgan, Hastings & Pritchard, 2012). In one instance, government implemented a constricted funding model in Colorado (Pike, 2005).

Tourism destinations do not directly benefit from visitor spending and a successful destination marketing campaign that increases visitors does not directly translate into revenue for the DMO (Progano, 2018; Ritchie & Crouch, 2003). DMO funding might come from a number of sources, but its source depends heavily on how a DMO operates. A DMO may receive funding directly from government sources, specifically tourist taxes (Franch & Martini, 2002; Presenza *et al.*, 2005; Ritchie & Crouch, 2003).

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One noteworthy example of a destination marketing division with comparatively adequate resources is the City of Cape Town, which has consistently provided substantial financial support to support tourism promotion projects throughout the years (Rogerson & Rogerson, 2014).

Destination marketing is amongst the most imperative roles of the DMO (Kumar & Mishra, 2019; Morrison, 2013), as they commit budgets and ascertain leverage through implementing suitable strategies in marketing mixes, especially in promotions aiming to establish a successful position in target segments (Kantamaa, 2020; Wang & Pizam, 2011). Comprised in the roles of DMOs, the function of branding and destination branding has undergone several changes over the previous decade (Giannopoulos, Piha & Skourtis, 2020; Kumar & Mishra, 2019). Academics and practitioners appear to concur on the multi-faceted methodology necessary for developing a successful destination brand (Foris *et al.*, 2020; Hudson, 2014; Hudson & Ritchie, 2009).

Kapferer (2012) acclaimed that a brand subsists when it has procured the capability to influence the market and attract prospective customers. In this manner, DMOs attract tourists by promoting unique attributes of a destination brand, through employing brand communication tools and techniques (Deng & Li, 2018; Klimek, 2017). Increasingly, the number of tourism destinations with similar tourism qualities tends to appeal to and attract identical market segments. In this regard it is imperative to project key brand elements of the destination (Buhalis, 2000; Kantamaa, 2020), carried out through marketing communications, which is the aspect that focuses on the activities interrelated with the communication of the brand identity (Kitchen & Schultz, 2003). According to Keller (2009), marketing communications are methodologies that organisations use to tell and educate, influence, and remind customers. Furthermore, Zehir, Şahin, Kitapçı and Özşahin (2011) explicate that brand communication intends to expose customers to a brand.

Destination will increase competitiveness with a sturdy communication and branding strategy focusing on social media, a leverage that has proved to be an exceptional approach (Kiráľová & Pavlíčeka, 2015; Scorrano, Fait, Maizza & Vrontis, 2019). Technological advances in the international tourism marketplace have turned tourism into a competitive environment. Destinations are under increasing pressure to

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distinguish themselves, and success is, therefore, predicated by relative destination competitiveness (Cucculelli & Goffi, 2016; Giaoutzi, 2017; Krešić & Prebežac, 2011; Miličević *et al.*, 2017).

DMOs have assumed a significant role in the expansion of tourism across the world (Eckert, Zacher, Pechlaner, Namberger & Schmude, 2019; Pike *et al.*, 2018). DMOs facilitate a cohesive approach in strategic planning, development, management, and marketing of the destination, which is substantial in the success of tourism (Cucculelli & Goffi, 2016; Ritchie & Crouch, 2003). Strategic values are the drivers of success in the marketplace (Osborne, 1996). Strategic values are the principles that determine the prescript on actions and decisions taken, as well as providing the basic rationale for business viability focusing on organisations' competencies and linking these competencies to the environment and as such, channelling daily efforts towards getting where the organisation envisions to be (Chiu, 2015; Yun & Vibber, 2012). Strategic value aligns an organisation's products to opportunities created by unmet needs (Avison, Jones, Powell & Wilson, 2004; Kaplan & Norton, 2004). This alignment is created by conceptualising linkages between the organisation and its environment, customers, competitors, technology, demographic patterns, and social trends (Dolan & Garcia, 2002; Karadal *et al.*, 2013; Osborne, 1996; Yun & Vibber, 2012).

2.3.3 Destination marketing planning

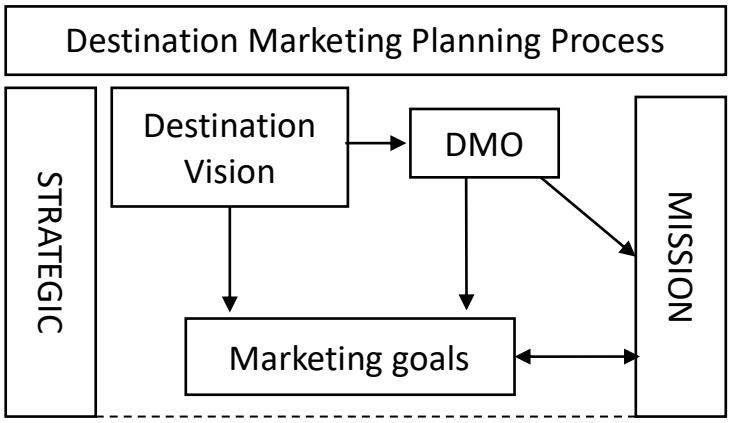
Destination marketing planning is a structured strategising process which includes both long-term strategic perspectives and short-term tactical considerations (Morrison, 2013; Pike, 2018). Responsibilities of the DMO include, developing the overarching marketing strategy and long-term marketing plan at the strategic level, and at the tactical level to establish the short-term marketing plans for tourism (Foris *et al.*, 2020; Morrison, 2013). According to Gilbert (1990), tourism marketing strategy would include long-term objectives that should be determined from the premise of full comprehension of the tourism market and available resources.

DMOs identify priority tourism target markets and apply effective identity for the destination, culminating in the execution of an effective branding approach (Vassileva & Kostenski, 2021). This task is fulfilled utilising integrated marketing communications

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techniques, coalescing conventional (online) and traditional promotions (Morrison, 2013).

Figure 3: Destination marketing planning process model



Source: Adapted from Morrison (2013)

According to Morrison (2013) model of destination marketing planning depicted in Figure 3, the planning of destination marketing is of paramount importance for DMOs due to its methodological nature. This process requires a systematic approach as it ultimately leads to the selection of suitable target markets and effective communication tools. The planning process comprises two essential components: strategic and tactical. The strategic component pertains to long-term planning, typically spanning three to five years into the future, while the tactical aspect is concerned with short-term planning, usually ranging from one to two years ahead. In essence, Morrison's model underscores the criticality of destination marketing planning for DMOs, which demands a meticulous, comprehensive, and forward-looking approach.

According to the model by Morrison (2013), a destination must have a vision. DMOs' destination marketing endeavours ought to be determined by an arrangement of expressly enunciated marketing objectives that are identified through a planning procedure referred to as visioning, which culminates in a long-term objective for the development of tourism in a destination (Ritchie, 1993). The destination vision statement creates a way for the development of DMO vision which should provide structure and direction for advertising and communication activities (Morrison, 2013). DMO needs to characterise its vision for the future that will set it to realise the

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destination vision in collaboration with all stakeholders (Adeyinka-Ojo, Khoo-Lattimore & Nair, 2014; Morrison, 2013; Ritchie, 1993).

Destination marketing goals, which are strategic (long-term) quantifiable outcomes that the DMO needs to accomplish in destination marketing, is derived from destination vision and DMO vision. It is best if destination marketing goals are target-market and time-bound and express a planned outcome in a quantified format. Not all marketing goals match the principles precisely (Morrison, 2013). In the destination marketing planning process lies a responsibility for the DMO when developing strategic goals to develop a brand strategy, which includes crafting a brand identity that must reverberate with the target market and indicate what the organisation can and will do consistently over a prolonged period (Aaker, 1996a). When brand identity is imparted to and translated by the customer, it will create a brand image (Urde, 2013).

Destination marketing objectives are informed by destination and DMO vision. Objectives are at the tactical level and are short-term (usually within one year) outcomes that the DMO needs to accomplish. Objectives must be a culmination of marketing goals and be provisional stages toward attaining destination goals. Similarly, as with the goals, marketing objectives should be target-market and demonstrate a quantifiable outcome. It ought to be acknowledged that even though numerous DMOs have marketing objectives, they often neglect to undertake long-term visions and goal-setting processes (Morrison, 2013; Ritchie, 1993). As indicated by Gilbert (1990), objectives should be meticulously monitored since change takes place speedily in the tourism marketplace. Tactics may be utilised to readdress demand patterns and the overall progress towards the long-term goals.

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At the tactical level of the destination marketing planning process, DMOs must develop integrated brand communication that will project elements of the destination brand identity as a culmination of destination marketing objectives (Foley & Fahy, 2004). Brand communication is the aspect that focuses on the activities related to the communication of the brand identity (Kitchen & Schultz, 2003). Keller (2009) states that marketing communications are the approaches where organisations endeavour to inform, persuade and remind customers. Furthermore, Zehir *et al.* (2011) explicated that the objective of brand communication has been to expose the customers to the brand. The result can be exploited in terms of improved awareness and higher recall. In turn, the customer will buy the brand which has the highest recall and that which will satisfy to the optimal level.

The chapter introduced the fundamental concepts of destination management and destination management planning, which encompass a declaration of strategic intent. To effectively comprehend the competitive landscape, as well as the prospects and challenges it presents, a comprehensive understanding of the destination's external environment is of utmost importance. This entails recognising the prevailing patterns that will shape the future competitive scenario (Dwyer & Kim, 2003; Fairley, 2019; Sheehan *et al.*, 2016). Within the destination itself, the destination management organisation (DMO) must employ the knowledge acquired from the external environment to conduct a strategic evaluation of the destination's strengths and weaknesses. This evaluation enables the DMO to adapt and develop the necessary competencies to articulate a competitive strategy (Dwyer & Kim, 2003; Fairley, 2019).

2.4 Conclusion

The literature review presented a comprehensive overview of destination management. This section then examined different destination competitiveness models. Additionally, the review explored destination management with particular attention on strategic planning, policy, and development, and destination market planning which are crucial elements in destination. In the subsequent section the focus of the review shifts to destination branding with a focus on the dimension of branding, mainly brand identity and brand image.

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CHAPTER 3: DESTINATION BRANDING

The concept of branding constitutes a foundational element with a pivotal role in shaping the competitiveness of a destination (Andrades & Dimanche, 2017; Crouch, 2011; Dwyer & Kim, 2003; Pike & Mason, 2011). Over recent decades, the branding has gained substantial scholarly attention, culminating in an extensive body of research primarily concentrated within the context of consumer goods (Aaker & Joachimsthaler, 2000; Kladou, Kavaratzis, Rigopoulou & Salonika, 2017). Extensive scholarly inquiries conducted by Cai (2002), Morgan and Pritchard (2002), nd Kavaratzis and Ashworth (2005) yielded insights that have been instrumental in comprehending the dynamics that underlie the strategic alignment of branding and tourism.

Brands are composed of a multifaceted set of inter-reliant aspects including values, vision, mission, strategy, culture, traditions, performance, and aspirations (Aaker, 2009). Brands undergo evolutionary trajectories that are contingent upon a dynamic interplay of both extrinsic factors, such as competitive pressures, and intrinsic determinants that have the potential to either compromise or rejuvenate a brand's image contingent upon their strategic deployment (Porter, 1997; Strick & Volbeda, 2018). The function of branding has evolved beyond conventional marketing practices to encompass the establishment of a distinctive competitive edge rooted in the exceptional qualities of a tourism product or destination (Soteriades, Tyrogala & Varvaressos, 2009; Sotiriadis & Shen, 2017).

3.1 Overview

A brand is a unique name and/or symbol with the purpose of defining products and services whilst offering the primary factors for distinguishing products and services amidst competitors (Aaker, 1991a). It serves as a distinct identifier that signifies the origin, quality, and value associated with a particular product or service (Aaker, 1991a; Wood, 2000). Branding offers a range of advantages, including the potential to serve as a formidable barrier against competitors, as well as the ability to foster a loyal customer base (Marczak, 2018; Vrontis, 1998). Hoeffler and Keller (2003), on review

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of scholarly articles research, documented an extensive variety of possible branding benefits which included enhanced perceptions of product performance; increased marketing communication effectiveness; and less susceptibility to competitive marketing actions. Consumers process communications from a strong brand positively and are prone to recall the communications (Hoeffler & Keller, 2003). Branding has emerged as a key strategic option and its objective is to establish and enhance brand differentiation, thereby creating loyalty among target customers (Pike *et al.*, 2018; Pike & Page, 2014).

According to Aaker (1991b), a brand refers to a unique name or symbol, which may include a logo, trademark, or package design that is used to identify the goods or services of one seller or a group of sellers. Ward, Light and Goldstine (1999) offer an alternative perspective, asserting that a brand serves as a distinct identity that sets apart a value proposition associated with a product offering or an organisation. From the preceding explanation, it can be inferred that a brand confers a characteristic feature to the product offering, endowing it with an exclusive identity. This serves to differentiate the product offering from that of competitors, allowing it to establish a unique market position and a lasting impression on customers.

The field of classical branding theory has predominantly focused its development and application on corporate entities and the manufacturing sector, rather than encompassing nations, places, or destinations (De Chernatony & Segal-Horn, 2001; Kasapi & Cela, 2017). Nation branding, for instance, although the concept is frequently applied in marketing literature, focuses fundamentally on four aspects; country of origin (Jaffe & Nebenzahl, 2001; Pisharodi & Parameswaran, 1992; Roth & Romeo, 1992), destination branding (Hankinson, 2005; Morgan & Pritchard, 1998), country image or country-product image (Agarwal & Sikri, 1996; Martin & Eroglu, 1993; Parameswaran & Yaprak, 1987) and country identity (Keillor, Hult, Erffmeyer & Babakus, 1996; Keillor & Hult, 1999).

Substantial studies affirm that place branding as a strategic marketing activity has increased essentially during the last quarter-century (Hankinson, 2015; Kavaratzis, 2005; Melewar & Dennis, 2014). The application of place branding reaches far into traditional areas of inward investment and leisure tourism to include a wider role in

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attracting tourists to a location (Hankinson, 2005). Not only is it limited to cities and countries, but also applies to shopping destinations and leisure parks (Ashworth & Kavaratzis, 2009). Accordingly, the place branding framework stretches through a broad area of academic interest including destination branding (Dioko *et al.*, 2011; Hankinson, 2001).

Destinations are products (Morgan & Pritchard, 1998). In this manner destination brands are analogous to corporate brands because they represent a collection of leisure and business tourism (Bellini & Pasquinelli, 2016). Fundamentally,, the tourism industry aggregates different industries to create a network of interacting service providers, which provide services to the needs of tourists (Stephens Balakrishnan, 2009; Stephens Balakrishnan, Nekhili & Lewis, 2011).

The development of a destination brand is a strategic initiative embraced by different tourist destinations (Brito & Pratas, 2015; Yen, Teng & Chang, 2020). Branding is viewed as a component of vital significance for tourism organisations in drawing tourists. The need for destination branding success has led researchers to evaluate the brand equity of different destinations (Dedeoğlu *et al.*, 2019b).

Destination branding can be described as a means to communicate a destination's unique identity through distinguishing a destination from competitors (Morrison, 2013; Morrison & Anderson, 2002). According to Morgan, Pritchard and Pride (2002), Blain *et al.* (2005), Tasci and Kozak (2006), and Morgan, Pritchard and Pride (2007), a more granular description of destination branding is presented as the set of marketing activities that provides sustenance for the conception of a name, symbol or logo that creates a distinctive destination; steadily conveys the expectation of a memorable tourism experience that is uniquely associated with the destination; solidifies the emotional bond between the tourist and the destination; reduces consumer search costs and perceived risk. Branding is associated with benefits to consumers (Mudambi, 2002), enhances destination image among visitors and helps DMOs in evaluating accomplishments (Blain *et al.*, 2005).

There are several aspects to the brand-building process, each influencing the ability for a consumer to see a destination's offerings as a prompt reference point when

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considering a purchase (Keller & Kotler, 2016; Sotiriadis & Shen, 2017). A destination that holds a well-defined market standing and has attributes that are deemed important will retain a top-of-mind position in the customer's mind (Galí *et al.*, 2017; Henderson, 2007). The increase in the number of destination brands has encouraged a rise in the variety of communication channels from which consumers obtain brand information (Alnawafleh, Alghizzawi & Habes, 2019; Pike, 2005; Pike, 2007b). The internet and social media are the two most significant communication channels used by destinations and tourists (Galí *et al.*, 2017; Rathore, Joshi & Ilavarasan, 2017).

3.2 Brand Identity

In contemporary discourse, the concept of destination brand identity is increasingly delineated as the fundamental embodiment of a specific geographical location (Hanna & Rowley, 2011; Kim, Stepchenkova & Babalou, 2018). Brand identity is a distinctive collection of brand associations implying a consumer promise that encompasses core and extended identity, represents the aspirational self-image developed by the DMO (Ghodeswar, 2008; Linsner, Sotiriadou, Hill & Hallmann, 2021; Pike, Bianchi, Kerr & Patti, 2010), and is the brand position expressed and communicated to target tourists (Kneesel, Baloglu & Millar, 2010; Konecnik & Go, 2008). When branding a destination, it is crucial to project destination brand identity through all the attributes and activities that distinguish the destination from others (Aaker, 1996a; Saraniemi & Komppula, 2017).

Melewar and Wooldridge (2001), in the corporate identity model, state that the building blocks of brand identity are communication, design, culture, behaviour, structure, industry identity, strategy. In the brand identity system model Aaker (1996b); Aaker and Joachimsthaler (2000) state that a brand is a product, organisation, person and symbol, value and benefits, credibility, and relationships. Risitano (2006) and Saraniemi (2009) proposed a destination branding model and suggested that brand identity is based on the following dimensions: brand culture, brand character, brand personality, brand name, brand logos (and symbols), and brand slogan. Advancing the knowledge on destination brand identity, Ruzzier and De Chernatony (2013), on the destination brand identity model, add that the building blocks include benefits,

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mission, vision, values, distinguishing preferences, personality, experiential promise, emotional value, functional value and stakeholders.

The establishment of a brand identity serves as a fundamental framework for engaging in competitive endeavours with other destinations. (Almeyda-Ibáñez & George, 2017c; Költringer & Dickinger, 2015). The destination brand identity includes unique characteristics related to the destination, allowing stakeholders or tourists to easily distinguish the brand of the target destination from other brands (Tsaur, Yen & Yan, 2016). Consequently, tourists' perceptions of destination brand identity have a significant impact on their perceived value, satisfaction, and behaviour (Yen *et al.*, 2020). In essence, the destination brand identity consists of the destination's culture, environment, stakeholders, as well as its structure, strategy, and communication (Saraniemi & Komppula, 2019).

In contemporary scholarship regarding brand management and the branding of tourism destinations, existing literature affirms that the foundation of a robust brand lies in the cultivation of a resolute and cohesive identity (Aaker, 1996a; Giannopoulos *et al.*, 2020). Organisations that derive their identity from their vision and unique distinctive features, may decide to emphasise symbolic, experiential, social, and emotional attributes (De Chernatony, 2001; Radomskaya & Pearce, 2021). Brand identity is derived from this foundation (De Chernatony, 2001; Linsner *et al.*, 2021; Stephens Balakrishnan, 2009), and is characterised as a unique set of brand associations linked to a promise (Ghodeswar, 2008; Kavaratzis & Ashworth, 2006; Wear & Heere, 2020). Kapferer (2012) adds that it is the formation of a connection between the brand and the clients enabled by a value proposition comprised of functional, emotional, and self-expressive advantages. Brand identity serves to differentiate a product-service organisation from competitors (Lin *et al.*, 2011), is a critical element for DMOs from which to draw generalisation of desirable qualities to be projected (Kapferer, 2012; Qu *et al.*, 2011), gives direction and purpose for the brand and is vital to the strategic vision of the brand (Aaker, 1996a). Furthermore, brand identity alludes to the segment of equity resulting from the perceived advantages offered by a brand that renders it attractive as an item of a possible purchase (Presenza *et al.*, 2005; Upshaw, 1995).

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According to Aaker (1996a), brand identity is presented in four categories: brand as a product (including product scope and attributes, quality/value, uses, users, and country of origin), brand as an organisation (organisational attributes, local versus global), brand as a person (brand personality, brand-customer relationships) and brand as a symbol (visual imagery/metaphors and brand heritage). From these categories, the concept of brand identity has been investigated by a variety of scholars (Aaker, 1996a; De Chernatony, 2008; Kapferer, 1989) and their viewpoints concerning brand identity segments differ to some extent. The investigation by Kapferer (1989) identifies a model, brand identity prism comprising six aspects of brand identity, namely, physique, personality, relationship, culture, reflection, and self-image. Regarding the physique, Kapferer (1989) implies that the brand's spine, its tangible value, and its prototype means the product is relevant to the brand's qualities. Brand personality results from branding communication, comprising those qualities of human identity that could be ascribed to the brand (Aaker, 1997; Kapferer, 2012; Tong, Su & Xu, 2018).

The culture of a brand is made up of a set of values by which actions are guided (Kapferer, 2012). The relationship aspect is about the brand's conduct that arises from how the brand acts, delivers services, and relates to consumers (Kapferer, 2012). Self-image refers to how consumers feel a connection to the brand (Kapferer, 2012). A brand is characterised as an epicentre of communication (Lynch & De Chernatony, 2004; Schivinski & Dabrowski, 2015). It follows that the physique and personality aspects play a part in defining the sender (the brand), whilst the reflection and self-image aspects characterise the recipient (the consumer) (Kapferer, 1989). The left side aspects (physique, relationship, reflection) speak to social expression of the brand, referring to the brand's noticeable components, whilst the right side (personality, culture, self-image) represents the brand's internal world, being a reverberation of the opposite side (Kapferer, 1989).

Kapferer's model is not the only one utilised in explaining brand identity. Aaker (1996a) and Ghodeswar (2008) also characterise brand identity as a concept having two distinctive dimensions, namely, the core and extended identity (Csaba & Bengtsson, 2006; Lin *et al.*, 2011; Urde, 2013). Core identity represents the true essence of the brand and remains steady as the brand transverses through to new markets and new

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products, focusing on aspects such as product attributes, service, and product performance, as well as acting as an instrument of differentiation (Ghodeswar, 2008; Kavaratzis & Ashworth, 2006).

Saraniemi (2009) posits that the core elements of the destination brand identity are the destination's culture, environment and stakeholders; destination structure; destination strategy; and destination communication. Destination culture comprises the location and resources, and meanings and values of the destination. A proposition is made that destination culture and structure may guide destination strategy formation. Both organisational structure and brand structure have an impact on destination design. It incorporates visual identity, comprising slogans, website, and physical layout of the destination, whereas destination communication alludes to the manner by which a destination can communicate with various stakeholders (Upshaw, 1995).

Risitano (2006) similarly proposed a destination branding model and stated that brand identity is founded on the accompanying six elements: brand culture, brand character, brand personality, brand name, brand logos (and symbols), and brand slogan. Extended identity is centred around aspects that provide brand texture and focuses on brand personality, relationship, and solid image affiliation (Ghodeswar, 2008; Kavaratzis & Ashworth, 2006; Srivastava, Ramakanth, Akhila & Gaikwad, 2022). Ghodeswar (2008) adds that extended identity is closely associated with characteristics arranged into unified and meaningful groups that deliver brand texture, and is knitted on brand personality, relationship, and strong symbol association.

Brand identity components (mission, vision, values, identity, distinguishing preferences, and benefits) continually connect to satisfy the brand promise through the functional and emotional values to create an experiential promise (Coleman, de Chernatony & Christodoulides, 2015; Taecharungroj, 2019). Although Wheeler, Frost and Weiler (2011) and Hanna and Rowley (2011) do not distinguish between the two categories of brand identity as is the case with Ghodeswar (2008), they insist that brand identity goes through a perpetual identity modification process as a consequence of brand experience, a view similar to that of Balmer (2001), in explaining the dynamic nature thereof.

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The development of an organisation's identity is influenced by both internal and external factors (Gioia, Schultz & Corley, 2000; Saraniemi & Komppula, 2019). The 21st-century economic environment has challenged organisations to grow financially, marketing contributing substantially in addressing those challenges (Dredge, Phi, Mahadevan, Meehan & Popescu, 2019; Kotler, Keller & Armstrong, 2012). Marketing is defined as a set of procedures aimed at creating, communicating, and delivering value (Bagozzi, 1974; Keller & Kotler, 2016; Kotler & Armstrong, 2013). According to Kotler *et al.* (2012), what is being marketed is different forms of entities: goods, services, events, experiences, persons, places, properties, organisations, information, and ideas.

Destination brands apply two important functions: identification and differentiation (Ritchie & Ritchie, 1998; Ruiz-Real, Uribe-Toril & Gázquez-Abad, 2020). In the branding literature, the connotation of identification involves the clarification of the source of the product to consumers. Destination branding can be defined as a way to communicate a destination's unique identity by differentiating a destination from competitors (Buhalis & Park, 2021; Morrison & Anderson, 2002). Every brand must determine the key attributes that differentiate it from other brands, and as such, DMOs need to develop brand identity, which includes how a destination intends to identify itself or its products (Vinyals-Mirabent, Kavaratzis & Fernández-Cavia, 2019; Wheeler *et al.*, 2011). Well-defined brand identity establishes the destination's character and conveys it in an idiosyncratic manner, being the source of the desired image (Kotler, Haider & Rein, 1993; Tomaž & Walanchalee, 2020). Essentially, every project undertaken by any branded entity must assert its identity and can be used as a source of competitive advantage (Buhalis, 2000; Muniz & O'guinn, 2001).

Ritchie and Ritchie (1998), Morrison and Anderson (2002), Cai (2002) and Campelo *et al.* (2014) articulate that destination branding is a way to communicate, identify and differentiate the destination, characterising it by a name, symbol, logo, wordmark or graphic, and guaranteeing a paramount travel encounter that is remarkably connected with the destination. Furthermore, it serves to merge and fortify the memory of pleasurable recollections of the destination experience. According to Blain *et al.* (2005), destination branding is the arrangement of marketing activities that bolster the

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making of a name, image, logo that clearly distinguishes a destination and reliably conveys the prospect of a memorable trip associated with the destination that serves to solidify and fortify the passionate association between the guest and the destination. The exploratory study conducted by Blain *et al.* (2005) found that many DMO managers tend to relate development of destination logos and taglines with comprehensive methodology of destination branding. Aaker (1996a) adds that understanding brand identity is key to brand-building.

The brand management studies have recognised the strategic significance of managing brand identity (Burmann, Riley, Halaszovich & Schade, 2017; Omar, Williams & Lingelbach, 2009). Brand identity is associated with establishing the essence of the brand (So, King, Hudson & Meng, 2017). Important elements in brand identity are the functional and experiential qualities of the brand, projected through brand elements (Aaker, 1996a; Keller, 1998; Lai, Khoo-Lattimore & Wang, 2019). Morgan *et al.* (2002) express that the brand essence speaks to the destination's identity, and it is probably going to be applicable crosswise over business sectors and product markets.

Describing the vision for the brand is viewed as one of the starting points of the brand--building process. In this way, brand identity speaks to management's vision of destination perception (Cai, 2002; Pike & Page, 2014). Topical approaches have proposed continual revision and refinement of the brand vision (Kavaratzis & Hatch, 2013; Saraniemi & Komppula, 2017). Brand identity embodies the vision of the destination and how it should be perceived in the marketplace. It is the essence of the brand (Hanna & Rowley, 2011; Kavaratzis & Ashworth, 2005; Pike & Page, 2014); an exclusive set of properties that the DMO seeks to construct; sustains and signifies the desired professed image of the destination (Ghodeswar, 2008), and specifies what the brand aspires to stand for (Konecnik & Go, 2008). Lastly, brand identity is the substratum on which a robust brand is built (Aaker, 1996a; Wassler, Wang & Hung, 2019). Consumers build supposed images of the destination based on the brand identity projected by destination marketers (Kumar & Kaushik, 2018; Qu *et al.*, 2011).

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Brand identity development takes effect by examination of the strengths and weaknesses entrenched in the tangible and intangible qualities of the destination (Saraniemi & Komppula, 2019). Govers and Go (2016) postulated that destination brand identity must be premised on its DNA, its landscape, nature, and history. The intensity of brand identity is influenced by the appeal of the environmental setting offering aesthetic pleasure through a variety of parameters such as culture, history, and the economy (Rodrigues *et al.*, 2020). Brand identity is co-created with the involvement of several stakeholders through the production of marketplace symbols (historic plaques, decorations, sculptures) and the improvement of formalities such as street parties, marches, ceremonies, and artistic exhibitions. These influence destination experience and what the destination is popular for (Cai, 2002; Gaggiotti, Cheng & Yunak, 2008; Hanna & Rowley, 2011; Harmaakorpi, Kari & Parjanen, 2008; Pryor & Grossbart, 2007; Wheeler *et al.*, 2011).

A view that stresses the visitor's standpoint as the basis of destination brand identity is that of Williams, Reilly and Haider (2006) asserting that brand identity is determined by the visitor's values and their alignment with experiences encountered. Additionally, another interpretation (Konecnik & Go, 2008) alludes to destination brand identity as a perceptual entity established in the minds of customers, while the destination-centric interpretation states that brand identity is in alignment with how owners of the brand intend the brand to be seen (Kavaratzis & Ashworth, 2005).

Destination brand identity has been examined from varying perspectives, culminating in the introduction of theoretical frameworks to investigate the concept of tourism destination brand identity. It appears that no consensus has been reached as to what constitutes components of destination brand identity.

3.3 Brand Image

According to Ladefoged and Maddieson (1998) and Inoue, Ono, Honda and Kurabayashi (2007), speech comprehension is facilitated through the intricate process of articulation, which involves the coordinated movement of various muscle effectors such as the lips and the tongue. This process is crucial for the accurate and efficient

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communication of linguistic information. Similarly, Hanna and Rowley (2011) provide a delineation of brand articulation as a pivotal component that accentuates the systematic procedures associated with the manifestation of a brand's essence, achieved through both verbal and visual manifestations of its identity. The process includes deliberations in the selection and design of the brand's name, logo, symbol, colour schemes, typography, and photographic elements (Hanna, Rowley & Keegan, 2021).

Hanna and Rowley (2011) further argue that articulation is a significant constituent of destination brand management, which is how brand identity is conveyed. However, this explanation differs from the result of the study by Jabreel, Moreno and Huertas (2017) where it was found that DMOs do not convey their identity in social media posts. Brand articulation translates (from brand identity) what the brand wants to be known for, how it can distinguish itself from the crowd to become competitive, thoughts and emotions that should be evoked in a customer's mind (Baker, 2007).

The challenges faced by companies in building brands are: to be seen, to be recalled, to alter perceptions and to fortify attitudes (Aaker & Joachimsthaler, 2000; Ghodeswar, 2008), and carried out through brand communication. Brand communication is the component that is closely linked to the communication of the sought-after brand identity. Thusly, it expands on and is firmly combined with the articulation component and affects the discernments and reality of the brand experience (Hanna & Rowley, 2011).

Integrated brand communications play a crucial role in ensuring the uniformity of messaging content across various marketing platforms, enabling the creation and perpetuation of a coherent brand image (Pedeliento & Kavaratzis, 2019). By aligning multiple marketing applications with the conscious brand identity, the integration of messaging content helps maintain consistency and uphold a harmonious brand image (Foley & Fahy, 2004; Schultz, 2020). Anholt (2004) and Gaggiotti *et al.* (2008) add that various messages bearing different propositions may confuse the target audience due to the inability to distinguish between messages culminating in a distorted brand image.

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In conjunction with brand identity, brand image plays a vital role in shaping consumer preferences (Linsner *et al.*, 2021; Pedeliento & Kavaratzis, 2019). It encapsulates the intangible essence of a brand, influencing customers' purchasing decisions as they are attracted to the unique qualities associated with the brand, transcending the conventional consideration of physical attributes and functional attributes alone (Dobni & Zinkhan, 1990; Miao, 2021). The formation of a brand image in the consumer's psyche is primarily a subjective and perceptual process that arises from the consumer's cognitive and emotional interpretation of various stimuli (Bilgin, 2018; Dobni & Zinkhan, 1990). It is a complex and multi-dimensional construct that evolves over time as consumers interact with the brand through various touchpoints (Bilgin, 2018; Dobni & Zinkhan, 1990). Brand image is perceived as the amalgamation of various brand associations, both tangible and intangible, that collectively shape the customer's impression and perception of the brand (Faircloth, Capella & Alford, 2001; Johnson & Zinkhan, 2015). Through translating, extricating and deciphering, customers form an image from all signals emitted by the brand (Kapferer, 2012; Kim & Chao, 2019; LeBlanc & Nguyen, 1996). Additionally, customers' brand image is a culmination of aggregate impacts of an organisation's marketing mix (Oladepo & Abimbola, 2015; Roth, 1994). Lastly, brand image manages the extraneous properties of the product or service, incorporating ways in which the brand endeavours to meet customers' psychological or social needs (Oladepo & Abimbola, 2015; Park, Jaworski & MacInnis, 1986; Qu *et al.*, 2011; Zhang, 2015).

The significance of brand image lies in its capacity to serve as a valuable resource and an influencer of brand performance, as it has the ability to establish a lasting competitive edge and facilitate market share growth (Park *et al.*, 1986; Zhang, 2015). Communicating a brand image has vast benefits such as assisting with establishing the positioning of the brand, shielding from competitors' advances, and enhancing the behaviour of the brand in the marketplace which together result in the construction of brand equity (Ali, Xiaoling, Sherwani & Ali, 2018; Keller, 2003).

One of the most commonly used brand models today in marketing is Keller's model of brand equity (Keller, 1993; Keller, 2003). Keller (1993) claims that brand image is derived from brand knowledge and brand awareness, and that brand image denotes a bundle of relations connected to the brand that consumers have in the recall. Keller

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(1993) suggests that knowledge could be the most valuable asset a firm has for improving marketing activity. Furthermore, Keller (1993) deliberated that knowledge created about the brand in the consumer's mind through previous marketing programmes could be the organisation's most valuable asset for refining marketing as well as productivity.

The impact of imagery has been found to exert a profound influence on the decision-making process of individuals seeking vacation destinations (Baloglu & McCleary, 1999). Most researchers concur that the image of a destination is an arrangement of impressions, thoughts, expectations, and emotional thoughts a consumer has of a particular place (Al-Bourini, Aljawarneh, Almaaitah, Altahat, Alomari & Sokiyna, 2021; Assaker, 2014; Baloglu & McCleary, 1999; Beerli & Martin, 2004; Chen & Tsai, 2007; Crompton, 1979; Kim & Richardson, 2003). According to Hunter (2012), the destination image is conventionally characterised to have two forms of the physical reality of a tourist destination, the first form being the purposive projection of a solitary message concerning the destination communicated via marketing channels, and the second form being the perception of a destination as a conveyed promotional version or as experienced straightforwardly. Gunn (1988) and Gaffar, Tjahjono, Abdullah and Sukmayadi (2021) add conceptualisation of two factors that play a part during destination image formation, namely, organic and induced. Organic comes from sources such as news, films, events, novels, and textbooks whilst induced comes from sources such as business strategies and promotional efforts to attract tourists that are formed by the marketing efforts of the tourist destination bodies, this aspect being critical as it leads to projected image (Gaffar *et al.*, 2021).

The destination brand image is characterised as the consumer's psychological representation of the offering in which the symbolic meaning is associated with the specific attributes of a destination (Dobni & Zinkhan, 1990; Padgett & Allen, 1997; Wisker *et al.*, 2020). The brand image is developed primarily by the marketing stimulus provided by formal marketing communication tools and the establishment of specific destinations (Chen & Wu, 2022; Manhas, Manrai & Manrai, 2016). Destinations with strong brand image can position product offering to appeal to the needs of target customers (Manhas *et al.*, 2016). It is essential that tourism suppliers, in addition to

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providing products and services that enhance brand image, also provide ways to meet the cultural needs of tourists (Wisker *et al.*, 2020).

Gartner (1993) approach proposes that destination image comprises cognitive and affective elements. The cognitive image is communicated through a sum of beliefs and knowledge reflecting evaluations of the perceived attributes of the destination and its features that actualise the mental picture of the destination (Baloglu & McCleary, 1999; del Bosque & San Martín, 2008; Pike & Ryan, 2004; Stylos, Vassiliadis, Bellou & Andronikidis, 2016). Resource attributes of a destination include aspects such as the scenery, climate, accommodation facilities, restaurants, and historical and cultural attractions (Mak, 2017), while effective elements of the destination image involve an individual's feelings towards a destination and emotional responses to a destination (Gartner, 1993; Kim, Lehto & Kandampully, 2019). As such, the cognitive element is an antecedent of the affective element. The two components in combination lead to an overall destination image (as shown in Figure 3) (Baloglu & McCleary, 1999; Echtner & Ritchie, 1991; Mak, 2017; Molinillo, Liébana-Cabanillas, Anaya-Sánchez & Buhalis, 2018) and the ability to attract tourists depend on the overall image of the destination (Akama & Kieti, 2003; Molinillo *et al.*, 2018). Destination generally utilises images in promotional efforts to generate awareness and establishing a positive destination image that identifies and distinguishes the destination through implementing consistent element mix (Cai, 2002). If customers hold distinctive and favourable destination images in their memory, they will develop a stronger connection with the destination (Chi, Huang & Nguyen, 2020; Gartner, 1993; Keller, 2003).

Since the brand image comprises perception of the brand in the minds of customers, in the same way, destination image can also be considered as a projected image which is created through various sorts of media (Echtner & Ritchie, 1991; Govers & Go, 2004; Govers, Go & Kumar, 2007). Bramwell and Rawding (1996) clarify that projected image is the thoughts and impressions of a place that are accessible to customers' consideration. Hunter (2012) adds that it is the strategy of creating a singular and outstanding portrayal of a place or a showcase of ideal attributes. Literature indicates that projected image has a ‘‘pull’’ factor in the destination decision process, which is transmitted by communication channels such as online (Baloglu & Uysal, 1996; Govers, 2015; Hunter, 2016). The development and access of the internet have

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prompted the proliferation of information and content, making destination image formation an increasingly dynamic phenomenon (Govers & Go, 2004; Hunter, 2016). In this manner organisations project their brand image utilising online channels. Projected online destination images portrayed in DMO-generated content are crucial in destination branding (Mak, 2017). Hunter (2016) suggested that online destination image can be conceptually isolated into two categories, namely, projected and perceived online destination image. In this study, Mak (2017) characterised projected online destination image as the traits projected through online marketing communications that signify the ideal features of tourism products offerings in a destination. The current study will not focus on perceived online destination image.

Advancing the discussion on projected online brand image, this study follows the two concepts, namely, cognitive and affective, resulting in the overall image as proposed by Gartner (1993). These concepts are then applied to projected online destination image. The cognitive component constitutes awareness, that which is known and understood about a destination, while the affective component depends on how an individual feels about the knowledge of the destination, both components contributing to the overall projected online destination image (Konecnik & Gartner, 2007; Mak, 2017).

Studies have indicated that affective image holds subjective and emotional response to cognitive knowledge for a destination. Along these lines, the cognitive image has a significant positive effect on the affective image and ultimately cognitive and affective image has a significant positive influence on the overall image (Li, Cheng, Kim & Petrick, 2008; Mak, 2017; Molinillo *et al.*, 2018; Qu *et al.*, 2011).

3.4 Linking Brand Identity and Brand Image

The focal point of destination image projection should remain steadfastly aligned with the authentic essence and inherent character of the destination itself (Go, Lee & Russo, 2004; Van Wijk, Go & Govers, 2008; Wang, Luo & Huang, 2020). The interdependence between the identity of a destination brand and its image has been observed to be mutually reinforcing. This reciprocal relationship implies that the way

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in which a destination brand is perceived and interpreted by its audience is shaped by its brand identity, whilst the image that the brand projects reinforces its identity (Lin *et al.*, 2011; Nandan, 2005). The significance of brand image in shaping brand identity cannot be overstated, as it plays a pivotal role in this process (Cai, 2002; Essamri, McKechnie & Winklhofer, 2019). Moreover, brand image not only serves as a reflection of brand identity but also embodies its essence. Basically, brand image serves as a manifestation of the underlying brand identity, encompassing its core values, attributes, and overall positioning in the market (De Chernatony, 1999; Ghodeswar, 2008). As indicated by Kapferer (2012), brand image is the aftereffect of brand identity's translation with deciphering messages and extracting implications. In this case, brand identity should go before brand image, as brand identity composes the content of the message to be communicated, which then forms the brand image. On the other hand, Aaker (1997) states that brand image is an important source of information for creating brand identity. From the two arguments it appears that brand identity would precede brand image, although there are instances where brand identity is developed from existing brand image.

Identity and image encompass the way in which a destination strategically positions itself. A proficiently developed brand identity plays a crucial role in shaping the destination's distinctive character and conveying its unique value proposition (Da Silveira, Lages & Simões, 2013; Kapferer, 2012; Kavaratzis & Ashworth, 2005). Govers and Go (2004) present a tourism destination image formation model that suggests alignment between tourism destination identity and projected tourism destination image. Destination image should be based on destination identity (Govers & Go, 2004).

A DMO's development strategy establishes a tourism product offering utilising destination identity (Haugland *et al.*, 2011), culminating in a projected destination image through the implementation of marketing and communication techniques (Elbe, Hallén & Axelsson, 2009). If the tourism product offering and the manner in which it is communicated are not aligned with the destination's identity, it can lead to the development of a strategy gap (Govers & Go, 2004; Govers *et al.*, 2007).

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3.5 Dimensions of Branding

Apart from the encompassing constructs of brand identity and brand image, there are various other dimensions related to branding. This section provides an overview of the different dimensions of branding.

Association

Brand association is connected to the brand in memory, and the link to the brand is strengthened in some cases by exposure to many, and sometimes by just a few, experiences and communications (Aaker, 1991a; Chen, 2017). Brand associations can be classified into three types, namely, associated characteristics, benefits, and attitudes (Huang, Li & Li, 2015). In this way destination brands with unique brand associations stand out from their competitors (Daniels, Kunkel & Karg, 2019). Destination brand association functions as the foundation for image diagnosis, and therefore serves as an important influence on consumer choice and preference (Park & Lee, 2019)

Attitude

According to Spears and Singh (2004), brand attitude is explained as a one-dimensional mental standpoint, and is directly related to behavioural intentions. The destination brand may become regarded as an unacceptable representation of the community and eventually of the residents, and as such, the brand might not attract support from residents or be developed further (Konecnik Ruzzier & Petek, 2012; Wassler *et al.*, 2019)

Authenticity

Authenticity is generally seen as a subject-related behavioural trait, encompassing consistency with oneself (Fritz, Schoenmueller & Bruhn, 2017; Moulard, Raggio & Folse, 2016), and reflecting distinctiveness of the local culture (Zhang, Li, Liu & Ruan, 2021). Brand authenticity is conveyed by means of any semblance of heritage, genuineness, sincerity, and originality of a brand (Napoli, Dickinson, Beverland & Farrelly, 2014; Portal, Abratt & Bendixen, 2019; Vargo & Lusch, 2011) and can be identified by gauging relevance to the past, originality reliability, and symbolism

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(Deepak & Kim, 2018; Liu, Hultman, Eisingerich & Wei, 2020). In particular, as tourists' interest in a destination increase, creativity becomes a way of exploring and introducing unique assets (Zhang & Xu, 2019).

Awareness

Brand awareness refers to how well prospective customers recall the brand or recognise the brand (Chen, 2010). Aaker (1996b) define brand awareness as the degree to which a brand reaches consumers' minds. As indicated by Konecnik and Gartner (2007), brand awareness is what someone knows about a destination or believes they know about it. A critical role is assumed by brand awareness in influencing consumer decision-making when considering the brand in the planning stage, and thereby positively influences tourist perceptions of both destination service quality and destination natural quality (Dedeoğlu, van Niekerk, Küçükergin, De Martino & Okumuş, 2020; Pike *et al.*, 2018).

Attachment

Attachment to a brand can be defined as an emotional and affective bond between the brand and the client (Thomson, MacInnis & Park, 2005; Xue, Wang, Gursoy & Song, 2021), Basically, place attachment is the phenomenon of human place-bonding (Chen & Dwyer, 2018; Kyle, Graefe & Manning, 2005). Positive destination satisfaction will result in the development and execution of a destination attachment that is credible (Esch, Langner, Schmitt & Geus, 2006). Destination satisfaction will result in the development of a destination attachment that is credible (Veasna, Wu & Huang, 2013).

Commitment

Brand commitment is the attitudinal disposition and mental connection to a brand inside a product class (Bloemer & Kasper, 1994; Coulter, Price & Feick, 2003; Fournier, 1998). Commitment is a combination of a consumer's belief in the brand's superiority, perceptions of the brand's distinctiveness from rivals, and notably a perception of risk during the purchase process (Belaid & Behi, 2011; Tong *et al.*, 2018).

Credibility

The concept of brand credibility has customarily been connected to the process by which a brand can transmit a guarantee of value through the products associated to it

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(Erdem & Swait, 2004; Jiménez-Barreto, Rubio & Campo, 2020). Additionally, credibility is the outcome of internal and subjective customer reactions. At this level, the brand renders managed and guaranteed experiences (Dwivedi, Johnson, Wilkie & De Araujo-Gil, 2019). Erdem and Swait (2004); Erdem, Swait and Louviere (2002) suggest brand credibility is the truthfulness and trustworthiness of a brand's intention. Therefore, brand credibility encompasses the dimensions of clear positioning and trust in a brand (Dwivedi *et al.*, 2019). Credibility is essential for shaping tourists' perceptions and attachments to a destination, and for contributing to customer satisfaction (Kani, Aziz, Sambasivan & Bojei, 2017; Veasna *et al.*, 2013).

Culture

The vital parts of culture have regularly been emphasised in destination branding literature (Kladou & Kehagias, 2014; Tsaur *et al.*, 2016). The brand culture of enterprises is therefore becoming an increasingly imperative aspect of their competitiveness (Gong, Jiang & Liu, 2019). Destination culture is used as a marketing tool to establish a distinctive destination brand and brand identity for tourist destinations (Gong *et al.*, 2019; Tsaur *et al.*, 2016). Brand culture alludes to the framework of characteristics based on the cultural aspects of the individuals and the destination (Tsaur *et al.*, 2016).

Engagement

Despite its popularity in brand management, brand engagement has been largely underexplored in tourism (Chen, Zhou, Zhan & Zhou, 2020). According to Hollebeek, Glynn and Brodie (2014), there are three variables that influence brand engagement, cognitive processing, attachment, and activation.

Equity

There have been numerous meanings of brand equity in the marketing literature. The intricacy of the concept has brought an assortment of conceptualisations where distinctive research presented different aspects of this phenomenon (Almeyda-Ibáñez & George, 2017b; Gertner, 2011), evident in discussed conceptualisations in the current paper (Keller, 1993; Nam, Ekinci & Whyatt, 2011; Wang & Finn, 2013). Studies that have approached brand equity are composed of many aspects, evident from models developed for respective papers, adding into the mix brand attitude, brand

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name, brand familiarity, brand trust, brand meaning, brand name, brand communication, brand personality, brand image, brand emotion, brand quality and brand uniqueness (Atilgan, Aksoy & Akinci, 2005; Berry, 2000; Konecnik & Gartner, 2007; Lane & Jacobson, 1995; Mishra & Datta, 2011; Nam *et al.*, 2011; Wang & Finn, 2013).

Given the significance of the brand equity concept in marketing academia and practice, the scholarly community applies effort on understanding the elements that impact the advancement of brand equity (Baalbaki & Guzmán, 2016; Christodoulides & De Chernatony, 2010). Besides products, services, and corporate brands, brand equity has also been applied to measuring the brands of cities and countries (Kim, Choe & Petrick, 2018b). From a consumer standpoint, customer-based brand equity (CBBE) is ascertained by the variation in how brand knowledge influences consumer reactions to a brand's marketing efforts(Kim *et al.*, 2018b). Consequently, how a destination that has a variety of resources can build brand equity to differentiate itself from competitors becomes a critical issue for tourism decision makers. Destination brand equity is considered to be an effective marketing tool for destination brands (Barnes, Mattsson & Sørensen, 2014; Kaushal, Sharma & Reddy, 2019). Consumer-based destination brand equity (CBDBE) as a concept was examined in terms of brand awareness, brand image, brand quality, and brand loyalty (Konecnik & Gartner, 2007) whereas Pike (2007a)'s piece focused on dimensions; brand awareness, brand associations, brand resonance, and brand loyalty. An earlier viewpoint identified three distinct approaches to studying brand equity, through customer perspective, organisational perspective, or the financial perspective (Farjam & Hongyi, 2015; Keller, 1993), this study focuses on the perspective of consumer and organisation.

CBBE as an outcome of brand equity, integrates consumer perspective into the comprehension and measurement of brand equity (Baalbaki & Guzmán, 2016). The existent literature is filled with different types of models for conceptualising CBBE (Keller, 1993; Nam *et al.*, 2011; Wang & Finn, 2013). The majority of the models have been developed conceptually rather than empirically (Baalbaki & Guzmán, 2016). The foundation for CBBE theory came as a result of early seminal works of Aaker (1991a); Aaker (1992); Aaker (1996b), and that of Keller (1993); Keller (2003). Strong brand equity is constructed on awareness, association, perceived quality, and brand loyalty

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(Aaker, 1992). Correspondingly, brand equity transpires when the consumer is acquainted with the brand and holds some favourable, strong, and unique brand associations in memory (Keller, 1993). From the perspective of Aaker, 1991a and Aaker, 1992 the conceptualisation of the CBBE model includes brand awareness, brand associations, perceived quality, brand loyalty and other proprietary brand assets. Keller (1993) views brand knowledge as a component of CBBE comprising awareness and image. His model categorises six elements including brand salience, brand performances, brand imagery, brand feelings, brand judgments and brand relationships.

Closely linked to brand feelings is the concept of brand love, as a construct goes beyond brand attachment and brand satisfaction that comprises a long-lasting emotional connection and a sturdier emotional affiliation focusing on affection as opposed to satisfaction that focuses on cognitive judgment (Carroll & Ahuvia, 2006; Thomson, MacInnis & Whan Park, 2005; Unal & Aydın, 2013). According to Albert, Merunka and Valette-Florence (2008), the brand love concept involves an array of psychological facets among which there is brand attachment. Brand love demonstrates consumers' expanding relationship with brands (Aro, Suomi & Saraniemi, 2018), a phenomenon experienced by passionate and emotionally attached consumers (Aro *et al.*, 2018; Carroll & Ahuvia, 2006; Drennan, Bianchi, Cacho-Elizondo, Louriero, Guibert & Proud, 2015; Gumparthi & Patra, 2020). Emotions felt towards a destination form a varied mixture of feelings about both the destination and the destination brand (Swanson, 2015).

Experience

Customer experience is characterised as a multifaceted construct centring on a customer's cognitive, emotional, behavioural and social reactions evoked by a stimulus to the brand (Brakus, Schmitt & Zarantonello, 2009; Lemon & Verhoef, 2016). Chen and Chen (2010) distinguish customer experience in tourism as the subjective individual responses and sentiments related with tourism activities. Branded destinations consist of the connotations and experiences that evoke an expectation of value about a specific location (Chen, King & Lee, 2018; Morgan, Pritchard & Piggott, 2003). Tourism firms' ability to retain customers comes down to the creation and delivery of memorable tourism experiences (Leung, Law, Van Hoof & Buhalis, 2013;

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Ravishankar & Christopher, 2020). In order to distinguish the destination brand from the competition, it must offer a memorable and unique experience as part of the brand promise (Barnes *et al.*, 2014; Khan & Fatma, 2021).

Familiarity

The familiarity of a destination is the result of visual or mental impressions of a destination or tourist experience that can generate intentions to travel to the destination (Horng, Liu, Chou & Tsai, 2012; Li, Rashid & Tahir, 2018; Milman & Pizam, 1995). The choice of a destination can be driven by tourists' experiences, the choice guided by using past experiences and familiar memories (Horng *et al.*, 2012; Prentice & Kadan, 2019). Tourists that have been to a destination before are likely to recall relevant information directly from memory (Horng *et al.*, 2012).

Identification

Brand identification increases customer loyalty and creates long-term connections between customers and a brand (Kumar & Kaushik, 2017). By building a sense of relationship with consumers, brands assist them with expressing their identities, and emphasising and enhancing their sense of uniqueness(Rather, Tehseen & Parrey, 2018; Tuškej, Golob & Podnar, 2013). Establishing successful relationships between tourists and destinations requires an understanding of brand identification (Berrozpe, Campo & Yagüe, 2019).

Judgement

Brand judgement is premised on how consumers evaluate a brand in respect of quality, reliability, consideration, and excellence based on performance and imagery associations (Panda & Kapoor, 2016; Woo, Jung & Jin, 2020). Brands that receive positive consumer feedback can subsequently develop strong relationships with their brands (Panda & Kapoor, 2016).

Loyalty

An important component of brand loyalty is a deeply ingrained predisposition to purchase the same brand again and again, despite circumstances and marketing efforts that may cause this behaviour to change (Aaker, 1997). The primary factor that determines loyalty is the affective component and is easily observable (Liu *et al.*, 2020;

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Oliver, 1999). In the context of a destination brand, tourists' loyalty can be summed up as the intention to revisit a destination (Jani & Han, 2011), defined as returning to or visiting a destination again (Nguyen, 2020). Destination loyalty is an outcome of tourists' complex assessment of a destination brand (Luo *et al.*, 2020).

Love

As a concept, brand love refers to the emotional attachment of consumers to a brand (Aro *et al.*, 2018). An emotional attachment to a brand can be referred to as brand love (Long-Tolbert & Gammoh, 2012). In describing the concept of brand love, Carroll and Ahuvia (2006) defined it as an explanation and prediction of desirable post-consumer behaviours of satisfied consumers. Increasing brand love illustrates consumers' growing affinity for brands. Destination brand love leads to tourists becoming interested in the brand's well-being (Aro *et al.*, 2018).

Meaning

Brand meaning is determined from consumer experience and dominant perception, interpreting the brand stimulus based on the social goals, life context, purpose and identity project that the consumer desires (Berry, 2000; Ligas & Cotte, 1999; Rosenthal & Brito, 2017), and the impression that instantly comes to customers' minds in reference to the brand (Berry & Seltman, 2007; Moreau, 2020). As parts of the destination-branding process, brand meaning indicators include perceptions such as believability, personality and trust (García, Gómez & Molina, 2012).

Performance

Destination brands have found measuring brand performance vital because the proliferation of competitors and brands creates more choices for visitors, and stakeholders are holding destination brands to higher standards of accountability (Kashif, Samsi & Sarifuddin, 2015; Morgan & Pritchard, 2002; Pike, 2005). The performance results of brands reflect the internal growth path that allows revenues from existing consumers in terms of profitability, to increase (Casidy, Wymer & O'Cass, 2018).

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Personality

Brand personality can be described as a collection of human traits associated with a brand (Aaker, 1997). Despite the fact that brands are inanimate objects, consumers frequently perceive them to have human traits such as youthfulness, outdoorsyness, sportiness, energy or sophistication (Aaker, 1997; Usakli & Baloglu, 2011). DMOs need to identify and communicate their unique symbolic and functional attributes to enhance their brand personality and the overall destination (Vinyals-Mirabent *et al.*, 2019).

Positioning

Positioning of the brand destination results from the notion that it must be managed in a way to clearly distinguish it from its competitors (Šerić, Jurišić & Petričević, 2015; Swystun, 2007). Brand destination positioning is essentially about strengthening the association between the brand and its attractiveness (Šerić *et al.*, 2015). An effective positioning strategy empowers a brand to successfully compete against a specified group of competitors (Hoeffler & Keller, 2003; Pike, 2017). Ordinarily, the larger parts of brand positioning mottos that are created to communicate brand characters are based on terms that speak to tangible destination attributes or affective benefits, and these are effortlessly imitable by competitors (Kotsi & Pike, 2021).

Preference

A consumer's brand preference is considered a significant factor that influences choice in the decision-making process (Bahn, 1986; Stankevich, 2017). By identifying the unique characteristics of different brands, consumers are able to establish brand preference (Jin & Weber, 2013; Li, Hua & Zhu, 2021). Brand preference is consumers' inclination towards a certain brand which is a strong emotional attachment (Herrando, Jiménez-Martínez & Martín-De Hoyos, 2017; Li *et al.*, 2021), based on their first encounter in utilising the brand compared with other comparable brands (Tresna, Herawaty & Chan, 2020). Destination preference is a result of destination selection and is a precursor of destination choice (Su & Huang, 2019; Zhang, Fu, Cai & Lu, 2014).

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Quality

Each consumer's assessment of a product's perceived quality centres on its perceived excellence or superiority (Aaker, 1991b; Kim *et al.*, 2018b). Quality has also been considered as a component of destinations' image in some studies (Dedeoğlu, 2019; Tasci, 2018). Quality is crucial when tourism destinations establish standards of production for products and services (Dedeoğlu *et al.*, 2020). Furthermore, it is valuable since it positively influences consumers' attitudes and behaviours towards the tourism destination (Suhartanto, Brien, Primiana, Wibisono & Triyuni, 2020).

Service quality at a destination is measured by customers' perceptions of the quality of the services received while residing at a destination (Jeaheng, Al-Ansi & Han, 2020; Kayat & Abdul Hai, 2014). In contrast to destination natural quality, destination service quality can be developed by DMOs themselves (Abdulla, Khalifa, Abuelhassan, Nordin, Ghosh & Bhaumik, 2020; Tosun, Dedeoğlu & Fyall, 2015).

Resonance

Brand resonance represents a sign of engagement with the destination (Tarigan, Lubis, Rini & Sembiring, 2019) that can be measured behaviourally through actual visitation, as well as attitudinally by expressing intention to visit (Duman, Ozbal & Duerod, 2018; Tarigan *et al.*, 2019). It is the consequence of consumers' judgments and sentiments regarding the product, with the first step being to assess level of awareness of the product (Duman *et al.*, 2018). As destination products become more popular, brand resonance will be stronger (Duman *et al.*, 2018; Jung, Lee, Kim & Yang, 2014).

Satisfaction

Tourist satisfaction is defined as the overall subjective judgment that a tourist makes regarding destination products and services through comparison of expectations before the trip with actual experiences on the trip (Su, Cheng & Huang, 2020; Wu, Cheng & Ai, 2017). Customer dissatisfaction is a result of performance of the service not meeting the customer's expectations. Conversely, when the performance of a service exceeds customer expectations, customer satisfaction increases (Byun & Jang, 2019; Liu & Jang, 2009; Westbrook & Oliver, 1991). Among tourist satisfaction and behaviour, distinctiveness positively affects travellers' satisfaction (Truong *et al.*,

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2018). Destination attributes have a positive impact on the destination image and therefore on tourist satisfaction (Eid, El-Kassrawy & Agag, 2019; Yen *et al.*, 2020).

Self-congruity

The concept of self-concept is extremely useful for understanding consumer behaviour, since it refers to how people view themselves (Chen *et al.*, 2020; Sirgy, 1982). Destination brand self-consistency alludes to coherence between the traveller's self-concept and the destination's brand image and is determined from a good self-concept composition (Usakli & Baloglu, 2011). Tourists who recognise that the destination image corresponds closely with their self-concept are more likely to strengthen their symbolic self, thereby associating the destination brand with favourable attitudes and positive feelings (Chen *et al.*, 2020).

Symbolism

Entities such as nations, localities or even organisations, regularly employ symbols to convey what they stand for and who they are, and these symbols can have meanings that can determine the behaviour of the interpreter (Muhwezi, Baum & Nyakaana, 2016). Symbolism reflects how consumers define themselves through the use of brands (Chen *et al.*, 2020). Brand symbols, such as logos, can represent the identity of a place (Séraphin, Ambaye, Gowreesunkar & Bonnardel, 2016). A brand conveys an emotion that consumers recall when they reflect on a certain symbol, product, service, organisation, or destination (Galí *et al.*, 2017; Simeon, 2006).

Value

Holbrook (1999) defines the term "value" as an evaluation of the advantages derived from the use of a product or service in comparison to the costs incurred by the consumer. The importance of value to a brand cannot be overstated (Luo *et al.*, 2020). The concept of destination brand value in tourist destination development is recognised as a key element for establishing competitive advantage (Ashton, 2015; Rather, Najar & Jaziri, 2020).

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Trust

According to the concept of trust, there are two sides in the relationship: a trustor, the one who gives trust, and the one who receives trust (Blöbaum, 2021; Hsu & Cai, 2009). There is a tendency for trust to become evident when it decreases or is threatened, as this is part of its nature (Blöbaum, 2021). Brand trust is a concept defined in terms of expectations and risk (Kim *et al.*, 2018b). Based upon the tourist's knowledge of the destination brand, brand trust is described as the tourist's inclination to rely on the brand to fulfil its promises and satisfy or surpass expectations (Hsu & Cai, 2009).

Perception

Tourism perceptions vary across cultures, which is affected by expectations among tourists (Martín, de los Salmones Sanchez & Herrero, 2018). While trying to create an image that would attract large audiences, destinations face a challenging task, since not all people have the same preferences and expectations (Valek, 2020). Destination attributes provide insight into how the destination promotion is perceived, and these attributes are assumed to be better when tourists suggest them based on their own experiences (Bottomley & Doyle, 2006; Han, Al-Ansi, Olya & Kim, 2019).

3.6 Conclusion

The literature review was conducted to explain the primary dimensions of destination branding, specifically focusing on brand identity and brand image. Furthermore, the discourse stretched beyond brand identity and brand image to explore other dimensions of destination branding. The subsequent section investigates of destination branding in the context of social media.

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CHAPTER 4: DESTINATION BRANDING THROUGH SOCIAL MEDIA

4.1 Overview

The Media Richness Theory (MRT) has been a cornerstone in the field of organisational communication, providing a systematic approach to selecting communication channels that align with the complexity of messages (Trevino, Lengel & Daft, 1987). The fundamental concept suggests that messages of greater complexity should be transmitted through more intricate and interactive media such as face-to-face conversations, while simpler messages are adequately served by more straightforward media, like emails or memos (Valacich, Mennecke, Wachter & Wheeler, 1994).

Amidst this backdrop, the rise of digital communication expanded organisations communicative reach, prompting revaluation of traditional media richness (Hui, Raza, Khan, Zaman & Ogadimma, 2023). This expanded scope of reach and the inherent immediacy of digital interactions compels a reimagined framework for integrated communication strategies, particularly salient from a global vantage point (Chandrasekaran, RV & Annamalai, 2023). Embracing digital channels not only amplifies an organisation's voice but casts it onto the global stage, where the rapid technological evolution markedly recalibrates interaction modalities (Keller, 2009; Kitchen & Schultz, 2003). Studies by Poon (1989), Pollock (1995), Buhalis (1998), Buhalis (2000), and Heath (2001) observed the future impact of technology on tourism management. A vital criterion in formulation of destination strategies in years to come would involve full comprehension of the stimulus exerted through the internet. Elements of the marketing mix, specifically promotional channels, would be affected the most (Bonn, Furr & Susskind, 1998; Heath, 2001).

Internet is the emergent information technology with the credibility of immediacy and fastness. In this manner, it relays globalisation in every facet of communication (Adams, 2018; Jothi, Neelamalar & Prasad, 2011; Marčeková *et al.*, 2019). Because

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marketing and promotions are costly exercises, right decisions are imperative in implementing appropriate communication tools (Foris *et al.*, 2020; Morrison, 2013).

The advancement of e-commerce has prompted changes in the way tourists identify with the tourism industry and destinations (Li, Robinson & Oriade, 2017) . Technology stands out as an imminent challenge to destinations since DMOs need to acclimatise marketing strategies and tactics to the improvement and diffusion of new communication methods (Li, Robinson & Oriade, 2017; Presenza *et al.*, 2005). The marketing communication budget needs to be allocated to an effective medium such as social networks (Kumar, Choi & Greene, 2017).

Marketing communication is how organisations endeavour to inform and remind consumers about product offerings or a brand (Bennett & Association, 1995; Shen, Chiou, Hsiao, Wang & Li, 2016). Marketing communication enables brands to connect to people, places, events, brands, experiences, and sentiments, creating experiences, establishing communities, and what's more (Girish & Lee, 2019), it can enable destination to build awareness of the destination, attain worldwide publicity, reinforce the destination image, ensure understanding of what the destination does and stands for, change behaviour and perceptions, and bolster the brand (Kiráľová & Pavlíčeka, 2015; Luo & Donthu, 2006). Marketing communication plays this vital role in a considerably difficult environment such as tourism (Krizanova, Lăzăroiu, Gajanova, Kliestikova, Nadanyiova & Moravcikova, 2019). The media landscape has gone through significant disruptions as a result of technological advancements, which has brought about significant changes that are influencing modern-day destination management and marketing (Thaler & Koval, 2007). The increased utilisation and changes in technology, together with abatement of marketing budgets, are compelling destinations to innovate communications strategies (Kiráľová & Pavlíčeka, 2015). Many destinations, regardless of size, are using social media to advertise and promote (Hays *et al.*, 2013; Mariani *et al.*, 2016; Saravanakumar & SuganthaLakshmi, 2012).

Distinct communication strategies are employed across different social networking platforms, namely, Facebook, X, and Instagram. Each platform presents unique opportunities and challenges for effective communication, necessitating tailored approaches to engage and connect with users (Kreiss, Lawrence & McGregor, 2018;

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Phua, Jin & Kim, 2017). In today's marketing landscape, social networking sites have emerged as the primary platforms for implementing highly targeted advertising and marketing strategies. Consequently, it becomes imperative to critically assess the effectiveness of brand communication strategies employed on these platforms (Hossain, Shan, Musa & Rahman, 2020; Jothi *et al.*, 2011).

In contemporary society, the internet and social media play a pivotal and indispensable role. These technological advancements have become integral components of daily life, profoundly influencing various aspects of society, communication, and human interaction (Roque & Raposo, 2021). This widespread internet connectivity has transformative implications for various aspects of life, ranging from communication and information access to commerce and social interaction (Haini, 2020). In the past twenty years, the emergence and widespread adoption of social media platforms have catalysed significant transformations within the domain of marketing communication (Walsh, 2020). The impact of information and communication technologies (ICTs) on tourism and their foreseeable future evolution seem to be shaping a new scenario for destination management (Ivars-Baidal, Celdrán-Bernabeu, Mazón & Perles-Ivars, 2019).

In today's global tourism landscape, it has become indispensable for destinations worldwide to establish a prominent digital footprint. The necessity of maintaining a robust online presence has emerged as a crucial requirement for tourism destinations aiming to remain competitive and attract a diverse range of traveller (Tiago, Moreira & Borges-Tiago, 2019). Various social media platforms, including Facebook, X, and Instagram, constitute a subset of the extensive array of available mediums for communication and engagement (Demant, Bakken, Oksanen & Gunnlaugsson, 2019). Within the realm of social networking, Facebook stands as the dominant platform for establishing and nurturing interpersonal connections. X, in contrast, operates as a microblogging medium where users succinctly express their thoughts through concise text messages (Filieri, Yen & Yu, 2021).

During the advent of the internet, Web 1.0 emerged as an early version characterised by the static presentation of published information, offering limited or negligible user engagement (Hays *et al.*, 2013). Web 2.0, in contrast to its predecessor, Web 1.0,

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embraces a higher degree of customer engagement by harnessing the power of popular social media platforms like Facebook, X, and Instagram. This evolved version of the web facilitates interactive and collaborative experiences, enabling users to actively participate, connect, and contribute within online communities (Clement Addo, Fang, Asare & Kulbo, 2021). In an analysis conducted on a sample of 50 DMOs in Europe by Uşaklı *et al.* (2017), it was discovered that a greater proportion of them operate on social media platforms. There are 43 official DMO accounts on Facebook, X, and YouTube, and 31 on Instagram. A variety of online platforms are used by DMOs for distributing content that contains information on the destination and the services it offers. An analysis by Mariani *et al.* (2018) of national tourism organisations' (NTOs) marketing and promotional strategies on Facebook was conducted for the top 10 most-visited countries by international tourists. According to the research, the approaches taken by NTOs to utilise Facebook vary. The analysis suggests that visual content, namely, photos, can positively affect engagement.

This study specifically directs its attention to three prominent platforms widely employed by DMOs in destination marketing (Lalicic, Huertas, Moreno & Jabreel, 2019). Research on social media in tourism and hospitality has mainly concentrated on Facebook as well as X (Hays *et al.*, 2013) as these were thought to be the most widely recognised social media platforms used by tourism organisations. However, as suggested and undertaken by Uşaklı *et al.* (2017), the proposed study will incorporate Instagram.

4.2 Facebook

Facebook has gained significant recognition as a prominent contemporary means of communication due to its widespread and distinct advantages over other modern communication methods (Kumar *et al.*, 2022). The platform's widespread popularity stems from its unique features and capabilities, which differentiate it from other modes of communication in the digital landscape (Azeez & Abbas, 2021) and is one of the most effective platforms that can be employed to promote tourism destinations (Kiswantoro, Sarina, Azahari & Rohman, 2021).

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Facebook started as a social utility to enable communication between friends and family through “wall” posts, photographs, personal messages, live chats, and status updates, and has since advanced into a noteworthy platform for social media marketing (Cox & Park, 2014; Paquette, 2009). Although an archetypal Facebook user devotes the majority of their time on Facebook inactively seeing without posting or “lurking” (Pempek, Yermolayeva & Calvert, 2009), as of April 2018, Facebook reported an estimated 2.2 billion Monthly Active Users and has 1.4 billion Daily Active Users (Hatch, 2018; Stout, 2018). By an exceptional margin, Facebook is the world’s largest social network, and as of the final quarter of 2020, Facebook had almost 2.8 billion worldwide month-to-month active users (Tankovska, 2021a).

Organisations can create a Facebook page similar to that of a personal profile for marketing products, or services and gain Facebook “fans” or “likes” through engaging advertisements and quality content, with the most popular feature being the “like button” (Tankovska, 2021a). A noteworthy objective of Facebook advertising is to encourage the “friends” of those who are now “fans” of the organisation’s Facebook page, to reach more potential consumers (Cox & Park, 2014). When displayed with human-like characteristics and social cues, Facebook fan pages can elicit positive social responses (Pérez-Vega, Taheri, Farrington & O'Gorman, 2018). Furthermore, an indication of the effectiveness of a marketing campaign is evidenced by the number of reactions to posts on Facebook, which is an important metric based on research (Molina *et al.*, 2020).

Online social media tools, such as Facebook, are used by destinations to communicate with the public and provide information for marketing purposes and tourism development (Park, Lee, Yoo & Nam, 2016). However, there is significant variation in the way Facebook is used across national DMOs (Mariani *et al.*, 2018). Facebook prioritise current events, enabling DMOs to communicate real-time updates (Hays *et al.*, 2013). Facebook has proven to be an effective medium for destination crisis communication during crisis response phases and recovery phases (Möller, Wang & Nguyen, 2018).

Many destinations around the world market themselves through Facebook. It is the most widely used social media platform in America and Europe, where it is used in

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varying degrees to analyse how two tourist destinations, namely, Mexico and Brazil, expressed their brand personality using Facebook. The results depicted that both countries used their official Facebook page to communicate their brand values. As part of the process of developing marketing strategies, messages must be shaped based on format, content, and appeal (Molina *et al.*, 2020). A study by Mariani *et al.* (2018) showed that visual content has a positive effect on engagement.

4.3 Instagram

Instagram is the social media platform that is generally utilised by most influencers because of the feeling of closeness and immediacy that it creates (Zolkepli, Hasno & Syed Mukhiar, 2015), and has also shown a substantial engagement rate contrasted with other social media platforms (Bakhshi, Shamma & Gilbert, 2014; Boulianne & Larsson, 2021). It is a photo- and video-sharing platform that is an extraordinary source of information (Aramendia-Muneta, Olarte-Pascual & Ollo-López, 2021). Instagram is an image- and video-centred social media platform (Muñoz & Towner, 2017). As of June 2018 Instagram reported more than 1 billion monthly active users worldwide (Hatch, 2018; Stout, 2018; Tankovska, 2021b), however, during the second half of 2018, Instagram (2018) announced that the total monthly active users is 1 billion-plus with daily active users of 500 million-plus and 400 million-plus daily story activities. Visual-driven social media platforms have had faster consumer adoption rates (Muñoz & Towner, 2017).

Instagram users share photos with a targeted audience by using hashtags in their posts, thereby helping users reach a larger audience by connecting them with similar posts (Filieri *et al.*, 2021). An even greater engagement of the users is reflected in the use of a specific hashtag than in the behavioural dimensions of engagement such as likes, shares, and comments (Fatanti & Suyadnya, 2015; Filieri *et al.*, 2021). Hashtags are a way for users to browse interesting photographs and find friends who share similar interests. One may choose to use a general travel hashtag, such as #travel, or one related to a particular destination (Filieri *et al.*, 2021). There are four types of hashtag functions in Instagram: grouping media for touristic content, finding media for tourist content, stimulating various tourism-related posts, and promoting travel

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products (Fatanti & Suyadnya, 2015). In addition to its initial use as a medium for online photo sharing, Instagram has blossomed into an advertising, promotion, marketing, and information service platform (Fatanti & Suyadnya, 2015; Iglesias-Sánchez, Correia, Jambrino-Maldonado & de las Heras-Pedrosa, 2020).

Instagram is the most popular user generated content (UGC) platform for visually-oriented content for tourists looking for travel destinations, by communicating in this way, post-tourists (those who have already travelled) engage pre-tourists (those who are yet to travel), (Arefieva, Egger & Yu, 2021). DMOs have employed Instagram for creating a visual image of the destination, as formed through exposure to visual media (Nixon, Popova & Önder, 2017). Images of tourism destinations are often constructed with a visual representation of the destination as the dominant component, therefore, photographs are essential (Garrod, 2009; Markwell, 1997). Leisure travel and photography are inextricably linked (Filieri *et al.*, 2021; Garrod, 2009; Markwell, 1997). It is particularly important for DMOs to get user-generated photographs of a place, since these can easily influence beliefs and perceptions toward the place among previous and potential visitors (Kim & Stepchenkova, 2015). Instagram assumes a critical role in choosing the next destination, in this way offering a significant device for destinations to reach their audience and communicate through visually engaging content (Benedek, 2018).

Several engagement metrics can be utilised to determine the success of an Instagram post or campaign where metrics consider determining how frequently consumers interact with content, being an indication of the post's popularity (Purba, Asirvatham & Murugesan, 2020). The number of account followers' "likes" or "favourited" content, comments, and shares are essential methods of establishing whether a campaign has achieved its objectives, and engagement is mainly appraised through the number of likes and comments. On the other hand, it requires less effort to "like" a post as compared to "comment" (Muñoz & Towner, 2017). Studies reveal that pictures and videos assist in drawing in customers with an intention to make a purchase (Hautz, Füller, Hutter & Thürridl, 2014).

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With the recent trend of visual content, as evidenced by the huge growth of the photo-sharing social network Instagram, destinations must consider how photos can influence consumers' perceptions of destinations (Nixon *et al.*, 2017).

4.4 X (formerly known as Twitter)

X is a microblogging open service that is fundamentally text-driven, although it also features photographs and recordings (Bigne, Oltra & Andreu, 2019; Lalicic *et al.*, 2019; Valenzuela, 2017). X enables users and consumers to express feelings regarding products and services (Trivedi & Singh, 2021). An important platform for DMOs, it has a total number of monthly active users of 330 million with a total number of Tweets sent per day equalling 500 million (Hatch, 2018; Stout, 2018). As of the final quarter of 2020, X had 192 million monetizable users around the world (Tankovska, 2021c).

X initially permitted users to compose text posts (tweets) addressing any topic within a 140-character constraint (Kwak, Lee, Park & Moon, 2010). Subsequently, in the year 2017, the character limit underwent an augmentation to 280 characters, globally implemented, with the exception of Japan, Korea, and China. This exception was informed by the observation that tweets in these regions rarely surpassed the 140-character threshold (Rosen, 2017). X has several mechanisms allowing organisations or users to monitor and track the status of any Tweet, for instance, a timeline is a real-time stream of Tweets from other accounts being followed and status updates are more integral to the purpose of X for businesses and individuals alike. While X is driven by and excels at providing timely updates (Hays *et al.*, 2013), it is possible to monitor: Likes (indicates that another X account appreciates the post or Tweet), Mention (a Tweet where a DMO's @username was included) and Retweet (when a Tweet is forwarded to the followers and is mostly used to relay news or other valuable discoveries on X and always retains the original attribution).

Mounting attention has been received by X as a distinct communication tool that facilitates electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM) (Kim, Sung & Kang, 2014). eWOM creates over 3 billion daily brand impressions, coming from various social media platforms (Berger, 2014). An additional avenue on X for facilitating brand eWOM is brand pages. After becoming followers of brand pages, users can read the

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communicated brand tweets in their timeline since they are automatically aggregated (Jansen, Zhang, Sobel & Chowdury, 2009). Influencer marketing produces a shortcut to branding and impenetrable content because some influencers have powerful personal brands that transfer onto the brand (Johansson & Svensson, 2018).

X has relevance in tourism as a major resource for promotion of destinations via e-WOM (Ross, Terras, Warwick & Welsh, 2011) and has become a new platform for DMOs to promote their destinations and to provide travellers with information (Guerrero-Solé & Fernández-Cavia, 2013; Lalicic *et al.*, 2020). DMOs utilise X to communicate product offering (Guerrero-Solé & Fernández-Cavia, 2013) and information about destinations on an inexpensive basis (Garay & Pérez, 2017; Hays *et al.*, 2013).

Crisis communication has been done largely through X owing to its immediacy attribute (Fowler, 2017; Wang & Zhuang, 2017), especially at times of crises, as X's speed can save time (Coombs, 2015; Oliveira & Huertas, 2019). It is important for DMOs to develop relationships with X influencers that can retweet posts to increase visibility (Bokunewicz & Shulman, 2017; Guerrero-Solé & Fernández-Cavia, 2013). DMOs have to improve X strategies and reposts, and also find a balance between own content and content from other sources that may relate to a DMO’s objectives (Guerrero-Solé & Fernández-Cavia, 2013).

Researchers examined the way DMOs in Europe communicate on X and concluded that they aren't consistently communicating brand identity with specific adjectives, they commonly use generic messages, and they lack a cohesive marketing strategy (Antoniadis, Grougiou, Zafiropoulos, Vrana & Theocharidis, 2018; Lalicic *et al.*, 2019).

4.5 DMOs and social media

Social media research concerning destination branding encompasses two distinct terms: firm-generated content (FGC) and consumer-generated content (CGC). FGC pertains to information produced by the DMO regarding the branding of the tourism destination (Dedeoğlu, van Niekerk, Küçükergin, De Martino & Okumuş, 2019a). On

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the other hand, CGC is created by tourists themselves, driven by various motivations (Antoniadis *et al.*, 2018).

In the realm of tourism business and customer communication, social media platforms have emerged as the most suitable tools for establishing and maintaining relationships with customers (Escobar-Rodríguez & Carvajal-Trujillo, 2013; Kim, Koh, Cha & Lee, 2015). Despite the inherent advantages of social media for tourism firms, the adoption of these platforms among DMOs varies. Some DMOs have embraced social media technology at a faster pace, recognising its potential to enhance destination promotion, engage with travellers, and amplify their marketing efforts. (Gretzel, Yuan & Fesenmaier, 2000; Li *et al.*, 2017).

Social networks furnish a user with a myriad of interaction possibilities, ranging from a simple chat, photographs, and videos (Li *et al.*, 2017). It permits individuals who share similar interests and activities to write, share, evaluate and discuss content (Giglio, Bertacchini, Bilotta & Pantano, 2019), as well as satisfy the need for interactive dialogue among organisations, communities, and individuals (Munar & Jacobsen, 2014). Social media induces various diverse terms, a large number of which are applied conversely, leading authors to agreeing that the terminology continues to allude to the same definition; the terms incorporate social media, user-generated content, consumer-generated media, online social networks, social networking sites, Web 2.0 and Travel 2.0 (Baka, 2016; Chung & Buhalis, 2008; Filieri, Alguezaui & McLeay, 2015; Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010; Luo & Zhong, 2015; Xiang & Gretzel, 2010).

Branded social media communication can be categorised into two distinct classes, namely, 'organic' activities initiated by the brand on social media platforms, which are freely shared, and 'paid' content that entails compensating media proprietors for ensuring consumer visibility. (Fulgoni, 2015). The widespread prevalence of social media has resulted in a significant surge in its adoption and utilisation across various demographics (Ali Qalati, Li, Ahmed, Ali Mirani & Khan, 2020). Its effect has turned out to be that social media platforms are the most fitting tools for tourism firms for communicating with customers and building viable businesses (Escobar-Rodríguez & Carvajal-Trujillo, 2013; Kim *et al.*, 2015). Some DMOs have adopted social media technology faster than others (Gretzel *et al.*, 2000; Li *et al.*, 2017). Zeng and Gerritsen

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(2014) analysed research papers that investigated the effects of social media in tourism. It was noted that social media is extensively gaining prominence as parts of tourism practices influencing destinations. As such, destination ecosystems are significantly impacted by the new strategic challenges posed by the emergent social media trend (Munar, 2012; Munar & Jacobsen, 2014). This change necessitates DMOs to employ social media platforms to remain connected in the day-to-day interactions of the virtual world (Hays *et al.*, 2013).

Due to the perpetually active nature of social media platforms, DMOs must handle their social media presence skilfully to remain competitive, as it, increasingly, assumes a pivotal role as an essential tool for destination marketing (Mariani *et al.*, 2016; Pike & Page, 2014). Some DMOs do not exploit the potential that social media presents to an organisation, and do not utilise social media for marketing campaigns (Denizci Guillet, Kucukusta & Liu, 2016). Contrastingly, a considerable number of organisations are increasingly leveraging social media platforms as their primary tools for marketing and communication (Leung, Sun & Bai, 2019). This shift is motivated by the recognition that traditional media channels no longer suffice to meet the evolving demands of a dynamic consumer landscape (Chen & DiVall, 2018; Denizci Guillet *et al.*, 2016). The ubiquitous nature of social media among consumers has played a pivotal role in steering this transition, emphasising the need for a more adaptive and responsive approach to reach and engage with target audiences (Mariani *et al.*, 2018; Uşaklı *et al.*, 2019). However, tourism organisations are criticised for the lack of communication strategies to communicate destination-related brand values that distinguish the destination from others on social media (Huertas & Marine-Roig, 2015; Kantamaa, 2020). Instead, DMOs tend to focus on emotional values in destination brand communication on social media (Jabreel *et al.*, 2017).

Scholars, including Andrlic and De Alwis (2016) and Hays *et al.* (2013), affirm the versatile utility of social media for DMOs, recognising its potent role in fostering customer connections and fortifying relationships, it enables DMOs to engage a global audience efficiently, even with limited resources. This advantage, surpassing traditional communication tools in cost-effectiveness and outreach, underscores the need for DMOs to strategically implement a comprehensive content strategy for impactful digital engagement (Gretzel *et al.*, 2006; Gretzel *et al.*, 2000; Hays *et al.*,

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2013; Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010; Xiang & Gretzel, 2010). The advantage of social media and its effectiveness to destinations can be observed particularly in the upsurge in brand awareness, brand engagement, WOM, friends/liking, trust, and social validation (Kiráľová & Pavlíčeka, 2015). Essentially, social media is a centrepiece for DMOs' branding strategies (Hays *et al.*, 2013).

The efficacy of social media as a marketing communication tool hinges upon the organisation's ability to grasp the appropriate strategies and approaches to employ when utilising these platforms (Eagleman, 2013). As the significance of social media as a tool for destination marketing continues to grow, DMOs increasingly rely on these platforms to promote and market their destinations. However, it is essential for DMOs to not only utilise social media effectively but also manage it efficiently to gain a sustainable competitive advantage (Pike & Page, 2014). DMOs predominantly employ social media platforms in various domains, namely, marketing, management, communication, and product distribution, as they recognise the multifaceted benefits and opportunities these channels offer (Leung, Schuckert & Yeung, 2013). Scholars contend that the diminishing efficacy of conventional media and the pervasive presence of social media platforms among consumers have led to a heightened reliance on social media for marketing endeavours. (Denizci Guillet *et al.*, 2016; Hays *et al.*, 2013).

From an advertising perspective, in recent years, X has launched a Promoted moment, video, tweet, and/ or an account, which may be retweeted, replied to, and "favourited" like any other tweet (Kim *et al.*, 2014; Twitter, 2018). Likewise, not only does Instagram, as a platform, bring a chance to communicate an organisation's message by pictures, but also through the utilisation of social media influencers and sponsored posts (Johansson & Svensson, 2018).

Organisations must recognise social media as an integral portion of the organisation's communication strategy (Qualman, 2010). The key to any effective communication strategy is aligning the message to the target audience and realising customer engagement as a result (Kilgour *et al.*, 2015). For most users the motives for participating in social media are communication and interface to enhance sentiments of confidence (Hennig-Thurau, Gwinner, Walsh & Gremler, 2004; Khang, Ki & Ye,

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2012), meaning that content developed should aid to enhance user sentiments of self-esteem when sharing content (Gensler, Völckner, Liu-Thompkins & Wiertz, 2013). Content marketing as a focal point of social media strategy necessitates that right social media content should facilitate a more targeted approach, thus increasing the likelihood of user engagement (Kilgour *et al.*, 2015). Given the extensive generation and ingestion of content, it is imperative to target content to highly connected users who will proliferate the message further in the social network (Romero, Galuba, Asur & Huberman, 2011).

The Study by Kilgour *et al.* (2015) identified two significant target audience variables that account for determining an organisation's social media communications strategy, which is the level of brand relationship, and the level of category involvement.

4.6 Social Media Content Development

The narrative transportation theory, as postulated by Green and Brock (2000), centres on the psychological mechanism through which individuals become engrossed in a story. According to this theory, when people read or hear a narrative, they are 'transported' into the world of the story, leading to a change in their attitudes and intentions in line with the narrative's suggestions (Green & Brock, 2000). This transportation happens because the individual is emotionally and cognitively engaged with the story, which can cause a persuasive impact, making the message of the story more likely to be accepted by the audience (Green & Brock, 2000).

The principles of content marketing, as outlined by Pulizzi (2015), advocate for the strategic marketing approach focused on creating and distributing valuable, relevant, and consistent content to attract and retain a clearly-defined audience — and, ultimately, to drive profitable customer action. Instead of pitching products or services, content marketing provides relevant and useful content to help solve issues for the target audience.

Combining these two, a model informed by both the narrative transportation theory and the principles of content marketing would likely be one that leverages compelling

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storytelling to captivate and engage an audience in a way that not only holds their attention but also aligns with their needs and interests (Green & Brock, 2000; Pulizzi, 2015). The content created according to these models would be designed to transport the audience into a narrative that resonates with them on an emotional or intellectual level, thereby fostering a connection that is both deep and meaningful.

In the practical application of these theories within social media environments, DMOs curate content that reflects and shapes the destination's identity, seeking to engage users as effectively as narrative transportation suggests. Social media content may originate from the DMO, where it is influenced by the attributes on destination identity, or from other users (Roque & Raposo, 2016). This study focuses on content generated by DMOs and how users engaged with it. DMOs face strain when curating appropriate content to project the correct image. Studies have recognised a gap between projected and received images (He *et al.*, 2021). The content posted on social media influences the acceptance of the tourism product offering and the way users comprehend posts. Users esteem posts that pose questions as disseminate information, or share links (André, Bernstein & Luther, 2012), suggesting that users tend to give less consideration to posts containing links, particularly if the link is necessary to understand the post's primary message (Counts & Fisher, 2011; Uşaklı *et al.*, 2017). Seven categories were observed: content, major themes, information type, engagement, interactivity, promotion, and customer service. A posted content can be categorised as identifying with events, tourist attractions, socialisation, or commercial content (Bigne *et al.*, 2019; Hays *et al.*, 2013).

The growth of social media has provided millions of users a chance to generate and share content (Romero *et al.*, 2011). Kaplan and Haenlein (2010) state that the fundamental objective of content communities is that of sharing media content between users. Social entertainment includes channels and vehicles that present opportunities to readers from playing to enjoyment, thereby enabling engagement (Denizci Guillet *et al.*, 2016). Social publishing plays a role in the distribution of content to the target audience, including regular updated online content like text, images, and videos, such that readers can comment, resulting in a thread conversation (Denizci Guillet *et al.*, 2016). Social media incorporate an assortment of online information-sharing formats including social networking sites (Mangold & Faulds, 2009), for

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instance, the accessibility of social media platforms allow more tourists to share comments, images, and videos of travel experiences (Amakye & Nedelcheva, 2016).

Content is also generated through WOM, is conveyed by a more reliable source of information regarding products and brands than organisation-generated persuasive messages (Feick & Price, 1987). Consumers frequently depend on it when searching information for decision-making (Chu & Kim, 2011). It is established that WOM is one of the most persuasive strategies of communication available in the market (Makumbi, 2016). WOM is informal communications directed at other consumers regarding ownership, utilisation, or attributes of specific products and services or merchants (Berger, 2014; Westbrook, 1987). The appearance of internet-based media has revolutionised WOM and encouraged the development of online WOM, (eWOM), and affords both marketers and consumers with an outlet for efficient and timely communication (Daugherty, Eastin & Bright, 2008; Dellarocas, 2003). An eWOM proclamation can be positively or negatively viewed, being described as a declaration by potential, current, or existing customers disapproving of a product, service, or organisation online (Hennig-Thurau *et al.*, 2004; Zhou, Yan, Yan & Shen, 2020). A thorough examination of the factors that influence consumers' engagement in eWOM via social networks is becoming critical (Chu & Kim, 2011). Social media is an ideal tool to facilitate eWOM, since consumers uninhibitedly create and disseminate brand-related information (Vollmer & Precourt, 2008).

Aral, Dellarocas and Godes (2013) introduced a comprehensive framework that categorises social media usage into four overarching research domains, focusing on the ways in which organisations and consumers employ and interact with social media platforms. This framework encompasses design and features, strategy and tactics, management and organisation, and measurement and value. Design and features pertain to the process by which consumers and firms design, implement, institutionalise, and govern the characteristics and functionalities of technologies to enable and restrict their use in achieving organisational objectives (Aral *et al.*, 2013; Seo *et al.*, 2020). Strategy and tactics depict how consumers and organisations, broadly use social media and create social media strategies that best address goals. Management and organisation describe how consumers and organisations structure, oversee, and designate the processes and technology expected to create, deploy,

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utilise, and interact with social media (Aral *et al.*, 2013; Deng, Liu, Huang & Ding, 2020). Measurement and value explain how consumers and organisations create, measure, assign, or appropriate the value generated through utilising social media (Aral *et al.*, 2013).

Social media usage can influence the relationship between corporate culture and social media culture (Munar, 2012; Naeem & Ozuem, 2021). Studies by Hays *et al.* (2013), Hvass and Munar (2012) as well as Uşaklı *et al.* (2017) have identified changing corporate culture concerning the degree of social media utilisation by DMOs as an important player in the branding and marketing efforts of a destination.

Social media use is high and continues so among tourism organisations, specifically the use of Facebook and X (Leung, Bai & Stahura, 2015). DMOs hold varying levels of social media activity (Mariani *et al.*, 2016; Zeng & Gerritsen, 2014), determined according to the frequency with which DMOs post, reply or repost on social media (Hays *et al.*, 2013) and direct interactions with users (Kim & Hastak, 2018). There are several DMOs that are dynamic in managing and increasing use of social media, while others join social media without adequate sustenance or knowledge on how to become active users (Bigne *et al.*, 2019; Hays *et al.*, 2013; Lalicic *et al.*, 2019).

Consumer-generated content on social media also contributes to shaping destination brand image since it can significantly and quickly influence the image of a brand (Lim *et al.*, 2012). The growth of social media has provided millions of users with a chance to generate and share content (Ida & Saud, 2020; Romero *et al.*, 2011). Content generated through WOM) is conveyed by a more reliable source of information regarding products and brands than organisation-generated persuasive messages (Bu, Parkinson & Thaichon, 2020; Feick & Price, 1987), consumers frequently depending on it when searching for information on decision-making (Chu & Kim, 2011). It is established that WOM is one of the most persuasive strategies of communication available in the market (Makumbi, 2016; Park, Kim & Ryu, 2019). WOM is informal communications directed at other consumers regarding ownership, utilisation, or attributes of specific products and services or merchants (Berger, 2014; Westbrook, 1987).

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Gaining more followers on social media can be determined by several factors including the popularity of the user, giving an influence which is determined by, among others, novelty factors and resonance of their posts and frequency of the content created (Jungselius, Hilman & Weilenmann, 2014; Sciara, Contu, Bianchini, Chiocchi & Sonnewald, 2021). It is, therefore, crucial to identify influential users in a network so as to gain help with respect to viral marketing (Romero *et al.*, 2011). Furthermore, Kilgour *et al.* (2015) add that doing so is seen as organic and reliable when received via eWOM, which assists to minimise purchase risk. Therefore, influencing the influencers may aid in achieving strategic goals where they have expansive networks within the community, implying that their content has a probability of generating more impressions. In this manner, it has been proposed that social media can be utilised as an indirect product distribution channel that invigorates demand and encourages the immediate distribution of products. Stimulating product demand through social media is one of the functions of the DMOs to improve indirect distribution and diminish distribution costs (Leung *et al.*, 2013). X has an Ad targeting aspect which helps users to connect with a relevant audience through advertising on X, and allows targeting based on language, gender, interest, follower, device, behaviour, keyword, geolocation, and tailored audience (Twitter, 2018). The establishment of target groups and issue-by-issue advertising and promotion has helped organisations that prefer to employ social media to connect with customers to allocate resources to social media (Kirtiş & Karahan, 2011).

4.7 Social Media as a Customer Engagement Tool

The concept of engagement has aroused widespread interest from the academic world, resulting in many studies from diverse fields, including the marketing field, where studies proposed the concept of customer engagement (de Oliveira Santini, Ladeira, Pinto, Herter, Sampaio & Babin, 2020; Sashi, Brynildsen & Bilgihan, 2019; Zhang, Guo, Hu & Liu, 2017). Customer engagement is viewed as a strategic tool for developing and maintaining competitive advantage (Dolan, Conduit, Fahy & Goodman, 2017; Sedley & Perks, 2008).

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Customer engagement is a crucial segment of relationship marketing, characterised as the intensity of an individual's participation in and connection with an organisation's product and service offerings initiated by a customer or an organisation's initiative (Alvarez-Milán, Felix, Rauschnabel & Hinsch, 2018; Vivek, Beatty & Morgan, 2012). Customer engagement was classified as psychological, cognitive, and emotional by observing how customers interact with a brand (Liu, Shin & Burns, 2019). Hollebeek (2011) adds that customer-brand engagement is a psychological state that includes customers' cognitive, emotional and behavioural aspects, the first two aspects being observed in the formation of an overall projected destination image (Govers & Go, 2004; Kim, Lehto & Kandampully, 2019) contributing to the behaviour aspect. Van Doorn, Lemon, Mittal, Nass, Pick, Pirner and Verhoef (2010) posit that customer engagement involves non-transactional behaviour that primarily includes advancing positive WOM and prescribing brand to others through posting comments.

There are three dimensions identified in customer engagement, namely, enthusiasm, conscious participation, and social interaction (Hernández-Mogollón, Duarte & Folgado-Fernández, 2018; Vivek, 2009). Enthusiasm is an impression of the emotional aspect in customer engagement, conscious participation in the cognitive element, and social interaction representing the behavioural aspect, the emotional aspect leading to customers' frequent interaction with the brand (Thakur, 2018; Vivek, 2009; Zhang *et al.*, 2017), This implies that for brand engagement to occur, the emotional aspect needs to be advanced.

Much of this brand engagement takes place online through social media (Dolan *et al.*, 2017; Malthouse & Hofacker, 2010; Watkins, 2021). Madondo (2016) indicated that social media can be used as an engagement tool with prospective visitors. It is demonstrated that an organisation-generated content (OGC) photograph whose projected images matched consumers' central impressions, predominantly affective ones, prompts higher online engagement (He *et al.*, 2021). Social media photographs are a good source of data to gauge how the public views and values the destination (Rossi, Barros, Walden-Schreiner & Pickering, 2019). Social media data have been utilised to evaluate the relative notoriety of destinations (Rossi *et al.*, 2019; Wood, Guerry, Silver & Lacayo, 2013).

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Customers that engage with brand communities online feel more connected and committed to the brand, have higher brand satisfaction and are loyal (Brodie, Ilic, Juric & Hollebeek, 2013; Gong, 2018; Jahn & Kunz, 2012). Social media facilitates a new landscape for brand marketing communication, where consumers assume a more active role, and brands are social currency (Hennig-Thurau *et al.*, 2004; Waqas, Hamzah & Salleh, 2020). The opportunity here is to offer a two-way interactive medium dissimilar to the traditional media which is a one-way communication stream (Krishnamurthy, 2019; Ward *et al.*, 1999). Social media is utilised as a communication tool that provides interaction and engagement between DMOs and tourists (de Oliveira Santini *et al.*, 2020; Harrigan, Evers, Miles & Daly, 2017; Kim *et al.*, 2015). It is suggested that DMOs are largely ineffective in creating interaction and communication with tourists on social media (Denizci Guillet *et al.*, 2016; Huerta-Álvarez, Cambra-Fierro & Fuentes-Blasco, 2020).

Customer relationships are established when brands psychologically engage customers in the co-creation process facilitated through social media platforms (Brodie, Hollebeek, Jurić & Ilić, 2011; Brodie *et al.*, 2013). A high number of users on X are passive information consumers and do not engage with content by forwarding it to their network. Additionally, enormous engagement in social media platforms is reflected in the myriad of opinions, news, and product reviews (Arora, Bansal, Kandpal, Aswani & Dwivedi, 2019; Romero *et al.*, 2011). Accordingly, organisations can utilise social media to stimulate conversation, encourage interaction, and promote engagements in ways that traditional marketing cannot (Gonzalez, 2017; Solomon & Tuten, 2013).

Mariani *et al.* (2016) solicited how to gauge the success of social media strategies deployed by DMOs. The engagement statistics can differ altogether depending on how the engagement metrics are built (Dolan, Conduit, Frethey-Bentham, Fahy & Goodman, 2019). There is no particular set of metrics deployed consistently across DMOs to evaluate the success of social media. The level of engagement appears to be a measure applied by many DMO managers (Trunfio & Della Lucia, 2019). On Facebook and X pages, engagement was highly influenced by visual content and adequate posts, while high post recurrence does not imply high engagement similarly with early morning posts (Mariani *et al.*, 2016).

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Facebook advertising measure engagement based on likes, comments, shares, and click-throughs (Lee, Hosanagar & Nair, 2018; Yang, Ren & Adomavicius, 2019). Content that is identified with brand identity utilising elements of humour and emotion, is related to higher levels of consumer engagement regarding amassing Likes, comments, shares (Lee *et al.*, 2018; Meire, Hewett, Ballings, Kumar & Van den Poel, 2019). Engagement with a social media post relies on more than just text and image content. It is also affected by account characteristics and the posting time (Li & Xie, 2020). Informative content such as pronouncement of price and deals is associated with lower levels of engagement when incorporated in messages in isolation, but higher engagement levels when provided in combination with brand identity-related attributes (Lee et al., 2018; Meire et al., 2019).

4.8 Social Media Analytics (SMA)

The surge in social media utilisation has yielded an unprecedented volume of data, with users prolifically sharing their experiences and opinions about products and services across various platforms (Abeysinghe, Manchanayake, Samarajeewa, Rathnayaka, Walpola, Nawaratne, Bandaragoda & Alahakoon, 2018). The expanse of social media as a key generator of diverse and rapid data has heightened scholarly interest in the examination and application of this information (Rathore, Kar & Ilavarasan, 2017; Zhang, Zang, Zhu, Uddin & Amin, 2022).

The process of deciphering vast and multifaceted data from social media necessitates robust analytics, which have become crucial in transforming raw data into valuable insights (Muruganantham & Gandhi, 2020). Data derived from social media platforms —encompassing user opinions, experiences, and sentiments related to various products and services — enhances the value proposition of business organisations (Kohavi, Rothleder & Simoudis, 2002). The process of gathering this data from social platforms and analysing it to inform business decisions, is referred to as Social Media Analytics (SMA) (Muruganantham & Gandhi, 2020).

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This phenomenon presents a compelling opportunity for organisations to harness these data through sophisticated automated tools for social media analytics (Muruganantham & Gandhi, 2020). The scholarly discourse underscores the critical role of SMA in enabling organisations to transform vast quantities of user-generated content into actionable intelligence that can shape strategic decision-making (Muruganantham & Gandhi, 2020; Yakobi, 2022). This approach is already being harnessed in several domains such as the policy formulation process where SMA is employed to detect nascent trends and gauge public opinion, thus informing future policy directions (Grubmüller, Götsch & Krieger, 2013). A compelling opportunity for organisations to harness these data through sophisticated automated tools for social media analytics is presented by this phenomenon (Muruganantham & Gandhi, 2020). The scholarly discourse underscores the critical role of SMA in enabling organisations to transform vast quantities of user-generated content into actionable intelligence that can shape strategic decision-making (Muruganantham & Gandhi, 2020; Yakobi, 2022). Such actionable insights are pivotal for organisations as they navigate and respond to the rapidly evolving market conditions.

Similarly, dynamic capabilities provide a framework for firms to conceptualise and operationalise organisations' adaptability and responsiveness to changes (Duarte Alonso, Kok, Vu & O'Brien, 2023). The concept of 'dynamic capabilities' delineates two fundamental considerations (Teece, Pisano & Shuen, 1997). On the one hand it recognises the fluidity and unpredictability of the business context. and on the other, it accentuates the pivotal responsibility of strategic management in adeptly aligning, synthesising, and reconfiguring the array of internal and external organisational aptitudes, resources, and critical competencies to effectively navigate and capitalise on the flux within the operational environment (Teece *et al.*, 1997). This synergetic approach, combining SMA and dynamic capabilities, illustrates an organisation's proficiency in not only adjusting to market and technological shifts but also in shaping these changes through strategic foresight and innovation (Vu, 2020). Hence, the dynamic capabilities framework complements the insights gained from SMA, providing a strategic lens for firms to proactively address the challenges and opportunities presented by the digital era.

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4.9 Conclusion

The literature review explored destination branding through social media providing comprehensive discussion into social media platforms Facebook, Instagram. The review then shifted focus to explore social media content development, engagement and analytics. The subsequent section discusses research methodology employed in the study. Outlining the approaches and techniques used in data collection and analysis.

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CHAPTER 5: RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This chapter provides an overview of the study's inquiry and research design, which adhered to a descriptive research approach. The ensuing sections delve into the contextual nature of the study, the research paradigm of pragmatism, and the implementation of a case study design utilising sequential mixed methods research. Additionally, this chapter elucidates the strategy of inquiry employed, the sampling methods applied, and the procedures undertaken for data collection and analysis at each stage of the research process.

5.1 Research Paradigm and Case Study Design

A research paradigm plays a crucial role in shaping the overall conduct of a study, as it guides the selection of methodology, tools, and sample (Saunders, Lewis, Thornhill & Bristow, 2015). According to Mertens (1998), a theoretical framework is occasionally alluded to as the paradigm and impacts how knowledge is considered and deciphered. The selection of a research paradigm serves as a fundamental cornerstone that shapes the overall direction and purpose of the study. It sets the stage for defining the research goals, outlining the underlying philosophy and theoretical framework that underpin the investigation. By consciously selecting a research paradigm, researchers establish a coherent and cohesive foundation upon which subsequent research approaches can be built (Mackenzie & Knipe, 2006; Mooney, 2020).

There are several theoretical paradigms identified in research design, namely, positivist (and postpositivist), constructivist, interpretivist, transformative, emancipatory, critical, pragmatism and deconstructivism (Creswell & Creswell, 2017; Hanson, Creswell, Clark, Petska & Creswell, 2005; Ivankova, Creswell & Stick, 2006). Pragmatism research philosophy acknowledges ideas to be relevant only if they bolster action (Culpeper & Terkourafi, 2017). Pragmatism accepts that there is a wide range of methods for interpreting the world and undertaking research, that no solitary perspective can ever provide the entire explanation and that there may be multiple realities (Creswell & Creswell, 2017; Nijhawan, 2017). Dissimilar to other research philosophies, pragmatism research philosophy can incorporate more than one

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research methodology and research strategies within the same study (Collis & Hussey, 2013; Saunders *et al.*, 2015). Qualitative methods emerge from the constructivist/interpretive traditions (Silverman, 2020). In constructivist traditions, meanings are seen as qualitative constructs which can be studied, understood, and explained scientifically (Silverman, 2013). Researchers who employ qualitative methods tend to adhere to a constructivist ontology, which views reality as socially and discursively constructed (Lee, 2012). Qualitative methods have always been recognised as contributing significantly to the understanding of social phenomena due to uniqueness and specificity (Newman, Thompson & Roberts, 2006; Rambaree & Faxelid, 2013).

Case study research serves as the ideal framework for the present study, as it enables the thorough examination of a specific setting within its real-life context (Cousin, 2005; Yin, 2018). The word 'case' in the concept of a case study may refer to a person, a group, an organisation, an association, or another type of subject (Saunders, Lewis & Thornhill, 2009). Selecting the subject of the study and defining the boundaries is a critical element in defining a case study (Starman, 2013). Case study research does not follow a standard experimental design with defined experimental conditions or controls, but rather involves contextual conditions as part of the investigation (Ridder, 2017). This approach is effective for in-depth scientific investigation of an issue, event, or phenomenon in its natural context (Ridder, 2017; Yin, 2018). A case study method can provide further insights into existent gaps in its delivery and implementation or why one strategy may be preferred over another (Crowe, Cresswell, Robertson, Huby, Avery & Sheikh, 2011; Yin, 2018).

Case study research does not use random sampling to create a representative sample of the population (Ridder, 2017). The case study strategies identified by Yin (2014) are based on four dissimilar dimensions, or comprehensive versus embedded, single case versus multiple cases, holistic versus embedded case studies. A multiple case strategy is used in this study, where its logic is to determine if findings are replicable across cases. The case is chosen, not on the grounds that are representative of other cases, but because of its uniqueness, which is of particular interest to the researcher. To develop an in-depth understanding of the case, the case study approach generally involves the collection of multiple sources of evidence using a variety of quantitative

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and typically qualitative methods (Crowe *et al.*, 2011; Rashid, Rashid, Warraich, Sabir & Waseem, 2019). The use of multiple data sources (data triangulation) is recommended as a way to increase the internal validity of the research (Abdalla, Oliveira, Azevedo & Gonzalez, 2018; Baskarada, 2014).

This case study explains how to manage and analyse large datasets using the framework approach - a practical approach that entails five steps, namely, familiarisation; identifying a thematic framework; indexing; charting; mapping and interpretation (Bonello & Meehan, 2019; Crowe *et al.*, 2011). In addition to integrating different sources of data, theoretical frameworks may be necessary for identifying emerging themes (Crowe *et al.*, 2011).

Insofar as case study research is concerned, it has certain limitations, as is the case with all forms of research (Crowe *et al.*, 2011; Hodkinson & Hodkinson, 2001). Case studies approach is criticised for lack of scientific rigor and generalisability, i.e., whether the findings can be applied to another setting (Chong & Plonsky, 2021; Crowe *et al.*, 2011). Several approaches can be taken to address these concerns, including theoretical sampling and drawing on a particular conceptual framework (Baccarelli, Naranjo, Scarpiniti, Shojafar & Abawajy, 2017; Crowe *et al.*, 2011).

5.2 Case Study Destination: South Africa

A population is composed of a comprehensive number of individuals, units, or items that can be used as objects of observation (Wiid & Diggines, 2009; Zhang & Zhu, 2018). The population in this study was made up of South African DMOs. By encompassing national, regional, and local DMOs, the research provides a comprehensive understanding of the destination marketing landscape in South Africa. DMOs were selected based on statistics from Statistics South Africa's domestic tourism survey, which focuses on provinces where overnight trips are popular (StatsSA, 2019). SAT (2021a) categorises a trip as a journey undertaken by an individual or a team of individuals for at least one night away from home where the individual does not receive any remuneration in return for travelling to that destination.

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Table 1 provides information on the main destinations for overnight trips in South Africa during the first half of 2019, specifically focusing on the percentage distribution of trips across different provinces. The data is presented for each quarter (Quarter 1 and 2), as well as the cumulative figures for the entire six-month period. The study included the top six provinces with the highest number of overnight visits, ensuring that the focus was on provinces with significant tourism activity.

Table 1: Province of destination for overnight trips, January–June 2019

Main destination	Quarter 1	Quarter 2	Half year
	Percent	Percent	Cumulative
Western Cape	8,60	13,30	21,90
Eastern Cape	15,90	12,70	28,60
Northern Cape	3,30	2,30	5,60
Free State	4,40	4,80	9,20
KwaZulu-Natal	13,20	16,40	29,60
Northwest	7,90	7,80	15,70
Gauteng	15,00	12,60	27,60
Mpumalanga	12,70	11,30	24,00
Limpopo	19,00	18,70	37,70

Source: (StatsSA, 2019)

The Western Cape accounted for 8.60% of the overnight trips in Quarter 1, which increased to 13.30% in Quarter 2. Consequently, the cumulative figure for the Western Cape for the entire six-month period was 21.90%. This suggests that the Western Cape was a popular destination, experiencing growth in visitor numbers throughout the first half of 2019.

The Eastern Cape, on the other hand, had a higher percentage of overnight trips compared to the Western Cape. It accounted for 15.90% of the trips in Quarter 1, slightly decreasing to 12.70% in Quarter 2. The cumulative figure for the Eastern Cape for the entire six-month period was 28.60%. This indicates that the Eastern Cape was

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also a significant destination, attracting a substantial number of visitors during the first half of 2019.

The Northern Cape had a relatively lower percentage of overnight trips, accounting for 3.30% in Quarter 1 and 2.30% in Quarter 2, reflecting a cumulative figure of 5.60% for the entire six-month period. Although the Northern Cape had a smaller share of visitors compared to other provinces, it still contributed to the overall tourism landscape during the first half of 2019.

The Free State accounted for 4.40% of the overnight trips in Quarter 1, slightly increasing to 4.80% in Quarter 2. The cumulative figure for the Free State for the entire six-month period was 9.20%. A moderate level of visitation to the Free State during the first half of 2019 is indicated.

The province of KwaZulu-Natal emerged as a prominent destination, accounting for 13.20% of the overnight trips in Quarter 1, which increased to 16.40% in Quarter 2. KwaZulu-Natal had a cumulative figure of 29.60% for the entire six-month period, suggesting that this province experienced a notable number of visitors, with a steady increase in visitation throughout the first half of 2019.

The Northwest Province accounted for 7.90% of the overnight trips in Quarter 1, which decreased slightly to 7.80% in Quarter 2. The cumulative figure for the entire six-month period was 15.70%, indicating a consistent level of visitation to this province during the first half of 2019.

Gauteng, which includes Johannesburg and Pretoria, had a significant share of overnight trips, accounting for 15.00% in Quarter 1 and 12.60% in Quarter 2. The cumulative figure for Gauteng for the entire six-month period was 27.60%. This suggests that Gauteng was a popular destination, attracting a substantial number of visitors throughout the first half of 2019.

Mpumalanga accounted for 12.70% of the overnight trips in Quarter 1, slightly decreasing to 11.30% in Quarter 2. The cumulative figure for Mpumalanga for the

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entire six-month period was 24.00%, indicating a consistent level of visitation to Mpumalanga during the first half of 2019.

Limpopo had the highest percentage of overnight trips among all the provinces, accounting for 19.00% in Quarter 1 and 18.70% in Quarter 2. The cumulative figure for Limpopo across both quarters was 37.70%.

Table 2 provides a list of destinations selected for the study and the corresponding DMOs responsible for promoting these destinations. It also indicates the level at which each DMO operates, whether at the national or regional level. This information serves as a crucial reference for understanding the geographical scope of the study and the specific DMOs involved in destination branding efforts within the selected regions.
Table 2 provides the regions selected as study cases, chosen based on their significanttourism activity in terms of overnight visits as observed in Table 1.

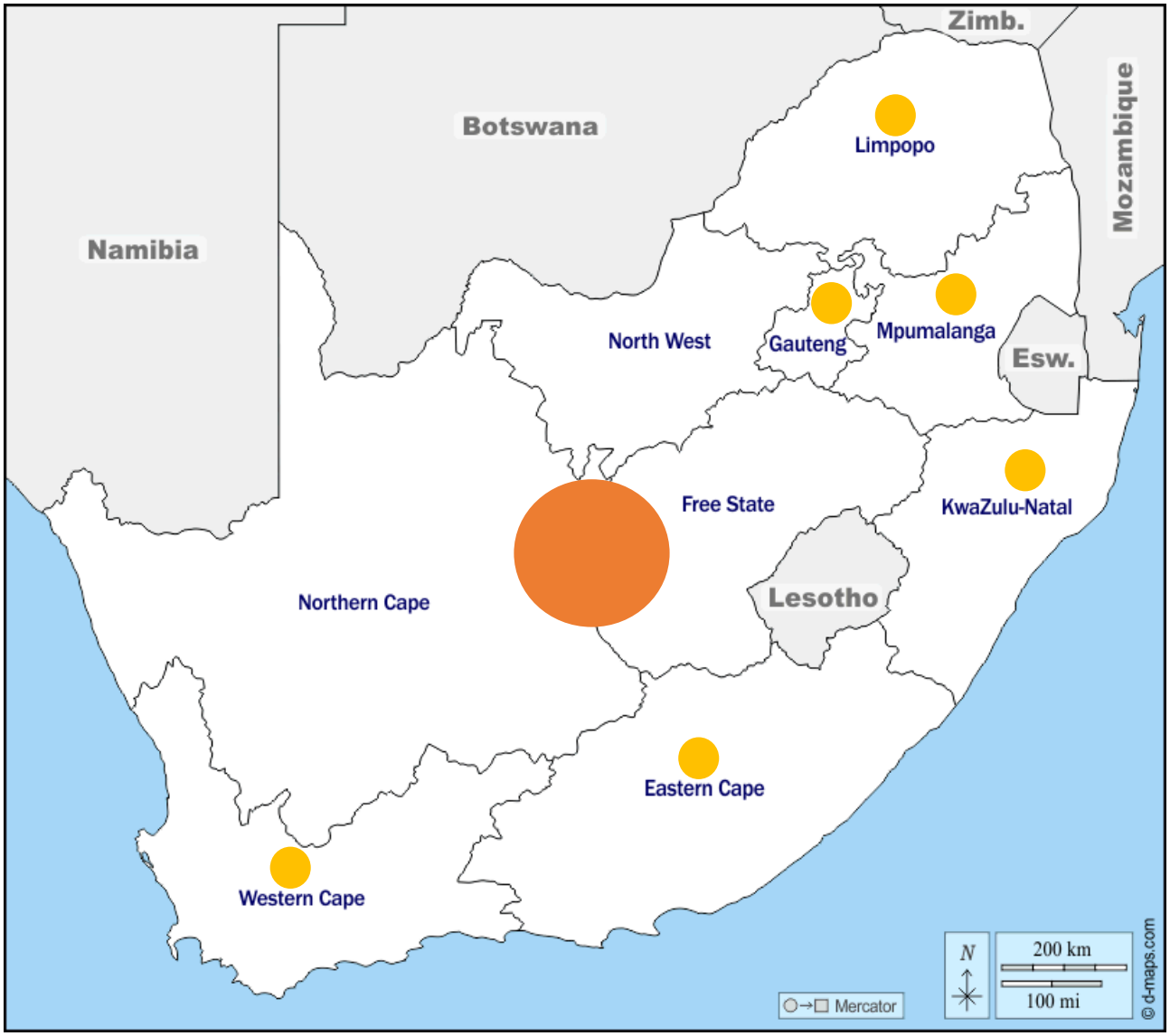
Table 2: List of the destinations studied and their respective DMOs

Destination	Destination Marketing Organisation	Level
South Africa	South Africa Tourism	National
KwaZulu-Natal Province	KwaZulu-Natal Tourism Authority	Regional
Mpumalanga Province	Mpumalanga Tourism Authority	Regional
Eastern Cape Province	Eastern Cape Tourism Authority	Regional
Western Cape Province	Western Cape Tourism, Trade and Investment Promotion Agency (WESGRO)	Regional
Limpopo Province	Limpopo Tourism Authority	Regional
Gauteng Province	Gauteng Tourism Authority	Regional

Figure 4 illustrates the geographical locations of the chosen South African destinations included in the study. It provides a visual reference for understanding the spatial distribution of these destinations within South Africa, thereby helping to contextualise the research within the country's geographical diversity.

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Figure 4: Geographic Location of Selected South African Destinations



Source: https://d- maps.com/cartse.php?num_car=4414&lang=en.

Key for DMOs studied	DMO level
Yellow dot	Regional DMO
Orange dot	National DMO

Destination South Africa

The Republic of South Africa is a developing nation located in the southernmost part of the African continent (Ehlers, Maja, Sellers & Gololo, 2000; Nyika, Onyari, Mishra & Dinka, 2020), home to over 60 million people and the world's 23rd-most populous nation (StatsSA, 2021a). According to the T&T Competitiveness Index 2019 for all 140 economies covered on the year, South Africa ranks number 61 out of 140 destinations (WEF, 2019). A case study on South Africa was chosen for its ease of accessing

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information and contacts, accessibility and familiarity, with a goal to contribute knowledge in the home country.

One of the most important sectors for economic development in South Africa is the tourism industry (Rogerson, 2004; Rogerson, 2017). The diversity and enchanting nature of South Africa make it an enticing travel destination with breathtaking scenery, fascinating people, culture and an incredibly rich history (Borchert, 2018). It has some of the world's best and least crowded beaches, as well as a heavy mix of Third and First World cultures (SA-V, 2020). SAT is the agency responsible for marketing tourism in South Africa, promoting tourism both domestically and abroad, whether for business, pleasure or events (SAT, 2021c). The domestic business unit continues to promote and market SAT through the Sho't Left campaign. With the key message: "It's Your Country, So Enjoy It", the campaign encourages South Africans to travel locally.

Destination KwaZulu-Natal

KwaZulu-Natal, one of South Africa's most beautiful provinces, is primarily known for its warm weather, nature, culture, and beach experiences, which appeals to both domestic and international tourists (Ezeuduji & Mhlongo, 2019; Nkosi, 2010). Coastal tourism amenities are concentrated in the KwaZulu-Natal province's south coast (Brett, 2019). KwaZulu-Natal tourism industry flourishes because of tourists and quality of experience (Nzama & Ezeuduji, 2021).

Destination Mpumalanga

Mpumalanga's name literally means "where the sun rises" in the Swazi, Xhosa, Ndebele and Zulu languages (Gunter, 2005; MPTPA, 2020). Mpumalanga Tourism and Parks Agency is the DMO of the Mpumalanga province having the task of promoting sustainable economic development that is inclusive, creates decent jobs, grows tourism and manages biodiversity (Leonard, 2016; MPTPA, 2021; Wylie, Bhattacharjee & Rampedi, 2018). The stunning scenic beauty of Mpumalanga is a blend of lowveld and escarpment terrain, sub-tropical weather and summer rainfall. (SA-V, 2022).

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Destination Eastern Cape

The Eastern Cape is the second largest of South Africa's nine provinces and is located between the Western Cape and KwaZulu Natal (SA-V, 2021). The Eastern Cape has a capital called Bisho, but the biggest cities are East London and Qheberha (ECPTA, 2021). This province offers a wealth of scenic beauty and a diverse geographical landscape not found anywhere else in South Africa, stretching inland from the coast (ECPTA, 2021; Mogano, 2012; Worboys, 2015). Views of unrelenting natural beauty and splendour are never far away for both locals and travellers (ECPTA, 2021; Worboys, 2015). The province is not only renowned for its natural wonders but also for its cultural artifacts that reflect the area's proud people, ancient heritage and cultural traditions still preserved today (Bryce, 2020; ECPTA, 2021). Furthermore, the province gave birth to Nelson Mandela, Steve Biko and Thabo Mbeki (Oliphant, 2013).

Destination Western Cape

Western Cape, one of the nine provinces in South Africa, is home to Cape Town, which ranks second in the country's largest cities (George, 2003). WESGRO is the official investment and trade promotion agency for Cape Town and the Western Cape (WESGRO, 2022b). Cape Town, also known as the Mother City, is a major international and domestic tourist destination located in the southernmost point of the African continent (George, 2003). It is a vibrant destination (Booyens & Rogerson, 2015) that is rated among the top ten tourist destinations in the world (SA-V, 2020). The Western Cape has a spectacular combination of fascinating features, such as lush winelands, indigenous flora, forests and beaches. The scenic Garden Route is well-known for its beautiful beaches and lagoons. The world-renowned, flat-topped Table Mountain that is dominated by craggy cliffs, overlooks the City of Cape Town (Booyens & Rogerson, 2015; Pirie, 2007; SA-V, 2020).

Destination Limpopo

Limpopo borders Botswana, Zimbabwe and Mozambique (Mamokhere & Chauke, 2020). The Limpopo region is a popular tourist destination (Leonard & Lebogang, 2018), boasting an infinite assortment of scenic beauty, rich cultural heritage, diverse wildlife species, and numerous opportunities for nature-based tourism (LTA, 2021; SA-V, 2019). The Limpopo Tourism Agency (LTA) was established in accordance with the

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Northern Province Tourism Board Act 8 of 2001 with a mandate to promote, foster, and develop tourism within the Limpopo Province (LTA, 2021).

Destination Gauteng

Gauteng, a seSotho word meaning "place of gold", is the smallest, most populous and urbanised province of South Africa. The country's largest city, Johannesburg, as well as the administrative capital, Pretoria, are located in this province (Butler, 2017; GTA, 2018-2019b). A key objective of the Gauteng Tourism Authority (GTA) is to position the Gauteng province as one of the most competitive tourism destinations in the world (Kuseni, Aardt & Boshoff, 2021). With this mandate in mind, the GTA has developed world-class tourism products and services that guarantee guests an enjoyable stay at an affordable price (GTA, 2018-2019b).

5.3 Mixed Method Research

The aim of research design is to translate research questions into a framework of strategies and methods that can be used to answer them in a systematic manner (Kroll & Neri, 2009). This research project employed a mixed-methods approach (Creswell & Creswell, 2017). Mixed methods is a methodology for gathering, analysing, and integrating both qualitative (such as focus groups and interviews) and quantitative (such as experiments and surveys) data at some phase of the research process inside a solitary study to gain comprehension of the research problem (Guetterman & Fetters, 2018; Ivankova *et al.*, 2006). It breaches the gap between qualitative and quantitative research (Giddings & Grant, 2007; Pham, Tučková & Jabbour, 2019). Mixed methods have strengths that compensate the weaknesses of both quantitative and qualitative research (Almeida, 2018). In this way, by using two kinds of research approaches, the strengths of each approach can compensate for the weaknesses of the other by providing a more complete and comprehensive understanding of the research problem than quantitative or qualitative approaches alone (Queirós, Faria & Almeida, 2017).

A standout amongst the most profitable qualities of conducting mixed methods research is the likelihood of triangulation, which is the utilisation of several means (methods, data sources, and researchers) to gather information on the same study

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(Davidov, Bush, Clear & Coker, 2019; Morgan, 2019). This is a way of assuring the validity of research using a variety of methods which includes diverse types of samples, in addition to techniques, for information gathering (Kirchherr & Charles, 2018). Triangulation enables one to distinguish aspects of a phenomenon more precisely by approaching it from various standpoints using distinctive methods and techniques (Jick, 1979; Saunders *et al.*, 2009; Tashakkori, Teddlie & Teddlie, 1998). Johnson and Onwuegbuzie (2004) advocated that mixed research methods should utilise a strategy and philosophy that endeavour to link the insights provided by qualitative and quantitative, facilitating a more comprehensive understanding of the research phenomenon. The weakness of mixed methods is that it is tedious, high in costs, and it may also be unclear on how to resolve conflicts that emerge in the interpretation of the findings (Queirós, Faria & Almeida, 2017).

The utilisation of a mixed-methods approach found within the research process is based on a rationale of making several pragmatic decisions (Mitchell & Education, 2018). Mixed methods research typically imitates the overarching epistemological approach or 'paradigm' based on Pragmatism (Dingyloudi & Strijbos, 2018; McBeath & Bager-Charleson, 2020). The pragmatic approach includes using the method which appears suitable to the research problem (Morgan, 2014; Timonen, Foley & Conlon, 2018). Pragmatism contends that the most imperative determinant of the research philosophy adopted is the research question, contending that it is conceivable to work with constraints of other paradigms (Mitchell & Education, 2018; Morgan, 2014). It applies a practical approach, integrating different perspectives to help collect and interpret data (Bryman & Bell, 2015; Saunders *et al.*, 2009).

Mixed methods research uses a method and philosophy that attempts to fit together the insights provided by qualitative and quantitative research into a workable solution (Hewlett & Brown, 2018; Johnson, de Waal, Stefurak & Hildebrand, 2017). The basis for blending the two sorts of data in one study is grounded in the way that neither quantitative nor qualitative techniques are adequate to capture the patterns and subtle elements of a circumstance (Hewlett & Brown, 2018). When utilised as a part of mixed methods, quantitative and qualitative techniques supplement each other and take into account a robust analysis, exploiting the qualities of each technique (Creswell & Creswell, 2017; Turner, Cardinal & Burton, 2017).

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A variety of mixed methods designs have been described in the literature (Ivankova *et al.*, 2006; Kroll & Neri, 2009; Wipulanusat, Panuwatwanich, Stewart & Sunkpho, 2020). In this regard, researchers using this approach have the potential to be creative (Kroll & Neri, 2009). There is the possibility that all aspects of a mixed methods study are guided by a single overarching question, or that there are sub-questions that guide qualitative and quantitative data collection separately (Kroll & Neri, 2009). There are six types of mixed methods designs, namely, sequential explanatory design, sequential exploratory design, sequential transformative design, concurrent triangulation design, concurrent embedded design, and concurrent transformative design (Gregar, 1994).

The study undertook mixed methods sequential exploratory strategy as shown in Table 3, where qualitative data gathering and analysis were followed by quantitative data collection and analysis (Gregar, 1994; Harrison III, 2013). Sequential designs feature the quantitative component first, then the qualitative component, or vice versa (Schoonenboom & Johnson, 2017). Besides the resource and expertise needed to conduct mixed methods studies, the researcher must be able to organise and map out the entire research process (Kroll & Neri, 2009). The sequential exploratory strategy is relatively direct due to the clear, distinct stages, and it is easier to describe than concurrent strategies. Additionally, both phases must be considered equally and given equal priority, which makes the process very time-consuming (Alkhurayyif & Weir, 2018). Through this method the two phases are equal in priority, although either phase can take precedence, and during the data interpretation phase data are integrated.

Table 3 outlines the research phases and methodologies employed in the study. Phase 1 involved a quantitative approach known as SQLR to provide a comprehensive summary of existing research. Phase 2 employed a qualitative methodology, specifically, document analysis, which systematically examines documents to address research questions. Lastly, in Phase 3, a quantitative approach called content analysis was utilised to analyse qualitative data, identifying prevalent words, themes, or concepts within the dataset. Each phase contributed to the study's overall investigation of destination branding and social media dynamics.

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Table 3: Research Phases and Methodologies

Phase	Design	Methodology	Description
Phase 1	Quantitative	SQLR	A systematic review of the literature aimed at providing an exhaustive summary of current research.
Phase 2	Qualitative	Document analysis	Employs a systematic approach to analyse documents to research questions.
Phase 3	Quantitative	Content analysis	Examines a qualitative dataset to identify words, themes or concepts that are prevalent.

This study was exploratory in nature and adopted an inductive approach, seeking to explore how DMOs strategically use social media among tourism destinations (Alizadeh & Isa, 2015; Buhalis & Spada, 2000). The main focus of the study was the analysis and interpretation through the systematic quantitative literature review process (Pickering & Byrne, 2014), document analysis (Bowen, 2009), and content analysis (CSU, 2018; Krippendorff, 2018; Riff, Lacy, Fico & Watson, 2019; Stepchenkova & Zhan, 2013) of data collected from websites, strategic documents and social media posts.

5.4 Methods Applied in the three Phases of the Research

For the empirical analysis of the data, a three-phased approach was adopted. Phase 1 involved a systematic quantitative literature review, phase 2 followed document analysis and lastly, phase 3 was carried out utilising social media content analysis.

5.4.1 Phase 1: SQLR

There are various review techniques including critical review, literature review, meta-analysis, systematic search, and review (Grant & Booth, 2009; Mahmoudi, Huda, Alavi, Islam & Behnia, 2019). The systematic quantitative literature review is efficient and exhaustive in consolidating and depicting an enormous body of research (Mahmoudi *et al.*, 2019). This section of the study is founded on the systematic quantitative literature review process to outline and review extant literature (Mahmoudi *et al.*, 2019). This type of method has been utilised to cover a wide variety of themes

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in tourism (Mollah, Cuskelly & Hill, 2021; Patroni, Simpson & Newsome, 2018; Yang, Khoo-Lattimore & Arcodia, 2017; Yang, Yang & Khoo-Lattimore, 2020). Developed over the past few years, SQLR method operates between traditional narrative and systematic weighted methods (Pickering, Grignon, Steven, Guitart & Byrne, 2015).

Quantitative research strategies commence by establishing a series of predefined characteristics, which are then represented through standardised quantitative measures. These measures serve as a basis for collecting and analysing data, enabling researchers to formulate comprehensive and generalisable assessments that extend beyond specific cases (Blanche, Blanche, Durrheim & Painter, 2006; Bryman & Bell, 2015; Hair Jr, Wolfinbarger, Money, Samouel & Page, 2015).

Figure 5, depicted as a flowchart, provides a visual representation of the systematic process employed in the SQLR conducted within the current study, focusing on the literature review of destination branding and the integration of social media. This flowchart delineates the five essential steps that guided the research from defining the research questions to arriving at the final sample of relevant literature for synthesis(Pickering *et al*., 2019).

Step 1: Define Research Questions

The first phase involved the definition of precise research objectives and research questions specific to the current study's context. These research objectives laid the foundation for the entire SQLR process, shaping subsequent steps.

Step 2: Formulate Review Protocol

In the second step, a comprehensive review protocol was formulated. This protocol outlined the specific parameters for conducting the literature search. It encompassed the selection of pertinent search terms, identification of suitable databases, and the establishment of selection criteria. These guidelines ensured a methodical and structured approach to the literature search process, aligning with the research's scope and objectives.

Step 3: Search Literature

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This phase represented the core of the literature search process. The research team meticulously combed through a range of literature databases, including renowned sources within the field of tourism research. Additionally, Google Scholar, a widely recognised search engine, was leveraged to ensure a comprehensive exploration of available scholarly resources. The search outcomes were subsequently screened against the predefined criteria. Notably, this extensive search yielded approximately 17,000 records from seven diverse databases and the chosen search engine. Following this, abstract screening was conducted, leading to the selection of 2,295 papers for in-depth assessment.

Step 4: Extract Literature

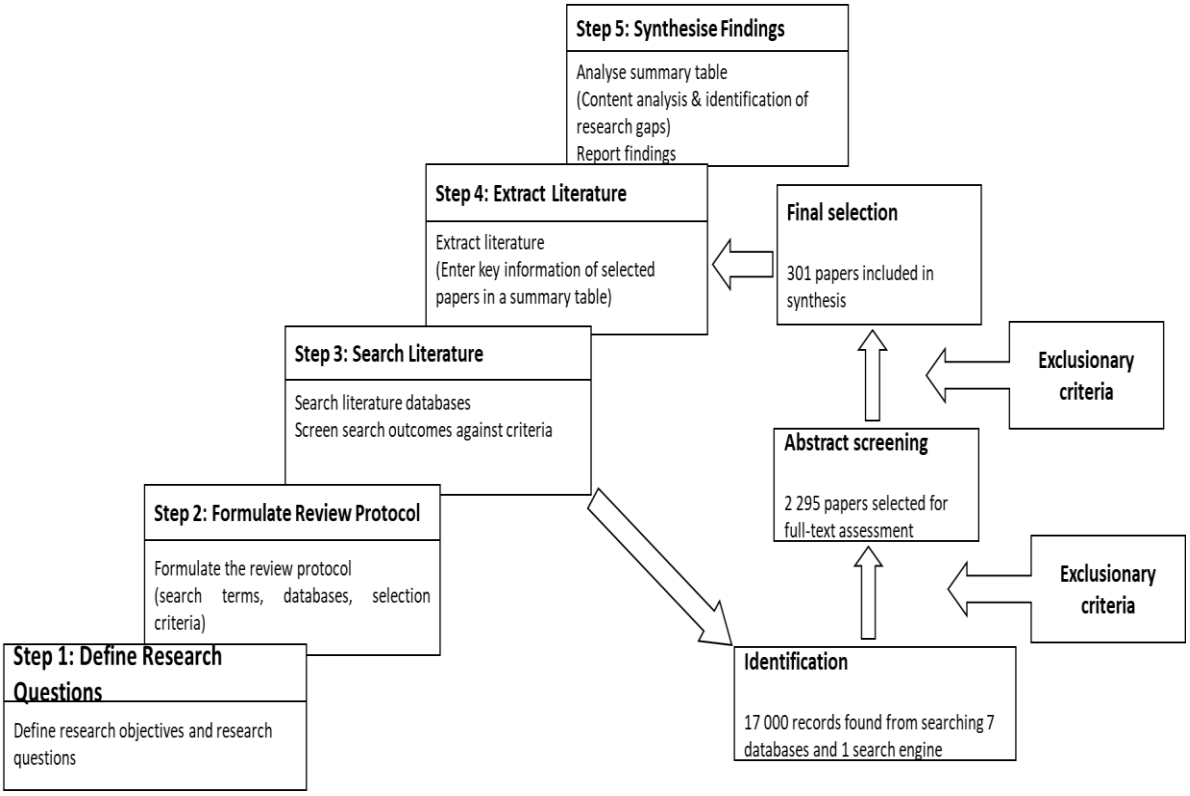
In Step 4, the selected papers underwent a detailed examination. Key information from these papers was methodically captured and entered into a structured summary table, as shown in Appendix A. This step facilitated the efficient organisation and management of the vast volume of literature retrieved during the search process. Ultimately, this systematic approach led to the final selection of 301 papers that met the criteria for inclusion in the synthesis phase.

Step 5: Synthesise Findings

The fifth and final step encompassed the synthesis of findings derived from the selected literature. A content analysis of the summary table was conducted to identify prevalent themes, patterns, and crucial research gaps within the body of literature. The outcomes of this analysis contributed to the study's overarching research objectives, ultimately forming the final conclusions and insights.

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Figure 5: The SQLR process flow



Source: adapted from Pickering and Byrne (2014).

5.4.1.1 Rationale for choosing SQLR

The rationale for selecting the SQLR technique lies in its suitability, reliability, and comprehensiveness in effectively addressing the theoretical and methodological gaps present in existing scholarly works, thereby facilitating the formulation of recommendations for future research agenda (Pickering & Byrne, 2014). The SQLR technique allowed for comprehensive analysis of the literature, ensuring that relevant studies are systematically examined, synthesised, and evaluated. The significance of this review stems from its systematic examination of the literature on destination branding and social media in the tourism field, a topic of utmost importance considering the substantial growth of social media platforms and their impact on destination branding (Lalicic *et al.*, 2019; Mariani *et al.*, 2016; Revilla Hernández, Santana Talavera & Parra López, 2016; Sevin, 2013). Moreover, this review is timely

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as it contributes to addressing the knowledge gap in destination branding and social media literature, particularly within the context of Africa (Hemmonsbey & Tichaawa, 2019; Osei & Gbadamosi, 2011; Van Wijk *et al.*, 2008). By employing the SQLR technique, the review effectively captures the existing body of literature, lays a strong foundation for further research, and identifies gaps and opportunities for future studies (Yang *et al.*, 2017).

5.4.1.2 Description of SQLR process

The SQLR methodically identifies, classifies and quantitatively analyses applicable bibliographic information, theoretical frameworks, and research designs (Mollah *et al.*, 2021; Pickering *et al.*, 2015; Roy, Byrne & Pickering, 2012). Reviewed literature is composed of knowledge gathered from both qualitative and quantitative methods (Pickering *et al.*, 2015). Data collected is quantified and placed under predetermined different categories (Pickering & Byrne, 2014).

Inclusionary Criteria

In the SQLR process, inclusionary criteria played a pivotal role in guiding the selection of pertinent studies that closely aligned with the research objectives (Pickering & Byrne, 2014). These criteria were adopted to ensure the inclusion of relevant and high-quality studies whilst reducing the inclusion of insignificant or irrelevant data. The SQLR process considered various parameters to determine the inclusion of studies (Pickering & Byrne, 2014), with a focus on the literature published between the years 2010 and 2020 within the domain of destination marketing/branding and social media. These criteria aid in ensuring the selection of relevant and high-quality studies that contribute to the overall research objectives (Pickering *et al.*, 2015). The following are key inclusionary criteria commonly used in SQLR technique for literature review:

Research topic relevance: Studies were selected based on their pertinence to the research subject matter (Pickering & Byrne, 2014), specifically addressing the intersection of destination branding and social media. This criterion ensured that the selected studies directly contributed to the study's core objectives (Pickering *et al.*, 2015).

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Publication types: The primary focus was on peer-reviewed journal articles, this was a key inclusion criterion.

Time period: To maintain the currency and contemporaneity of the literature, only research articles published within the timeframe of 2010 to 2020 were included.

Methodological rigor: Inclusion criteria prioritised studies that exhibited methodological robustness, including clear sampling techniques, valid measurement instruments, and data collection tools.

Geographic relevance: Geographic context played a crucial role in the selection process. The focus was on the studies that specifically examined a particular destination, this was crucial to ensure alignment with the study's focus on destination branding.

Language: The inclusion criteria encompassed literature that was published only in the English language, facilitating accessibility and comprehension for the research team.

Adherence to the inclusionary criteria aided in the selection studies that not only contribute to the research objectives but also upheld methodological rigor and quality. This selection process ensured that the included literature was well-suited to the study's goals and parameters, enhancing the overall robustness and relevance of the SQLR process (Pickering *et al*., 2015).

Exclusionary Criteria

The SQLR process involved the application of exclusion criteria to ensure that the selected articles aligned closely with the research aims and objectives of the study. These criteria were developed based on established methodologies (Iacono, Keeffe, Kenny & McKinstry, 2019) and aimed at achieving content relevance. The following are key exclusionary criteria for literature review:

Relevance to research topic: Articles whose research focus did not directly address the research topic were excluded from consideration. This criterion ensured that the selected literature closely related to the study's core objectives.

Publication types: Conference papers, book chapters, reports, and other related publications were excluded from the selection process. The exclusion was because of potential variance in rigor and quality as compared to peer-reviewed publications.

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Insufficient methodological rigor: Articles that exhibited incomplete sampling techniques or inadequately described research methodologies were eliminated. This criterion was important for maintaining the quality and reliability of the included studies, ensuring that they met methodological standards.

Lack of focus on a destination case study: Research articles that lacked focus on a specific destination as a case study were excluded. The study's emphasis on destination branding needed a case-specific approach, and this criterion ensured that the sampled articles aligned with this method.

Language barrier: Articles published in languages other than English were excluded. This exclusion aimed at enhancing accessibility and comprehension for the researchers, as English served as the primary language of communication within the study.

Publication date: Research articles published outside the specified timeframe of 2010 to 2020 were also excluded.

The application of the exclusion criteria refined the selection of literature, ensuring that sampled articles aligned with the study's thematic and methodological scope.

5.4.1.3 Sampling of articles

The study followed non-random sampling to create a representative sample of the population, the sampling technique was based on convenient considerations (Ridder, 2017). The keywords were selected through review various research articles in the field of destination branding. A search of terms grouped with others and a variety of equivalent words was utilised. The review protocol included the search terms: *destination brand, destination branding, destination marketing, destination marketing organisation, user-generated content, social media, social network, brand equity,* and *brand identity.*

The literature search was carried out between January 2010 and March 2020. The sample incorporated the search on significant databases for related studies on destination brand and social media, which included the most relevant databases for tourism research includes EBSCO Host (Hospitality and Tourism Complete); Science Direct (Elsevier); Emerald; Scopus; Web of Science; ProQuest; and Sage publications

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and one search engine Google Scholar. Major tourism journals provided by the databases incorporated Tourism Management, Annals of Tourism Research, Journal of Travel Research, Journal of Destination Marketing & Management, Journal of Travel & Tourism Marketing, Journal of Vacation Marketing, Tourism Geography, Journal of Sustainable Tourism, Journal of Sport & Tourism, Tourism and Hospitality Research, Leisure Sciences, Journal of China Tourism Research, Journal of Hospitality Marketing & Management, Journal of Quality Assurance in Hospitality and Tourism, Current Issues in Tourism, The Service Industries Journal, Journal of Business Research, and the like. Google Scholar was utilised to classify literature that might have been omitted from the databases.

5.4.1.4 Data capturing sheet

Data collection sheet was created, provided in Appendix A, to serve as a systematic instrument for gathering and structuring information from diverse literature sources regarding the intersection of destination branding and social media. The data collection sheet encompassed a range of categories, such as publication particulars, research perspectives, branding elements, social media platforms, research methodologies, data collection techniques, and geographical contexts (Tran & Rudolf, 2022). Its purpose was to streamline the data collection process, maintaining a high degree of consistency and precision when handling the extensive body of literature pertinent to the study's research aims and objectives.

5.4.1.5 Data analysis

Data analysis in the SQLR process involved the utilisation of descriptive statistics as the primary analytical tool. Additionally, cluster analysis was employed as part of the data analysis methodology. These two methods are discussed below:

Cluster analysis

Cluster analysis can be delineated as a quantitative method of categorisation that aims to discern inherent patterns and groupings within a dataset (Solter & Beasley, 2013) and is a well-established technique in tourism segmentation studies (Randle, Ernst, Leisch & Dolnicar, 2017). Cluster analysis focuses on identifying clusters of points in

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space. In the first instance, in order for an analysis to be successful, it must first present the results in a meaningful manner (Edwards & Cavalli-Sforza, 1965; Majerova & Nevima, 2017). When clustering objects together, the same group (called a cluster) will have more homogeneity than the ones in other groups (Wierzchoń & Kłopotek, 2018). In essence, objects are assigned to mutually exclusive and exhaustive groups as parts of cluster analysis (Stylidis, 2018).

The procedures used to create clusters are different algorithms and each offers distinct procedures. A cluster analysis can be conducted using the Two-Step Cluster Analysis, Hierarchical Cluster Analysis, or K-Means Cluster analysis (Kim, Virk, Elysee, Passias, Ames, Shaffrey, Mundis, Protopsaltis, Gupta & Klineberg, 2019). The Two-step cluster analysis is primarily intended for analysing large datasets. Both categorical and continuous attributes can be applied (Şchiopu, 2010). Variables are separated using distance measure (Kent *et al.*, 2014). With Hierarchical Cluster Analysis the purpose is to identify relatively homogeneous groups of cases (or variables) by clustering them according to selected characteristics and combining them until one cluster remains (Zolfaghari, Khosravi, Shahriyari, Jabbari & Abolhasani, 2019). On the other hand, K-Means clustering attempts to group the data into a predetermined number of clusters in a manner that makes the data within a cluster similar to the data in other clusters (Gao & Hitchcock, 2010). In all instances distance measures are used to minimise dissimilarities between the clusters, with Euclidean distance being the most popular (Sun, Wang & Fang, 2012).

In this study Two-Step cluster analysis was used to distinguish between the types (clusters) of destination branding literature available and to determine where social media feature within these clusters. The clusters also aimed to show where the gaps are in terms of methodologies used and social media studied, based on the prevalence of the different variables (for researchers to move away from the ‘typical’ analyses). The feasibility of sampling is increased when the entire population is divided into homogenous groups, as was done in the Two Step analysis (Wierzchoń & Kłopotek, 2018). Since each cluster represents the entire population, there is a greater possibility of including more subjects (Duran & Odell, 2013; Wierzchoń & Kłopotek, 2018).

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When distinguishing between groups, consideration should be given to the fact that some clusters may be 'artefacts', not viable in real context (Bigné et al., 2008). Silhouette measure of cohesion and separation indicated cluster quality. The Silhouette measure is a metric used to assess the quality of clustering in data analysis (Kumar, Ahmed, Vigneshwaran, Sandeep & Singh, 2021). It provides a way to evaluate how well-separated clusters are and how cohesive the data points are within each cluster (José-García & Gómez-Flores, 2021). The predictor importance measured relative contribution of the various factors toward the formation of the clusters, with a rating between 0.8 and 1.0 being highly important and below 0.0 – 0.2 less important (Tkaczynski, Rundle-Thiele & Prebensen, 2015). For cluster analysis purposes, the categorical variables (the four choice reasons) were recoded as 0 (not selected), 1 (selected the negative statement - representing the soft drink option), 2 (selected the positive statement – representing the contribution option). The two-cluster solution was validated and tested for appropriateness by using discriminant analysis, the t-test and Pearson chi-square test of independence.

In this study, cluster analysis was applied to segment the collected literature into distinct clusters or categories. It helped to classify studies with similar characteristics such as research methodologies, branding dimensions, or social media platforms into cohesive groups.

5.4.2 Phase 2: Document Analysis

In document analysis, there are two types of documents: qualitative and quantitative (Wesley, 2010). Qualitative document analysis was to the preferred method the study as it aligned with the objectives of the study. 'Qualitative document analysis' is a technique used to analyse the content of documents in a similar manner to other qualitative methods such as in-depth interviews, participant observation notes, or non-participant observation recordings (Bowen, 2009; Mackieson, Shlonsky & Connolly, 2019).

The document analysis is used in conjunction with other research methods in Phase 1 and Phase 3 as a triangulation tool to bolster and confirm findings across a variety of data sets with the objective to reduce the impact of potential biases in a study as

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prescribed by Danto (2008) and Bowen (2009). Bowen (2009) stated that document analysis method combines elements of content analysis and thematic analysis. Thematic analysis was adopted for Phase 2 of the study. Analysing qualitative data through thematic analysis provided structure and integrated reflexivity and a systematic exploration of patterns and themes within the data (Mackieson *et al.*, 2019).

A SQLR analysis in Phase 1 resulted in the identification of key brand dimensions within the destination branding literature. Two of the most prominent brand dimensions identified were brand identity and brand image. Document analysis is built on the SQLR outcome, in that it served as a reference in identifying key terms in the documents during the analysis phase which pertains to destination management, identity and image.

For many years, researchers have used organisational and institutional documents have been a source of qualitative studies (Van den Berg & Struwig, 2017). Lately, there has been an expansion in the number of research reports and journal articles that accept document analysis as part of the qualitative methodology (Bowen, 2009; Stoffelen, 2019).

Document analysis is a systematic technique employed for assessing documents that come in different formats, including printed and electronic material (Bowen, 2009, Zhao et al., 2018). The current study collected strategic documents from the DMOs to undertake thematic document analysis. It entailed a systematic procedure for evaluating documents — both printed and electronic (computer-based and internet-transmitted) material (Bowen, 2009). The analysis included skimming (superficial examination), intensive examination, and interpretation. This procedure consolidated components of content analysis and thematic analysis (Dong, Hill & Agogino, 2004; Gicevic, Aftosmes-Tobio, Manganello, Ganter, Simon, Newlan & Davison, 2016; Krippendorff, 2018; Stepchenkova & Zhan, 2013; Wong, Casey & Wahl, 1982). In this manner it was possible to determine whether the content of the documents fits the conceptual framework of the study (Bowen, 2009; Krippendorff, 2018). For evaluation of documents, details of the author, sources of information, and purpose of the document were used (Webb, Campbell, Schwartz & Sechrest, 1969). As noted by Altheide and Schneider (1996), qualitative document analysis includes identification

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of relevant themes and topics. The study followed the Altheide and Schneider (1996) method which identified the following basic steps which include:

- Pursuing a specific problem to be investigated.
- Becoming acquainted with the procedure and context of the information source.
- Becoming familiar with instances of pertinent documents, noting the format.
- Listing several items or categories to guide data collection and drafting a data collection sheet.
- Testing the data collection sheet by collecting data from several documents.
- Updating the data collection sheet and selecting several further cases to refine the data collection sheet.

5.4.2.1 Rationale for undertaking document analysis

Different classifications of documents exist, namely, public records, personal documents, and physical evidence (O'Leary, 2017). Documents are ordinary and come in a variety of forms, making them a very accessible and reliable source of data (Bowen, 2009; Coffey, 2014). The technique allows for drawing data from multiple sources and establish a point of convergence through the use of different data sources and methods (Bowen, 2009). The rationale for using document analysis is outlined below:

Data extraction from DMOs' documents: DMOs often articulate their branding strategies, goals, and identity through a range of documents such as strategic plans, mission statements, and reports (Bowen, 2009). Document analysis offers a reliable means to extract valuable data from these documents (O'Leary, 2017), providing insights into the DMOs' strategic intent regarding destination branding.

Comprehensive understanding: Document analysis allows for a comprehensive understanding of the content encapsulated within selected documents (Bowen, 2009; Coffey, 2014). In the context of this study, it enables the research team to delve into the specifics of how DMOs express their brand identity, equity, and objectives within their strategic documents. This level of detail is vital for grasping the nuances of destination branding practices.

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Trustworthiness and reliability: Document analysis is considered a robust and dependable technique (Wach & Ward, 2013). It ensures the trustworthiness and reliability of the data extracted from documents. This aligns with the study's objective of obtaining accurate and credible information about DMOs' branding strategies.

Alignment with research goals: Given the study's focus on destination branding and its intersection with social media, document analysis is particularly apt. It allows researchers to extract information about branding components, which is essential for examining how DMOs integrate these elements into their social media strategies. This alignment with research goals enhances the relevance of document analysis in this context.

5.4.2.2 Sampling of DMO documents

The researcher employed the Purposive sampling technique to select a sample of subjects from the population under investigation (Etikan, Musa & Alkassim, 2016b; Phutela & Dwivedi, 2020). Purposive sampling is a nonprobability sampling method that involves deliberately choosing sampling units based on specific characteristics of interest within different segments of the population, without the need for replacement (Etikan *et al.*, 2016b; Guest, Namey & Chen, 2020). This technique allows the researcher to intentionally select individuals who possess the desired attributes or meet the specific criteria relevant to the research objectives (Alvi, 2016; Etikan & Babtope, 2019; Sharma, 2017).

The non-probability sampling technique refers to a sampling approach that does not provide an equal opportunity for all participants or units in the population to be included (Etikan, Alkassim & Abubakar, 2016a; Sharma, 2017). To establish the population for this study, the DMO with the highest number of overnight trips was selected as the primary focus. This approach ensured that a DMO with substantial tourism activity and significance in terms of visitor volume was included in the analysis. By prioritising the DMO with the highest overnight trips, the study aimed to capture a representative sample from a prominent destination. Once the primary DMO was identified, a subsequent step involved collecting relevant documents from the DMOs.

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While this method is appropriate for the study, it is not without limitations, and these include potential bias in both the documents and researchers, lack of contextual information, and restricted access to documents (Bowen, 2009). To address these challenges, the study incorporated reflexivity through analytical while employing thematic analysis to systematically investigate data at hand (Mackieson *et al.*, 2019).

The inclusionary criteria were designed to identify documents that directly aligned with the research question and provided valuable insights into the topic of interest. These criteria were established based on the specific research objectives, ensuring that the selected documents were relevant and pertinent to the study. According to O'Leary (2017), prior to initiating the document analysis, it is imperative to undertake a planning phase that entails devising strategies to be employed and compiling a comprehensive list of textual sources to be examined. The study acknowledges that documents, as a primary source of information, may have limitations in terms of providing sufficient detail due to their nature of being developed without a specific research agenda. Consequently, these documents often lack the level of detail necessary to fully address a research question. In this manner, the current study followed the same path asserted by Wong *et al.* (1982), Bowen (2009), and Brooks and Normore (2015). Systematic assessment of documents incorporated manuals, brochures, maps and charts, press releases summaries and annual reports pertaining to the destination. The primary emphasis of the study revolved around the examination of public documents and physical evidence pertaining to the organisation under investigation. Public records were identified as authoritative and ongoing documentation of the organisation's activities encompassing mission statements, annual reports, policy manuals, handbooks, and strategic plans. These documents serve as essential sources of information that provide insights into the organisation's goals, operations, and overarching strategies (Bowen, 2009; Love, 2013).

Inclusionary Criteria

The establishment of inclusionary criteria was crucial for maintaining a systematic approach to document selection and minimising the collection of irrelevant data (Wood, Williams, Nagarajan & Sacks, 2021). Among the important parameters to consider when determining these criteria, the age of the documents holds significance (Atkinson, Koenka, Sanchez, Moshontz & Cooper, 2015; Wach & Ward, 2013).

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The document selection process adhered to well-defined inclusionary criteria designed to uphold the study's research objectives. These inclusionary criteria were applied, particularly within the context of South African DMOs. The following criteria guided the selection of documents:

Relevance to research topic: Documents chosen for inclusion were primarily strategic in nature and originating from the DMOs themselves. This was essential for ensuring that the selected documents provided valuable insights into the DMOs' strategies, initiatives and approaches related to destination branding.

Language consistency: To maintain consistency and facilitate effective analysis, the study exclusively considered documents in the English language, a criterion that was crucial to ensure that all selected documents understandable.

Authenticity and credibility: The selected documents were sourced from reputable and trustworthy origins, DMOs, guaranteeing their authenticity and credibility. This criterion was critical for ensuring the reliability of the data derived from these documents.

Time period: To capture the most recent strategies, policies, practices, and trends within South African DMOs, the inclusionary criteria focused on documents created from 2010 to 2020.

Diverse document types: The inclusionary criteria embraced a wide array of document types, including marketing strategies, annual reports, promotional materials, research articles, and strategy documents. This approach enabled a thorough understanding of the operations and plans of the DMOs.

Exclusionary Criteria

The implementation of exclusionary criteria was critical in the process of refining and narrowing down the initial pool of potential documents to form the final sample. The criteria ensured that only appropriate documents are included in the study (Iacono, Keeffe, Kenny & McKinstry, 2019). The implementation of exclusionary criteria facilitated the adoption of a systematic approach in the final selection process, while simultaneously upholding the principles of representativeness, relevance to the study's themes and content, and appropriateness (Bowen, 2009; Iacono *et al.*, 2019; Love, 2013). The following exclusionary criteria were implemented:

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Time Period: Documents issued before the year 2010 were excluded from consideration. This criterion was essential to maintain a focus on recent and contemporary data, aligning with the study's objective.

Language: Documents written in languages other than English were not considered a decision taken to ensure consistent comprehension and effective analysis of all selected documents contributing to the study's overall consistency.

Relevance to research topic: Irrelevant documents that did not directly pertain to South African DMOs or did not align with the study's specific research objectives were not considered, ensuring that the selected documents were directly related to the study's core themes and content.

5.4.2.3 Document / Thematic analysis

Thematic analysis is an analytical approach that entails the identification, examination, and interpretation of patterns and themes present within qualitative data (Braun & Clarke, 2012; Clarke & Braun, 2014). Thematic analysis process involved systematic search for relevant data, selection of pertinent information, evaluation of data quality, and the synthesis of findings derived from a range of available documents (Barnett-Page & Thomas, 2009; Mackieson *et al.*, 2019). This method may lead to data decontextualisation where data lose original meaning when extracted from the original documents (Bowen, 2009).The current study systematically documented and examined contextual factors with the same rigour as primary content.

Thematic analysis offers an adaptable methodology that can be customised to suit the requirements of various research studies, facilitating a comprehensive and intricate exploration of data (Nowell, Norris, White & Moules, 2017). It facilitates the extraction of rich and intricate information from the dataset, enabling researchers to gain a deep understanding of the data under investigation. Additionally, thematic analysis proves valuable in identifying significant patterns and characteristics within large datasets, as it compels researchers to handle data in a systematic and well-organised manner, thus promoting clarity and coherence in the final research report (Cassell, Symon & King, 2004; Nowell *et al.*, 2017). Thematic analysis can be approached from both an inductive and deductive standpoint (Alhojailan, 2012). The inductive approach involves allowing the data itself to guide the identification and development of themes,

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thereby deriving themes directly from the data without preconceived notions or theoretical frameworks. On the other hand, the deductive approach involves a more theory-driven or knowledge-based perspective where researchers approach the data with predefined themes rooted in existing theories or prior knowledge (Hewitt, Mills, Hoare & Sheridan, 2022; Murphy, Klotz & Kreiner, 2017).

Data relevant to a research question was organised and categorised in a coherent and meaningful pattern called a theme (Clarke & Braun, 2014). A theme is a method to organise and report the researcher's analytic observations (Clarke & Braun, 2014; Terry, Hayfield, Clarke & Braun, 2017). Codes and themes were identified from qualitative data in a systematic manner (Nowell *et al.*, 2017). The codes represent the smallest pieces of data which may be relevant to the research question and capture interesting sections of the data (Clarke & Braun, 2014). The codes are the patterns of meaning laid out through themes that are underpinned by a core idea that unifies them (Clarke & Braun, 2014; Terry *et al.*, 2017).

The current study followed the deductive approach, it selected chosen to facilitate interpretation of themes and patterns. As such, the deductive approach involved coming to the data with predetermined themes that were resultant from SQLR themes based on existing literature (Blum, Stenfors & Palmgren, 2020).

Thematic analysis with ATLAS-ti software

The study utilised ATLAS.ti, a computer-assisted qualitative data analysis software, to systematically review the DMO's documents . ATLAS.ti is a versatile tool that aids researchers in analysing qualitative data, supporting both qualitative and quantitative studies (Friese, Soratto & Pires, 2018). The tool is particularly useful for large sections of text, visual, and audio data (Mackieson *et al.*, 2019). Texts are analysed and interpreted using codes and annotations in the data analysis process. The study adopted the method followed by Lewis (2016).

The analysis process involved importing a set of documents obtained from a primary national DMO, alongside an additional six regional DMOs, into the software platform ATLAS.ti. This facilitated a comprehensive examination of the materials, ultimately resulting in the formulation of definitive themes and conceptual frameworks

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(Mackieson *et al.*, 2019. In ATLAS.ti, a cyclical and iterative approach to data analysis was easily achieved that was not possible with note cards, word processors, or spreadsheets. In the coding process, ATLAS.ti enabled the creation of chains of multiple codes and the linking of quotations to create networks (Hecker & Kalpokas, 2022).

The network diagrams contributed significantly to the coding of the data by providing qualitative visual representations of it (Hecker & Kalpokas, 2022). Diagrams of network connections revealed concepts, themes, and patterns (Lewis, 2016). Although qualitative data were analysed, interpreted, and presented by researchers, they remained central to this process.

Table 4 outlines the different phases of thematic content analysis and the corresponding steps were conducted using the ATLAS.ti software. The table further provides a breakdown of the analytical process within the ATLAS.ti software, organised into three phases (Hecker & Kalpokas, 2022).

Table 4: Applying the various stages of content analysis in Atlas.ti

Phases of thematic content analysis	**Steps in ATLAS.ti**
First phase: Pre-analysis	• Creating the project. Adding documents. • Grouping documents into document groups. • Writing first memos on the overall project aim including research questions.
Second phase: Material exploration	• Reading the data, selecting data segments and creating quotations. • Creating and applying codes. • Writing memos and comments. • Grouping codes and memos
Third phase: Interpretation	• Exploring the coded data using various analysis tools. • Linking quotations, codes, and memos on the conceptual level. • Continuing memo writing. Generating network views. • Extracting reports.

Source: Adopted from Hecker and Kalpokas (2022).

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The content analysis in Atlas.ti consists of three phases, as shown in Table 4: “pre-analysis, material exploration and treatment of results, inference and interpretation”. The initial phase involves selecting the documents to be analysed, formulating hypotheses and objectives, and developing indicators to support the final interpretation (Hecker & Kalpokas, 2022; Fereday & Muir-Cochrane). Empirical data, whether in the form of transcribed text, documents, photographs, audio, or video, are thoroughly examined during this stage (Hecker & Kalpokas, 2022).

In the pre-analysis phase, the project in ATLAS.ti was assigned a name, and all relevant empirical data files that contribute to understanding the phenomenon under study are imported into the project (Hecker & Kalpokas, 2022). Each document is automatically assigned a number based on the order of importation (Hecker & Kalpokas, 2022). Document groups are created by grouping together documents from the same DMO using their names.

The second phase, known as material exploration, aims to achieve a comprehensive understanding of the text (Hecker & Kalpokas, 2022). Predetermined codes, linked to quotations, are created based on the research objectives and theoretical framework (Hecker & Kalpokas, 2022; Fereday & Muir-Cochrane). The code manager in ATLAS.ti displays the frequency of codes obtained from the DMO's literature search. These codes are further grouped into categories based on the DMO to which they pertain.

In the third and final phase, interpretation takes place, involving the transformation of raw data into meaningful and valid results using tables, diagrams, and figures (Hecker & Kalpokas, 2022). During this phase, the coded data is analysed in alignment with the research objectives and theoretical framework (Hecker & Kalpokas, 2022). Additionally, a network view is developed to visualise the conceptual connections that emerge during the analysis process (Hecker & Kalpokas, 2022; Fereday & Muir-Cochrane).

Document Analysis Code Sheet

The document analysis code sheet presented in Appendix C served as an essential data organisational framework for categorising and coding information extracted from various documents within the research context. It is a tool that systematically

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structures and classifies data for subsequent analysis (Fereday & Muir-Cochrane, 2006). The code sheet included three classifications, themes, each broken down into relevant categories, with each category a code was assigned.

The process on Atlas.ti was carried out systematically following the procedures outlined below:

- **Sampling and design considerations:** A representative sample of DMOs' strategic documents, including strategic plans, reports, and promotional materials, was selected in line with the study's focus on destination branding and marketing (Fereday & Muir-Cochrane, 2006; Hecker & Kalpokas, 2022).
- **Development of the code sheet:** A code manual was created within Atlas.ti based on predefined themes and categories related to DMO activities and strategies. Codes were labelled, defined in terms of affiliated quotations integrating insights from Boyatzis (1998) and Fereday and Muir-Cochrane (2006).
- **Validation of code reliability:** Multiple researchers independently applied codes to the DMO documents within Atlas.ti, assessing inter-coder reliability through systematic comparisons and discussions. Atlas.ti's query functions were utilised to validate coding consistency and refine the codebook as necessary (Fereday & Muir-Cochrane, 2006).
- **Application of codes and additional coding:** The established code sheet was systematically applied across the entire dataset, with ongoing refinements and expansions based on new insights and data discoveries. Atlas.ti facilitated a flexible and iterative coding process, allowing for dynamic adjustments to the analysis (Fereday & Muir-Cochrane, 2006).
- **Corroboration and Legitimation of Themes:** Identified themes were validated and substantiated through member checking and peer review, leveraging Atlas.ti's reporting capabilities to present supporting evidence and verbatim quotes from the DMO documents (Hecker & Kalpokas, 2022).

This integrated methodological approach, merged deductive thematic analysis with Atlas.ti software and facilitated the investigation of DMOs' strategic documents, yielding valuable insights.

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5.4.3 Phase 3: Content Analysis of Social Media

In the third stage of study, an in-depth investigation was conducted, focusing on the social media environment. The examination of social media content was conducted through the application of well-established quantitative content analysis techniques. It's worth noting that these methods have been widely employed and validated in numerous prior studies (Lai & To, 2015; Riff *et al.*, 2019; Stepchenkova & Zhan, 2013; Weber, 1990). Quantitative content analysis is a research methodology that can be employed to determine the occurrence and presence of specific words or concepts within texts or sets of texts (Neuendorf, 2016). Through this approach, researchers quantify and analyse the presence, and relationships of such words and concepts, then draw inferences regarding the messages within the texts (Bryman & Bell, 2015).

According to Berelson (1952) and Thomaz *et al.* (2017), content analysis can be applied to reveal discrepancies in communication content; recognise the intentions and different qualities of the communicator; describe trends in communication content, and most importantly, in alignment with this study, to audit communication content against set strategic objectives on the strategic documents.

Weber (1990) noted that content analysis has several advantages, including that content-analytic methods work specifically on content or transcripts of human interchanges. Content-analytic studies apply both qualitative and quantitative operations to texts (White & Marsh, 2006). Principal problems of content analysis begin during the data-reduction procedure through which numerous words of texts are classified into few content categories. One of the problems, among others, is consistency or reliability of text classification (Krippendorff, 2018; Mackenzie, Tan, Hoverman & Baldwin, 2012). Reliability problems emanate from the haziness of word meanings, category definitions, or other coding rules (Gaber & Gaber, 2018; Neuendorf, 2016). Classification by different human coders allowed quantitative evaluation of achieved reliability, while computer-assisted coding could lead to perfect coder reliability (Krippendorf, 2004; Krippendorff, 2018). Once accurately characterised for the computer, the coding rules are constantly implemented unchanged (Krippendorff, 2018).

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Content analysis in the context of the study was utilised to clarify inclinations in communication content (Weber, 1990). Social media are a relatively new subject (Townsend & Wallace, 2016), manner and degree with which DMOs utilise social media as a component of their marketing efforts vary extensively (Lund, Cohen & Scarles, 2018). Content analysis is an appropriate research approach since it is on a very basic level, empirical in orientation, concerned with real phenomena, and it is further predictive in its intent. It will, therefore, prove significant in describing trends in content communicated by DMOs (Berelson, 1952; Krippendorf, 2004; Thomaz *et al.*, 2017).

The objects of analysis may vary from traditional textual content such as messages and trending topics, to any media object with specified formal properties or metadata such as video, photographs, phone conversations (Larsen, 2002; Riff *et al.*, 2019; White & Marsh, 2006). McKeone (1995) and Deshpande, Sharma and Peddoju (2019) differentiate amongst prescriptive analysis, described set of specific parameters, and open analysis, which can be employed to texts and content, and where dominant messages are identified in the analysis.

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5.4.3.1 The rationale for choosing a content analysis

The choice of content analysis as the research approach suitable for the current study is underpinned by its ability to systematically examine and extract valuable insights from textual and visual data available on social media platforms. Content analysis was selected based on its known strengths.

- **Data richness:** Social media platforms are an abyss of both textual and visual content (Lovink, 2017), continually generated by users and organisations. Content analysis offers a systematic means to explore rich data landscape, enabling a comprehensive exploration of the myriads of messages, themes, and narratives that underlie destination branding efforts.
- **Objective analysis:** Content analysis introduces an objective and structured approach to studying the vast volumes of social media content. It empowers researchers to methodically code and categorise data, significantly reducing the potential for bias and subjectivity in the analysis process.
- **Comparative analysis:** Content analysis excels in helping comparative exploration of data across diverse social media platforms, timeframes, and geographical destinations.
- **Qualitative and quantitative insights:** One of the characteristic advantages of content analysis lies in its capacity to generate both qualitative and quantitative data.
- **Customisation:** Content analysis methods are highly adaptable and customisable to align with the research objectives. Content analysis allows ability develop coding schemes and criteria that are consistent with the specific research aims and objectives.
- **Scalability:** Content analysis possesses inherent scalability, rendering it appropriate for studies characterised by large datasets. This attribute empowers researchers to efficiently manage and analyse substantial volumes of content.

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5.4.3.2 Sampling Social media content

A population is composed of a number of individuals, units, or items that can be used as objects of observation (Pandey & Pandey, 2021; Wiid & Diggines, 2009). The study employed systematic sampling, which included selection the sample at regular intervals from the sampling frame. Through this approach every second post on the social media pages was selected for analysis and was done retrospectively from 03 March 2022 going backwards. The posts were in a form of text and image. Studies indicate that written and visual material in destination-marketing communication provides significant information regarding preferred images of destination (Lin *et al.*, 2011).

Uşaklı *et al.* (2017) recognised seven classes from a theoretical perspective that appeared from the content analysis of measures used to study European DMOs' social media utilisation, among which are content, major theme, information type, engagement, and promotion. Quantitative research was selected as an essential research method for this study to categorise, measure and analyse how DMOs utilise social media in communication (Queirós *et al.*, 2017). The quantitative investigation integrated large volumes of data and scopes of social media activity (Hays *et al.*, 2013; Weber, 1990).

The quantitative instrument (see Appendix B) was adopted from Hays *et al.* (2013) and Uşaklı *et al.* (2017). Content analysis was made up of the categories as adapted from Uşaklı *et al.* (2017), and were analysed in relation to strategic values of each DMO.

Content

A variety of content types are used in the posts of the DMO to ensure message reach and range, as well as identifying tags, hashtags, photos, and links to websites. The objects of analysis may vary from traditional textual content such as messages and trending topics, to any media object with specified formal properties or metadata such as video, photographs, phone conversations (Larsen, 2002; White & Marsh, 2006).For the purpose of the study, text and images were used to represent the content format.

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Major themes

In the current stage, Phase 3, the research delved into the major themes emerging from social media postings. The objective was to discern and categorise the prominent themes and messages conveyed through these digital channels. Several categories of product offerings were outlined from DMO documents, including adventure, nature, heritage, arts, culture, coastal and maritime, hospitality, and shopping, as well as wellness and sports.

Engagement

Content analysis also examines user engagement with the social media posts of the DMOs (Dhanesh *et al.*, 2022). The users are also able to post comments on shared content as well as likes on Facebook, Instagram and X (Dhanesh *et al.*, 2022). This study used the method applied by Li and Xie (2020), who applied two broad categories for measuring social media engagement as a way to understand what drives engagement on social media. There are two types of direct responses, firstly in terms of likes and comments, and secondly, share or retweet by audiences (Li & Xie, 2020; Yang *et al.*, 2019). The current study focused on likes, a commonly adopted metric, as well as comments and shares or retweets.

Image content coding

An analysis of 1,260 social media postings (60 posts on Facebook, 60 tweets, and 60 Instagram posts) was conducted using 87 measures. In order to identify the underlying categories of relevant measures, the data reduction process was necessary due to the large number of measures. This was accomplished through a content analysis since words or text are generally categorised into a fewer number of categories. DMO documents were reviewed to identify categories for each measure, yielding 12 categories. Consequently, 12 measures were used to classify social media posts. Finally, four categories emerged from the content analysis process: (1) values, (2) major theme, (3) content format, and (4) engagement, which are noted in Appendix B. The above method was adopted from Hays *et al.* (2013) and Uşaklı *et al.* (2017).

A post consisted of text and photo, and data was classed in an Excel spreadsheet (shown in Appendix B) according to the DMOs' values and products. Product theme was divided into general tourism categories such as adventure, nature, heritage, arts,

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culture, coastal and maritime, hospitality and conference, and finally, wellness, shopping, and sports. These categories were then analysed within the context of each respective province (their presence as well of format).

In the posts containing photos, Google's Vision AI tool was used to categorise photos and attribute them to relevant values using its photo analysis and detection capabilities (Srisawatsakul & Boontarig, 2020; Zeng & Zhang, 2020). Vision AI uses machine learning (AutoML Vision) to generate insights from images in the cloud or at the edge (Google, 2022; Zeng & Zhang, 2020). It also uses pre-trained vision API models to detect emotion, interpret text, and classify multiple objects as well as determine their location in the image (Li & Xie, 2020). Images are classified into millions of predefined categories by applying labels to them.

Data collection commenced with a scan of destinations' official websites to acquire links to DMOs' authentic social media accounts to screen out unofficial accounts. Keywords were utilised together with the DMO's name to locate official DMO websites (such as national tourist/tourism board/office, official tourist/tourism board/office, official travel and tourism websites). After accessing official websites, links of social media accounts were copied to ascertain legitimacy of social media accounts and a sample of content posted was examined to establish if it made any reference to the website. For sampling of social media posts, Saunders *et al.* (2009) identify five principal techniques of probability sampling that are utilised in a study, namely, simple random; systematic; stratified random; cluster; multi-stage. Sampling methods are normally categorised into probability methods and non-probability methods (Saunders *et al.*, 2015). In this study emphasis was on probability sampling, particularly stratified random sampling, which is sampling through classifying respondents into groups according to characteristics such as position, rank, income, education, sex, or ethnic background. For this study respondents are classified through position. Each element of the population has a known and equal chance of inclusion in the sample and the sample size determines accuracy. In this regard, inferences were made from the sample about the population (Bezzina & Saunders, 2015; Saunders *et al.*, 2009; Saunders *et al.*, 2015).

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5.5 Rigour of the Study

Reliability and validity were significant considerations in all three phases for ensuring credibility of the study. The methods applied to the study enhance reliability and validity in each phase are outline in the following sections.

5.5.1 Phase 1: SQLR

For reliability and validity of the SQLR on destination branding and social media articles published between 2010 and 2020, the following methodology was applied. The potential temporal weakness to articles published between 2010 and 2020 is that it excludes recent developments and emerging trends post 2020. The study can be completed by a follow up review which includes more recent literature.

Clear research objective:
The premise of this phase rested on the development of concise research objective that served as the guide for the literature review process (Pickering *et al.*, 2015), which was to provide an overview of the existing literature in destination branding and the integration of social media.

Search strategy:
The literature search was conducted online through the use of various electronic databases, which included Emerald, Scopus, Web of Science, ProQuest, and Sage publications, together with search engines Google Scholar (Uşaklı et al., 2017; Tran & Rudolf, 2022). The search was conducted through the use of search terms, “destination branding”, “tourism, and “social media” (Tran & Rudolf, 2022).

Inclusion and exclusion criteria:
The pre-established inclusion and exclusion criteria were developed (Pickering *et al.*, 2015). The inclusion criteria included the requirement for articles to be peer-reviewed and written in English language, year of publication (2010- 2020), and the studies needed to focus on destinations as case studies.

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Inter-coder reliability:

The inter-coder reliability was upheld within a team of four individuals with expertise in marketing and tourism (Krippendorf, 2004; Krippendorff, 2018). Collected data was shared through a Microsoft excel coding sheet, which carried clear for coding and classifying various aspects of the literature, including study perspective, key concepts covered in the study, study design, research methodology, data analysis, and continental base of the destination case under study (Fereday & Muir-Cochrane, 2006). Coders provided feedback and opinions to reach consensus on modifying the coding rules as necessary to ensure consistency among coders.

Documentation and transparency:

Documentation and transparency were upheld and maintained throughout stage of the SQLR process. This stage incorporated the inclusion of a detailed documentation of the six steps involved (explain earlier in the current chapter).

Statistical analysis:

The statistical methodological approaches utilised in this phase were Chi-square and Cluster analysis.

5.5.2 Phase 2: Document Analysis

The Phase 2 of the study was based on document analysis, it was critical to main the reliability and validity of the study at this phase, the following section describes how this was conducted.

Clear research objective:

Phase 2 was premised on the findings on Phase 1, from henceforth, Phase 2 built on the foundation laid in the SQLR process where concepts under investigation in Phase 2 were identified. The selection of suitable documents was guided the set of inclusion and exclusion criteria (outlined earlier). Th specific focus on identifying prominent themes and their portrayal of attributes associated with destination brand identity.

Sampling Strategy:

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A sampling strategy was guided by inclusion and exclusion criteria that was developed encompass a wide range DMOs' strategic documents, including, annual reports, brochures, map guides and others (Fereday & Muir-Cochrane, 2006).

Coding manual:

This stage has specific focus on identifying prominent themes and how they portrayal of attributes associated with (themes), strategy, brand identity, and social media (as identified in Phase 1) (Fereday & Muir-Cochrane, 2006). A with Phase 1, the coding manual was compiled using the Microsoft excel was composed list of the codes that signify the key themes identified during document analysis (Krippendorf, 2004; Krippendorff, 2018; Fereday & Muir-Cochrane, 2006). Under each theme, there were categories identified, beneath each category, there were codes which were developed deductively. The coders assessed the Microsoft excel sheet and further conducted a search on Atlas.ti to test the codes and the associated statements in relation to each theme.

Inter-coder reliability:

Intercoder reliability for document analysis was established using Atlas.ti coding software (Krippendorf, 2004; Krippendorff, 2018). This software allowed for methodical classification and coding of different document elements, including key, documents, themes, code groups, and codes. Coders followed standardised practices, as guided by the Microsoft excel sheet for consistency (Krippendorff, 2018). There were regular discussions and feedback sessions done to report discrepancies and coding rules modification.

5.5.3 Phase 3: Content Analysis Of Social Media

Reliability and validity were maintained through to Phase 3, which was based on the analysis of DMOs' social media content, the following section describes how this was conducted.

Clear research objective:

The research aim of this phase was pivotal as a means to ground the analysis's focus. The primary goal was to assess the strategic use of social media by the DMOs . This

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was carried through investigating the thematic composition of the posted content and establishing whether there is strategic congruence between brand identity and the projected brand image on social media, while also observing resultant user engagement.

Coding framework:

Phase 3 built on the work completed in Phase 2 of the study, where the same coding sheet was utilised for social media content analysis, classifying social media post composition in conformity with the codes (Krippendorf, 2004; Krippendorff, 2018). Adopting the framework from Phase 2, ensured consistency and comparability between Phases 1, 2 and 3, which is a triangulation process.

Inter-coder reliability:

It was achieved through individual coder analysis of DMO content across Facebook, X, and Instagram, encompassing both photographic and text content formats (Noble & Heale, 2019). Coders assessed all three social media platforms for each DMO case study. Consensus was reached amongst coders through an interactive process. Data was organised in an Excel spreadsheet, as shown in Appendix B.

Triangulation:

Research triangulation has become increasingly popular over the years as researchers have become more adept at generating and testing theories (Natow, 2020). Research triangulation serves to validate study results, thereby enhancing overall credibility and validity (Noble & Heale, 2019). It entails the use of multiple research methods to gather data, aiming to bolster confidence in the findings (Al-Ababneh, 2020; Davidov *et al.*, 2019; Morgan, 2019). However, the application of triangulation varies between qualitative and quantitative research (Noble & Heale, 2019). While quantitative research emphasises validity through replication by other researchers, qualitative research views validation as an indication of structured and effectively executed study aligned with research objectives (Santos, Ribeiro, Queiroga, Silva & Ferreira, 2020). This was also the case in this study where triangulation incorporated both data types validate research findings (Natow, 2020; Noble & Heale, 2019), and extract required information to analyse and establish validity and credibility (Abdalla *et al.*, 2018; Natow, 2020).

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Triangulation progresses through several steps as guided by the nature of the study (Natow, 2020). Phase 1 served as the foundational step that informs Phase 2. In Phase 1, the SQLR systematically evaluated and synthesised existing literature on destination branding and social media, identifying key themes and brand dimensions pertinent to the research objectives. The findings of Phase 1 provided a structured framework and foundational knowledge base for Phase 2.

In Phase 2, the strategic documents obtained from DMOs were scrutinised. The key themes and dimensions identified in Phase 1 served as a guide for analysing the content of the documents. Researchers examined the documents to extract relevant information related to destination branding and social media practices, aligning with the insights gleaned from Phase 1. This process ensured that the document analysis was focused and targeted, building upon the findings of the SQLR to deepen the understanding of destination branding.

Once Phase 2 was completed, the insights obtained from the document analysis fed into Phase 3. In Phase 3, researchers leveraged the findings from Phase 2 to guide the analysis of social media content posted by DMOs. The themes and brand dimensions identified in Phase 2 provided a framework for classifying and interpreting social media content, allowing researchers to assess how DMOs communicate and project themselves on social media platforms. Expanding on the insights garnered from Phase 2, Phase 3 broadened the analysis to include interactive user engagement contexts.

This triangulation method strengthens the validity and credibility of the research findings by corroborating insights across multiple data sources and analytical technique (Abdalla *et al*., 2018; Natow, 2020).

5.6 Ethical considerations across three Research Phases

Throughout the research journey, ethical considerations were diligently woven into the fabric of this study, notwithstanding the absence of direct human subjects (Hasan,

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Rana, Chowdhury & Rony, 2021). The study unfolded in three distinct phases: a SQLR, document analysis and social media content analysis. Although some conventional ethical concerns related to human subjects may not be directly applicable, other ethical dimensions remained pivotal to preserving the overall ethical soundness and integrity of the research (Hasan *et al*., 2021).

5.6.1 Phase 1: SQLR

In this phase of this research, ethical considerations predominantly centred on the responsible utilisation of pre-existing research data (Hasan *et al*., 2021). The SQLR process demanded valid representation of previously published work and to avert any semblance of misrepresentation or deliberate distortion of content.

5.6.2 Phase 2: Document Analysis

Principal ethical considerations related to the categorisation of data under analysis (Hasan *et al*., 2021). Although these documents were publicly accessible and thus not subject to traditional informed consent requisites, ethical subtleties emerged concerning their appropriate treatment in academic research (Noble & Heale, 2019). This encompassed correct citation of publicly available documents, ensuring adherence to responsible and accurate scholarly discourse, and avoiding misinterpretation and subjectivity in data representation.

5.6.3 Phase 3: Content Analysis of Social Media

The recent years have seen a surge in social media engagement (Aydin, 2020; Dolan *et al.*, 2019), turning platforms into vital spaces for networking and reflection on daily life. Social media contain vast amounts of data on variety of topics ranging from consumer behaviours to consumer preferences (He, Tian, Chen & Chong, 2016), offering researchers insights previously difficult to obtain, the ethical responsibility to maintain high standards in data acquisition and utilisation accompanies this opportunity (Kosinski, Matz, Gosling, Popov & Stillwell, 2015; Mittelstadt & Floridi, 2016).

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Social media user data is frequently accessed and analysed without prior informed consent, raising ethical concerns (Jung, Clausen, Franzke & Marx, 2022). The dynamic nature of social media presents challenges, with unpredictable ethical dilemmas emerging in future platforms or versions (Slade & Prinsloo, 2013). A major concern revolves around defining the status of social media data as either public or private (Robinson, Cox, Bailey, Hetrick, Rodrigues, Fisher & Herrman, 2016).

In the final phase of the research, which centred on the analysis of thematic composition in social media posts made by the DMOs, the ethical considerations primarily focused on responsible data usage and the handling of publicly accessible information (Noble & Heale, 2019). Since the data analysed were publicly available social media posts created by DMOs for public consumption, there were no specific ethical concerns similar to that which would apply to individuals who posted on public or private platforms.

However, ethical standards were still maintained to ensure the integrity of the research (Hasan *et al*., 2021). This included responsible and accurate handling of the social media content, avoidance of misrepresentation or distortion of the posts, and transparent reporting of the analysis methods and findings. The research team upheld ethical principles related to scholarly research and the responsible use of publicly accessible data throughout this phase.

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CHAPTER 6: RESULTS

This chapter provides the findings covering Phases 1, 2 and 3. Results from each phase are presented the subsequent sections.

Phase 1 involved a systematic literature review to identify current literature on social media and destination branding. The second phase analysed DMOs' strategic documents, while the third phase reviewed social media content to report on DMOs' social media activities. The results from these phases follow consecutively in the subsequent sections.

6.1 Results of Phase 1

Phase 1 of the study involved conducting a systematic quantitative literature review (SQLR) to analyse and assess scholarly publications focusing on destination branding and social media within destination branding. The review encompassed publications from 2010 to the first half of 2020. The objective of this phase was to provide a description of the existing knowledge in the field by categorising and summarising the identified publications using a set of predefined descriptors. The selection of articles for analysis involved both inclusionary and exclusionary criteria. Inclusionary criteria included articles published between 2010 and 2020, peer-reviewed articles, and articles written in the English language. In analysing the collated research data, this section examines a consolidated sample of 300 publications, post-elimination of duplicates. The number of studies that included both branding and social media were 180 articles. A total of 120 articles only studied branding.

The data collected from the articles were quantified and organised to facilitate coding and evaluate the depth and breadth of research on the topic within the sampled articles. Various descriptors were used, including the publication outlet (journal types), research locations and contexts (regional location of studies and geographical catchment of the DMOs), the methods employed, dimensions of branding investigated, and the social media platforms studied.

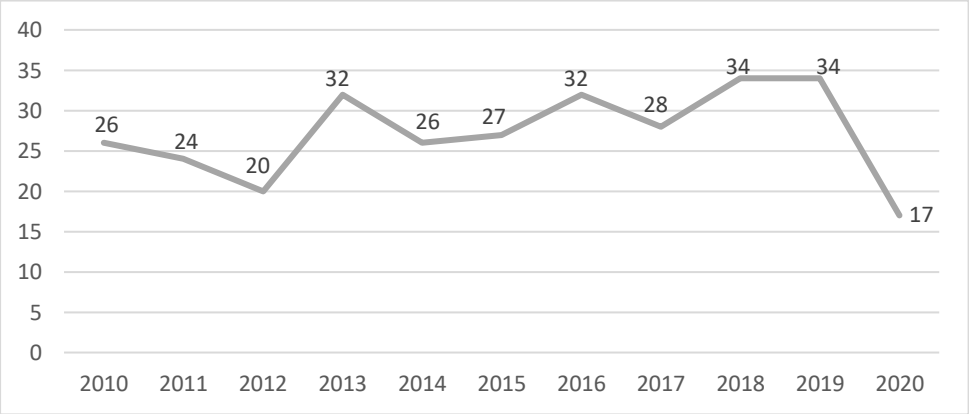
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Firstly, descriptive statistics were used to describe the sample of articles used. Secondly, significant differences were calculated to identify patterns and highlight gaps in the existing research on branding and social media. Comparisons were made between methods used to study branding, social media as well as branding across social media platforms. Lastly, a cluster analysis was performed to group similar studies together based on their characteristics and findings to supply insights into distinct clusters within the research landscape on branding and social media.

6.1.1 Publication profile

Figure 6 provides a visual representation of the publication dates of the articles included in this study. The articles were sourced from internationally accredited journals and spanned the period from 2010 to 2020. The highest number of articles reviewed was in 2016, with 32 articles, while the lowest was in 2020, with 17 articles.

Figure 6: Reviewed publication numbers by year

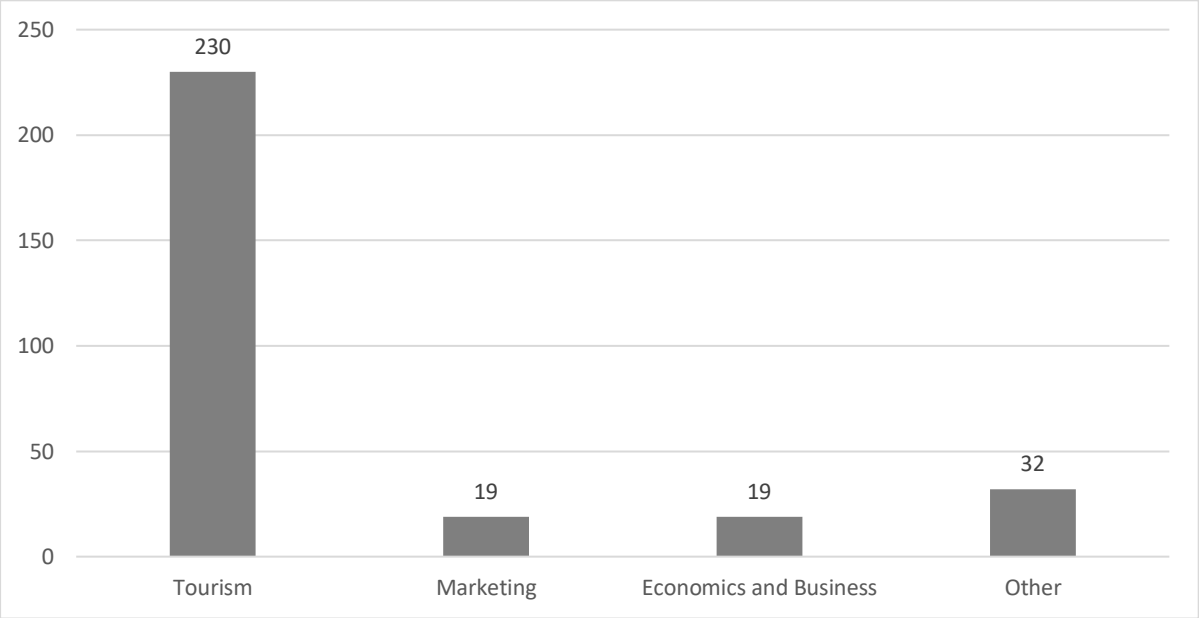


n=300

Note: Denoted as frequencies

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Figure 7: Types of journals



n=297

Note: Denoted as frequencies

Figure 7 provides insights into the distribution of reviewed publications across various journal types. Predominantly, the field of *tourism* has the most substantial representation (n=230). There were also articles from *other* fields (these are articles from different other fields of study such as geography, cultural and environmental studies) (n=32), as well as *marketing* and *economics and business* (n=19 respectively).

6.1.2 Research context

Perspectives used (supply/demand)

Tourism research typically delineates between supply side and demand side perspectives (Antolini & Grassini, 2020). Supply side tourism research focuses on the provision of tourism services organisations within a destination, such as infrastructure development, hospitality services, transportation, and destination management (Marais, Du Plessis & Saayman, 2017). While demand-side tourism research focuses on the behaviours, preferences, and motivations of tourists, such as travel decisions, destination choice, travel patterns, consumer behaviour, and the impact of socio-economic factors on tourism demand (Golmohamadi, 2022).

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The sample included articles from both the *supply side* perspective of destination branding (n=154) as well as the *demand side* (n= 146). Very few articles could be found that use *both* perspectives (n=3).

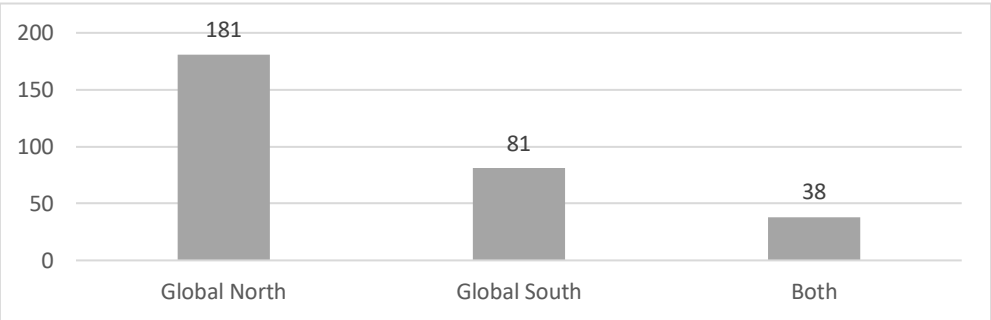
Geographical catchment of the DMOs

Regarding the geographical coverage of DMOs, three distinct categories exist: national, regional/provincial, and local (UNWTO, 2020). According to the UNWTO, national tourism administrations or authorities are recognised as the official entities entrusted with the task of fostering tourism growth within their respective jurisdictions (UNWTO, 1979). In the study sample, the predominant focus of the reviewed sources was on *regional* DMOs (n=132), followed by *national* DMOs (n=136). In contrast, coverage of *local* DMOs was limited (n=12).

Region (Global North / Global South)

The findings demonstrate the geographical preferences within academic research on destinations. Destinations were categorised into three groups: *Global North* (GN), *Global South* (GS), and *Both*, as illustrated in Figure 8. Analysis of articles based on their case study locations indicated a predominance of studies conducted in the Global North. A total of 181 articles focused on case studies within the GN region. Conversely, the GS region received less attention, with only 81 articles concentrating on this area. Additionally, a smaller proportion of studies encompassed both the GN and GS, constituting 38 articles.

Figure 8: Research regions



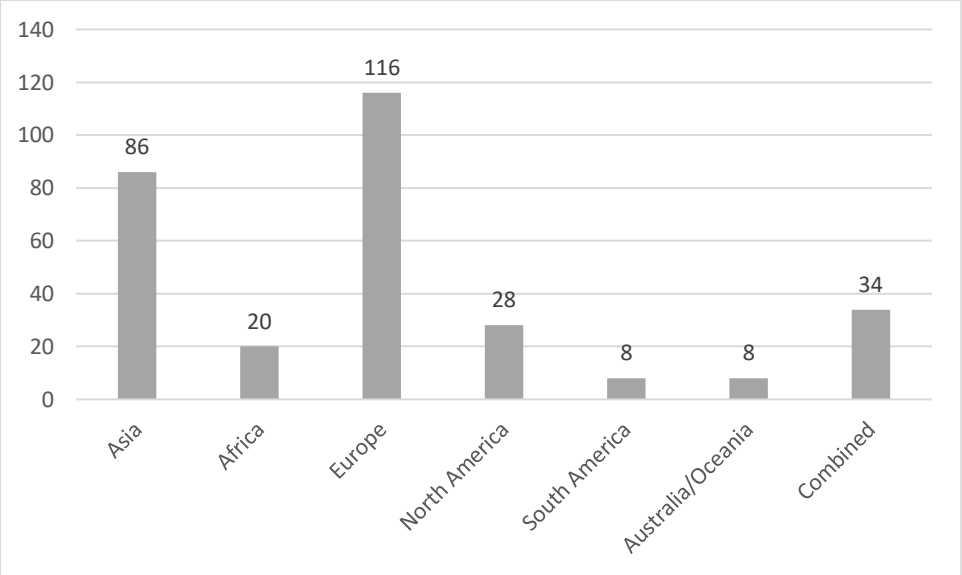
n=300

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Continent

In the context of the analysed case studies (Figure 9), researchers exhibit a clear preference for utilising *European* destinations as case studies (n=116). This is closely followed by *Asian* destinations (n=86), and notably the *Combined* category which includes studies spanning multiple continents (n=34). Studies exclusively focusing on *North American* destinations featured less (n=28), while *African* destinations received similar limited attention from researchers (n=20).

Figure 9: Continental base of case study destination



n=300

6.1.3 Research methods

Table 5 presents an overview of the methods, data types, and data collection techniques that were employed in the different research designs, reflecting the potential diversity of research practices in different fields of study. Articles in the sample consisted of *qualitative* (n=102), *quantitative* (n=126), and *mixed* methods (n=58).

In terms of data type, *primary data* were more commonly utilised (n=171) compared to *secondary data* (n=88). Least popular were a combination of *both* types (n=27). This indicates potential for more mixed method research. Regarding data collection method, the vast majority (n=140) did not specify the data collection method. Offline

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data collection was the most popular (n=80), followed by *online* (n=41), and both *offline* and *online* methods (n=14).

Finally, the most popular data collection technique utilised in the sampled studies was *structured survey questionnaires* (n=155). *Interviews* were next (n=63), followed by a range of different, less frequented techniques, including *observation* (n=18), *unstructured questionnaires*, *experiments*, and *checklists* were employed with frequencies of n=16, n=10, and n=6, respectively. Furthermore, *focus groups* and *telephonic interviews* were utilised n=4 and n=3, respectively, while *literature reviews* were employed, n=3.

Table 5: Methods applied *(table continues on the next page)*

Research design	
Method	Frequency
Qualitative	102
Quantitative	126
Mixed	58
Data type	
Primary	171
Secondary	88
Both	27
Data collection type	
Online	41
Offline	80
Both	14
Not mentioned	140
Data Collection technique*	
Structured survey questionnaire	155
Interview	63
Observation	18
Unstructured questionnaire	16
Experiment	10
Checklist	6
Focus group (discussion guide)	4

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Telephonic Interviews	3
Literature reviews	3

n=286

* Some articles did not indicate / indicated more than one

6.1.4 Dimensions of branding

Table 6 presents an overview of branding dimensions across various studies. It presents an additional distinction between the GN and GS regions to identify research gaps in the context of this study. The table delineates frequencies of dimensions studied within each category. The brand dimension of *Image* was by far the most studied (n=143), followed by *Loyalty* (n=56). *Equity* (n=29), *Personality* (n=25). *Branding in general* (n=23), as well as *Awareness* and *Quality* (n=20), showed fairly similar trends. The remaining dimensions were used in fewer than 20 studies.

Table 6: Dimensions of Branding Across Studies: A Distinction between Global North (GN) and Global South (GS) ***(table continues on the next page)***

Dimension	GN	GS	Both	Total
Image	90	38	15	143
Loyalty	36	16	4	56
Equity	18	8	3	29
Personality	15	5	5	25
Branding in general	11	8	4	23
Awareness	14	3	3	20
Quality	13	3	4	20
Perception	9	6	1	16
Satisfaction	6	5	2	13
Self-congruity	9	4	0	13
Value	11	1	0	12
Identity	9	2	1	12
Association	5	1	1	7
Experience	5	2	0	7
Attachment	1	3	2	6
Love	4	1	0	5
Authenticity	4	0	0	4
Symbolism	3	0	1	4
Trust	1	2	0	3

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Credibility	1	1	1	3
Engagement	2	1	0	3
Identification	1	1	0	2
Resonance	1	1	0	2
Attitude	1	1	0	2
Positioning	1	1	0	2
Judgement	0	1	0	1
Familiarity	1	0	0	1
Performance	0	1	0	1
Culture	0	0	1	1
Preference	1	0	0	1
Commitment	1	0	0	1

Note: *Single Article could have studied more than one dimension. **Numbers denote frequency.

N = Some publications studied more than one dimension

6.1.5 Social media research

Research progress of social media in destination branding

Table 7 presents data on the use of a wide range of social media platforms studied in destination branding studies. It presents an additional distinction between the GN and GS regions to identify research gaps in the context of this study. *Facebook* emerged as the most extensively researched platform (n=33), followed by *X* (n=28). Platforms such as *Blogs or travel blogs* (n=17), *YouTube* (n=15), *TripAdvisor* (n=13), and *Flickr* (n=11) exhibited moderate academic research interest. The sample thus included a diverse range of popular platforms studied in academic research (Jordan, 2018), with some platforms clearly being focal points of research, while others remain on the periphery (Tham, Mair & Croy, 2020).

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Table 7: Social media platforms Studied Across all articles, Differentiating Between Global North (GN) and Global South (GS)

Dimension	GN	GS	Both	Total
Facebook	23	4	6	33
X	20	4	4	28
Blogs/ Travel Blogs	13	2	2	17
YouTube	11	2	2	15
Tripadvisor	11	0	2	13
Instagram	9	0	0	9
Social media unspecified	6	4	3	13
Flickr	6	2	3	11
MySpace	3	0	1	4
Google search / plus	3	3	0	6
Sina Weibo/Weibo	2	2	0	4
WeChat	2	0	0	2
LinkedIn	2	1	0	3
Wordpress	2	0	0	2
Pintrest	1	0	0	1
Bullet screen	1	0	0	1
Snapchat	0	1	0	1
Mafengwo	0	0	0	0

*Single article could have studied more than one social media platform.

**Numbers denote frequency.

African perspective:

The results show that different brand components have been investigated in the context of African destinations. Within an African-centric framework, the concept of image was predominantly examined (n=8). *Loyalty* and **satisfaction** were subsequently addressed (n=2 respectively). Concepts of *identity*, *equity*, *positioning*, *perception*, *personality*, and *attachmen*t were explored less frequently (n=1). There were 4 studies focusing on social media, including *Facebook* (n=2), *X* (n=1), and *YouTube* (n=1).

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6.1.6 Approaches to branding research

Methods employed in destination branding research

Cross-tabulations were used to examine relations between each of the branding dimensions and the types of methodologies employed. The aim was to determine which methods were most likely to be used (significantly associated) when studying the branding dimensions. The branding dimensions and methods explored were those identified as most prevalent during the SQLR. Branding dimensions included *equity*, *awareness*, *image*, *personality*, *loyalty*, *perception,* and *branding in general*. Methods included perspective (supply / demand), DMO catchment (national / regional & local / not known), region (GN / GS), methods (qualitative / quantitative / mixed), data type (primary / secondary / both), data collection (online / offline / both / not known), and journal category (tourism / marketing / economics and business / other). The significance of these relationships was tested using the Chi-square tests of independence. In most instances the Pearson Chi-Square test ($\chi 2$) was used. In the instances where cell counts were lower than five, either Likelihood ratio Chi-Square test (G^2) was used, or Fischer's exact test for 2x2 tables (Saunders *et al*., 2012). The strength of the relationships was tested using the *phi* coefficient (ϕ), with small ($0.10 \leq \phi < 0.30$); medium ($0.30 \leq \phi < 0.50$); and large ($\phi \geq 0.50$) (Field, 2009). Table 8 presents the results, indicating only the significant relationships. Full details of the respective tests are provided in Appendix D.

The methodology that indicated the most significant relationships, related to data type used. *Equity*, *awareness* as well as *loyalty* studies were associated with primary data, with *loyalty* showing the strongest association. Secondary data was associated with *branding in general* studies. For all the other dimensions, there were no significant relationships with a specific data type (equally likely to have utilised primary, secondary or both types). In all three instances, *equity*, *loyalty* and *perception* studies were significantly associated with a demand perspective. Methods presented varied results, with *personality* studies significantly associated with mixed methods. While *loyalty* studies were associated with quantitative methods, *branding in general* was least likely to be quantitative (none present in the sample). *Equity* and *awareness* studies were associated with marketing journals. Lastly, data collection only presented a significant relationship with *image*, where *image* studies were significantly less likely

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to indicate a specific collection technique or to be online. There were no significant relationships in terms of the DMO catchment areas or geographic regions (GN/GS) from which the different branding dimensions were studied.

Methods employed in social media research

The same analysis was employed to determine which methods were most likely to be used (significantly associated) when studying the different social media platforms. The social media platforms included Facebook, X, Instagram, YouTube and Blogs / Travel blogs. The same methods categories were used as those in the branding dimension analyses. Table 9 presents the results, indicating only the significant relationships. Full details of the respective tests are provided in Appendix D. The methodology that indicated the most significant relationships, once again related to data type used. Facebook, X and Blogs were associated with secondary data, while both Instagram and YouTube were significantly less likely to be studied using both types, and also least likely to be studied using primary data. Both Facebook and X studies were significantly related to a supply perspective. Facebook was also significantly related to online data collection. Instagram was significantly related to quantitative methods. While there were no significant relationships between branding dimensions and regional perspective, both Facebook and Instagram were significantly related to GN.

6.1.7 Dimensions of branding studied on different social media platforms

Lastly, the relationships between the branding dimensions and social media platforms were tested. As indicated in Table 10 (full details in Appendix D), there were very few significant relationships. Facebook presented the majority of these. It was significantly associated with not being used to study equity and awareness studies (none in the sample of *equity* and *awareness* studies). It was also significantly associated with *image* and *loyalty* (less likely used to study image and *loyalty* within the total sample of *image* and *loyalty* studies). Both X and Instagram were similarly associated with *image*.

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Table 8: Significant associations between branding dimensions and methodologies employed

Methodology / Branding dimension	Perspective	DMO catchment	Region	Methods	Data type	Data collection	Journal category
Equity	$\chi 2$ = 7.421* ϕ = .158[1]	-	-	-	G^2 = 9.208** ϕ = .179[1]	-	G^2 = 11.041*] ϕ =.206[1]
Awareness	-	-	-	-	G^2 = 6.531***] ϕ = .141[1]	-	G^2 = 10.078** ϕ = .212[1]
Image	-	-	-	-	-	$\chi 2$ = 8.386** ϕ = .173[1]	-
Personality	-	-	-	$\chi 2$ = 5.508*** ϕ = .139[1]	-	-	-
Loyalty	$\chi 2$ = 15.719* ϕ = .230[1]	-	-	$\chi 2$ = 15.239* ϕ = .230[1]	$\chi 2$ = 33.648* ϕ = .342[2]	-	-
Perception	*Fisher Exact*** ϕ = .140[1]	-	-	-	-	-	-
Branding in general	-	-	-	$\chi 2$ = 3.104*** -.102[1]	G^2 = 9.466* .190[1]	-	-

*p<.01; **p<.05; ***p<.10. Effect size: 1 small (0.10≤ϕ<0.30), 2 medium (0.30≤ϕ<0.50), 3 large ($\phi \geq$ 0.50)

$\chi 2$ = Pearson Chi-square; G^2 = Likelihood ratio Chi-square

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Table 9: Significant associations between social media studies and methodologies employed

Methodology Branding dimension	Perspective	DMO catchment	Region	Methods	Data type	Data collection	Journal category
Facebook	$\chi 2$ = 7.993* ϕ = -.164[1]	-	*Fisher's exact*** ϕ = -.139[1]	-	$\chi 2$ = 18.159* ϕ = .252[1]	G^2 = 7.330** ϕ = .167[1]	-
X	6.097** -.143[1]	-	-	-	$\chi 2$ = 19.784* ϕ = .263[1]	-	-
Instagram	-	-	*Fisher's exact**** ϕ = -.131[1]	G^2 = 6.898** ϕ = .143[1]	G^2 = 5.861*** ϕ = .153[1]	-	-
YouTube	-	-	-	-	G^2 = 7.564** ϕ = .169[1]	-	-
Blogs/Travel blogs	-	-	-	-	G^2 = 13.730* ϕ = .220[1]	-	-

*p<.01; **p<.05; ***p<.10. Effect size: 1 small (0.10≤ϕ<0.30), 2 medium (0.30≤ϕ<0.50),3 large (ϕ ≥ 0.50)

$\chi 2$ = Pearson Chi-square; G^2 = Likelihood ratio Chi-square

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Table 10: Significant associations between branding dimensions and social media

Methodology Branding dimension	Facebook	X	Instagram	YouTube	Blogs / Travel blogs
Equity	*Fisher's exact*** ϕ = -.128[1]	-	-	-	-
Awareness	Fisher's exact *** ϕ = -.105[1]	-	-	-	-
Image	$\chi 2$ = 7.771* ϕ = -.161[1]-	$\chi 2$ = 6.382** ϕ = -.146[1]	$\chi 2$ = 4.068*** ϕ = -.116[1]	-	-
Personality	-	-	-	-	-
Loyalty	$\chi 2$ = 3.966*** ϕ = -.115[1]	-	-	-	
Perception	-	-	-	-	-
Branding in general	-	-	-	-	-

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6.1.8 Cluster analysis results

After conducting the cross-tabulations to gain a detailed understanding of the separate aspects of the SQLR (the methods for branding studies, the methods for social media studies, and the branding dimensions featured in social media studies), a cluster analysis was conducted to gain a more holistic perspective of the 'typical types' of articles published on the topic of branding and social media. This would allow the researcher to identify resemblances and disparities among groups and to formulate typologies.

In this study a Two-Step Cluster Analysis technique was employed. It applies an automated process to determine the appropriate number of clusters by considering several factors: (a) the Bayesian Information Criterion (BIC) which should be low, although not necessarily the lowest, (b) a high ratio of distance measures, (c) a high ratio of BIC changes, and (d) the potential for meaningful interpretation (Benassi, Garofalo, Ambrosini, Sant'Angelo, Raggini, De Paoli, Ravani, Giovagnoli, Orsoni & Piraccini, 2020). It is important to note that this method has a limitation in that it cannot handle missing values, therefore any items with missing values are not included in the analysis (Askeyev & Baizholova, 2021; Radjenovic & Boskov, 2022; Supandi, Saefuddin & Sulvianti, 2021). Applying the specified rules, a two-cluster solution appeared to be the most suitable choice, with a BIC value of -262.347, a ratio of distance measures of 1.687, and a BIC change of 1.000. The quality of the clusters was assessed using the silhouette measure of cohesion and separation, which yielded a value of 0.2, surpassing the threshold of 0.0.

To ascertain the validity of the cluster solution, an assessment was conducted to determine whether the clusters exhibited statistically significant variations across variables (Carrillo-Larco & Castillo-Cara, 2020; Milligan, 1981). Following the formation of the cluster solution, three validation measures were employed. Firstly, the silhouette measure of cohesion and separation was utilised to assess whether the distances within and between clusters were valid, with a minimum threshold of 0.0. The cluster analysis yielded a value of 0.2, surpassing the required threshold. Secondly, the discriminant analysis generated a function that exhibited a statistically significant Wald statistic ($p<0.001$), and accurately classified 96.1% of the cases, thereby confirming the presence of heterogeneous characteristics concerning the identified important variables. Thirdly, $\chi 2$- and t-tests were performed on the

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categorical and continuous variables, respectively, to identify significant disparities among the clusters.

Table 11: Cluster distribution ***(table continues on the next page)***

	Predictor Importance	Clusters		Significance test
Size of clusters		Article type 1 (171)	Article type 2 (60)	
Cluster names				
Methods: Data type (primary/secondary/both)	1	Primary (81.9%)	Secondary (86.7%)	χ2=175.397* φc =.871
Methods: Research design (Qualitative/quantitative/mixed)	0.60	Quantitative (57.9%)	Qualitative (81.7%)	χ2=86.483* φc =.612
Context: Supply/demand perspective	0.36	Demand (67.3%)	Supply (83.3%)	χ2=29.094* φc =.355
Brand dimension: loyalty	0.17	27.5%	0%	χ2=21.173* φc =.303
Methods: data collection (online/offline/both)	0.16	Not mentioned (43.3%)	Not mentioned (78.3%)	χ2=17.971* φc =.268
Brand dimension: general	0.12	2.9%	16.7%	χ2=8.074* φc =-.201
Platform: X	0.11	5.3%	20%	χ2=11.229* φc =-.220
Platform: Facebook	0.08	8.2%	21.7%	χ2=13.367* φc =-.241
Methods: number of destinations	0.07	Mean (1.89)	Mean (5.35)	*T*=2.694*
Brand dimension: personality	0.06	9.4%	0%	χ2=10.233** φc =.163
Brand dimension: Quality	0.05	8.2%	0%	χ2=8.905** φc =..152

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Brand dimension: equity	0.05	13.5%	3.3%	χ2=2.994 *** φc =..114
Platform: blogs/travel blogs	0.04	3.5%	10%	χ2=3.213 *** φc =-.125
Brand dimension: identity	0.03	7.6%	15%	χ2=2.631 φc =1.107
Brand dimension: perception	0.03	7%	1.7%	χ2=3.110 φc =.104
Brand dimension: Awareness	0.03	8.8%	3.3%	χ2=2.357 φc =..094
Context: DMO level	0.02	Regional (56.1%)	National (53.3%)	χ2=2.956 φc =.113
Brand dimension: image	0.01	50.3%	53.3%	χ2=.120 φc =..023
Context: Global North/ Global South	0.00	North (67.8%)	North (66.7%)	χ2=.145 φc =-.025
Platform: YouTube	0.00	5.3%	5%	χ2=1.387 φc =-.081
Platform: Instagram	0.00	3.5%	3.3%	χ2=8.561 * φc =-.209

N = 231 (69 Articles did not fall within one of the two meaningful clusters)

Note: Values represent single responses (thus % of the category).

*p<.01 **p<.05 *** p<.1

As indicated in Table 11, the primary determinant in cluster formation was the type of data (whether it was primary, secondary, or a combination of both), which had the highest predictor importance score of 1. Following that, the research design factor held the second highest predictive value at 0.60, while the perspective (supply or demand) held moderate importance at 0.36. The dimensions of brand studied, specifically the brand's image, held a relatively lower importance score of 0.17, followed by the data collection method (online, offline, or both) with a score of 0.16. Out of the 21 characteristics chosen for the cluster analyses, 14 exhibited statistically significant differences between the clusters. A careful examination of the cluster analyses revealed that these seven characteristics held minimal importance in forming the clusters, suggesting that they can be disregarded.

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Article type 1 constituted the largest cluster, representing the majority of articles (74%). These articles primarily relied on primary data (81.9%), employed quantitative methodology (57.9%), and adopted a demand-side (tourist) perspective (67.3%). They exhibited a significantly lower number of DMO case studies compared to the articles in the second cluster (mean = 1.89 versus mean = 5.35). The case studies predominantly focused on regional or local contexts (56.1%) within the GN (67.8%).

Within this cluster, there were articles that focused on *loyalty* (27.5%), which were absent in the second cluster. Additionally, a smaller proportion of articles addressed *branding in general* (2.9%) compared to the second cluster (16.7%). Conversely, there was a significantly higher presence of articles related to brand *personality* (9.4% versus 0%), brand *quality* (8.2% versus 0%), and brand *equity* (13.5% versus 3.3%) compared to the second cluster. In terms of social media platforms, this cluster featured a lower number of articles on X (5.3% versus 20%), Facebook (8.2% versus 21.7%), and blogs (3.5% versus 10%) compared to the second cluster. However, the remaining dimensions of branding (*identity, perceptions, awareness, and image*) and social media platforms (YouTube and Instagram) were similarly represented in both clusters.

Article type 2 constituted 26% of the clusters. These articles predominantly relied on secondary data (86.7%), utilised qualitative methodology (81.7%), and adopted a supply-side (DMOs) perspective (83.3%). They featured a significantly higher number of DMO case studies (mean = 5.35) compared to article type 1. It's particularly noteworthy to highlight the dominant presence of the GN in both types of articles, underscoring its continued prevalence in research. The case studies centred primarily on national-level perspectives (53.3%), echoing the prevailing focus seen in the first article type. Within this category, a substantial majority (66.7%) were specifically within the GN context. Notably, a higher proportion of these GN-focused articles (16.7%) addressed branding in a broader sense, compared to the initial cluster (2.9%). However, there were significantly fewer articles on brand *equity* (3.3% versus 13.5%) compared to the first cluster. In terms of social media platforms, this cluster featured a higher number of articles on X (20% versus 5.3%), Facebook (21.7% versus 8.2%), and blogs (10% versus 3.5%) compared to the first cluster. The remaining dimensions of branding (*identity, perceptions, awareness,* and *image*) and social media

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platforms (YouTube and Instagram) were similarly represented to a lesser extent than in the first cluster's articles.

Instagram exhibited a notable degree of statistical significance in distinguishing the clusters, even though it emerged as the least influential factor in the formation of the clusters, displaying comparable proportions to the predominant category, specifically the absence of any mention of Instagram (Instagram not studied). This can be attributed to the discernible pattern evident in the binary representation (0's and 1's) denoting the utilisation or non-utilisation of Instagram across the clusters. Among the instances where Instagram was not used (represented by 0's), 24.7% belonged to cluster 1 and 75.3% belonged to cluster 2. Conversely, within the instances where Instagram was used (represented by 1's), 75% were associated with cluster 1 and 25% with cluster 2.

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6.2 Results of Phase 2

The study's methodology examined thematic aspects of the documents (Clarke & Braun, 2014). Thematic analysis is an analytical approach that entails the identification and patterns and themes present within qualitative data (Braun & Clarke, 2012; Clarke & Braun, 2014). The process started by establishing the major themes, it encompasses the repeated occurrences of an experience and its different expressions that convey significant meanings and identities (DeSantis & Ugarriza, 2000). Identifying a theme means linking fragments of thoughts or experiences that are meaningless on their own, thereby connecting large amounts of data together (DeSantis & Ugarriza, 2000; Morgan & Nica, 2020; Nowell *et al.*, 2017). This section initially describes the development of themes and codes, document sampling and the code sheet, and then presents DMO-specific results.

6.2.1 Sampling

The researcher obtained DMO contact information from the National Department of Tourism website to begin document compilation (SAT, 2020-21). Telephone calls to DMOs were made to obtain relevant contact information. Data collection challenges involved DMOs' poor website information updates, reluctance to provide document access, and bureaucratic delays. Conversely, other DMOs had extensive website information and were keen to provide requested strategic documents. Subsequently, the DMOs were contacted via telephone in order to procure the email addresses of the relevant individuals. It was seen that some DMOs lacked comprehensive information on their websites, impeding the availability of readily accessible documents. Furthermore, inadequate updates to these websites exacerbated the issue. DMOs referred to their websites for information upon request, which proved insufficient for conducting thorough research. Additionally, the documents provided lacked satisfactory information in some cases.

Table 25 provides the DMOs' list of documents analysed for the investigation. As indicated, the majority of documents were annual reports and performance plans. Strategic plans were only available for ECPTA and MTPA. For a number of destinations, a variety of different sources were available that provided an interesting perspective e.g., visitor guides, toolkits, and brochures. Limpopo Tourism Authority provided their annual report which offered an in-

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depth view of their achievements and initiatives within the specified year. Unfortunately, no other documents were available for this province, limiting the insights into content of the individual annual report.

Document sample

The strategy document provides details on the master plan (George, Walker & Monster, 2019). Strategical planning is merely a formalisation of the strategic process established in the strategic thinking process (Bahrampour, Shokooh, Pourkiani & Kamali, 2021). As part of the implementation phase, short-term plans are developed and tactics are selected to operationalise the master plan (Loorbach, 2010; Malekpour, Walker, de Haan, Frantzeskaki & Marchau, 2020).

To commence the process of document compilation, the researcher acquired the contact details of DMOs from the official website of the National Department of Tourism. Subsequently, the DMOs were contacted via telephone in order to procure the email addresses of the relevant individuals. It was observed that certain DMOs lacked comprehensive information on their websites, impeding the availability of readily accessible documents. Furthermore, inadequate updates to these websites exacerbated the issue. When approached, the DMOs referred to the aforementioned website information, which proved insufficient for conducting thorough research. Additionally, the documents they were able to provide lacked satisfactory information in some cases. Notably, one instance involved a bureaucratic delay and obstacles hindering the DMO's ability to share documents. Conversely, there were also DMOs that possessed ample information on their websites and expressed willingness to share further documents.

Table 12 presents a view of documents obtained from DMOs that were reviewed as part of the document analysis. Each DMO is listed alongside the specific documents that were examined. SAT had several documents available, including annual reports and annual records for multiple years. These documents provided essential insights into the organisation's activities, achievements, and strategic objectives. ECPTA offered a diverse set of documents for analysis, ranging from growth strategies to brochures and toolkits. These documents offer a view of their marketing efforts and strategies. MTPA included

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documents, namely, annual reports and strategic plans, offering a historical perspective on their operations and future goals. These sources served as valuable references for understanding their long-term strategies. TKZN contributed a variety of documents, including brochures, annual reports, and guides. These materials were adequate sources of information about the DMO's promotional activities and visitor engagement efforts. LTA provided their annual report, which offered a view of their initiatives. No other documents were available. GTA contributed annual reports and a Meetings Planner's Guide, which provides insights into their marketing strategies and efforts to attract business events to the region.

Table 12: Documents reviewed for every DMO *(table continues on the next page)*

Destination Marketing Organisation	**Documents reviewed**
South Africa Tourism	Annual Report, 2019/2020 Annual Report, 2018/2019 Annual Performance, 2017/2018
Eastern Cape Parks and Tourism Agency	Annual Performance Plan, 2021 Strategic Plan, 2020 Eastern Cape Provincial Nature Reserve Visitor Guide, 2020 Brand Guidelines, 2019 Eastern Cape Toolkit, 2018 Trade led Tourism Growth Strategy for Eastern Cape, 2010
Mpumalanga Tourism and Parks Agency	MTPA Brochure, 2020 Annual Report, 2019/2020 MTPA Presentation, 2019 Mpumalanga Tourism and Parks Agency Act, 2005 Mpumalanga Tourism and Parks Agency Strategic Plan, 2011-2015
KwaZulu-Natal Tourism	Destination Brochure, 2020 Travellers Tips Brochure, 2020 Annual Report 2019/20 TKZN- How to Brochure, 2019 Annual Performance Plan, 2018/19
Limpopo Tourism Authority	Annual Report, 2018-2019
Gauteng Tourism Authority	Annual Report, 2018-2019 Gauteng Meetings Planner's Guide, 2019

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Western Cape Investment and Trade Promotion Agency	Wesgro Annual Performance Plan 2022-2023 Your guide to Cape Town and the Western Cape 2021 Annual Review 2021 Wesgro IQ_Western Cape_Tourism Visitor Trends_2021 Wesgro Investment Promotion Services-Brochure-2019 Locations Guide_2019

The Document Analysis Code Sheet, in Appendix C, played a fundamental role in structuring and classifying information gathered from various documents, thus highlighting its pivotal role in the research process.

6.2.2 Data Collection and Analysis

The analysis process comprised of the methodological examination of the DMO documents, through selection of relevant information, data quality evaluation, and synthesis of findings. The study followed deductive thematic analysis which imply that themes and codes were determined before examining the data (Blum *et al.*, 2020). The composition of themes and categories was based on the literature review in Phase 1 of the study. Documents were analysed using ATLAS.ti software, which is useful for interpreting large texts (Friese *et al.*, 2018).

Data preparation on Atlas.ti

To conduct a deductive thematic analysis, the researchers adhered to the guidelines established by Braun and Clarke (2006). The analysis process was divided into three distinctive phases discussed in the following passages.

Pre-analysis phase:

In the pre-analysis phase, the study selected and collected relevant DMO documents according to Chapter 3's inclusion criteria. DMO documents were loaded into Atlas.ti for analysis. Within Atlas.ti, documents were grouped into distinctive document groups and classified according to the DMO from which they originated to maintain their contextual origins. Document preparation and layout were essential for data integrity and traceability.

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Material Exploration:

The focus on the second phase, material exploration, was to gain understanding of the textual data. Predetermined themes, categories and codes were analysed following the deductive approach. Each of the themes and categories were evaluated to ascertain how they reflected within the text. Codes were derived and quotations for each code were assessed to verify if they were a true representation of the themes and categories. The material exploration phase resulted in the understanding of the interrelatedness between the codes, categories, and themes. The themes and their related categories as identified from literature review were strategy, brand identity, and social media.

For each of the categories, a coding process was executed by selecting keywords or phrases which accurately represent the category. The keywords or phrases identified were used as codes. In turn, the codes were searched within the DMO document group, and a code was attached to the resulting quotations. Each code indicated the number of quotations in which it was referenced in the documents; this is called code frequency. The code manager in Atlas.ti software was utilised to create categories which displayed the codes and their frequencies.

Interpretation:

During the final phase, the interpretation phase, the analysed data were interpreted using diagrams, tables, and figures to illustrate the linkages and code frequencies.

6.2.3 Validity and reliability

The validity and reliability of the deductive thematic analysis were of importance to the study. These are addressed through following the established procedures that used both theoretical bases and empirical evidence from previous studies.

Ensuring Validity

The validity of the study relates to the accuracy and correctness of the study results (Coleman, 2022) achieved by following a systematic approach to data coding and the development of the themes described by Braun and Clarke (2006). Every theme was examined concerning the data in the documents to ascertain whether it accurately

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represented the DMO (Ningi, 2022). During the process, data fragments were consistently compared to refine each theme. The methodology allows for systematic coding and analytic procedures (Clarke & Braun, 2013; Mohajan & Mohajan, 2022).

Enhancing Reliability

Reliability for thematic analysis was achieved through incorporating inter-coder discussions which are essential to ensure results are not an outcome of individual researcher bias but are dependably reproducible (González-Prieto, Perez, Diaz & López-Fernández, 2023; Krippendorff, 2004). The multiple coders worked independently on developing codes to minimise potential biases and affirm the reproducibility of the themes across different coders (Aguinis & Solarino, 2019). The intercoder discussions provided a platform for determining discrepancies in the coding process and reaching an agreement on the explanations of codes and themes (Cascio, Lee, Vaudrin & Freedman, 2019). The intercoder discussions resolved differences in interpretation and added analytical depth by including different perspectives (Campbell, Quincy, Osserman & Pedersen, 2013; MacPhail, Khoza, Abler & Ranganathan, 2016).

Additional methodological rigor

The additional methodological rigor on the deductive thematic analysis was achieved by including reflexiveness in the analysis process. Reflexive thematic analysis is applied in the study fields such as education, social work, and counselling, thus presenting a context for analysing qualitative data (Braun & Clarke, 2022). The crucial aspect of reflexive thematic analysis is that it recognises the influence of the researcher's subjectivity (Finlay, 2002), encourages theoretical adaptability and grounding, while placing the research question as a focal point (Braun & Clarke, 2019). This reflection ascertains that themes established from the analysis accurately represent the data and not researchers' ideas and beliefs.

The study utilised the following six stages of the reflexive thematic analysis as prescribed by Braun and Clarke (2019). Stage 1 (document familiarisation), researchers engaged with data through a repetitive review of the documents for familiarisation with the content to ensure that it relates to the predetermined themes and categories. This stage included collecting and constructing preliminary notes that relate to the research objectives. During stage 2 (themes and categories creation) themes and categories were predetermined. Each

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theme consisted of a grouping of categories and through gathering relevant data, the viability of themes and categories was assessed. Stage 3 (codes creation), codes were identified that would be representative of the themes and categories. It entailed a repeated coding process to ensure a widespread data coverage of each category, followed by attaching data extracts to each code for a deeper analysis. Stage 4 (reviewing codes), prospective codes were refined through reassessing documents from DMOs. The objective was to ensure that the codes reflected the key issues delineated in the documents and aligned to the research question. They were modified a number of times by amalgamation and elimination based on their ability to capture the essence of each category. Stage 5 (refining codes) focused on code reassessment and refinement with the goal to ensure that codes were a true reflection of the category. This process unfolded by implementing a codes examination to ascertain whether each code was assigned descriptive terms that carried the core meaning of the category. If misalignments were seen between the code, category and data extracts were refined. Lastly, stage 6 (writing up) marked the beginning of the write-up, with the focus on combining codes with supporting quotations that convey the essence of each code and writing the results for analysis.

Throughout, an iterative process was followed. The procedure included several sessions of coding and discussion, followed by reliability assessments to ascertain that the agreement arrived at remained consistent amongst team members as discussed by Olson, McAllister, Grinnell, Gehrke Walters and Appunn (2016). This strategy is significant as a qualitative research methodology to get trustworthy and reliable results (Rheinhardt, Kreiner, Gioia & Corley, 2018). In this process it was plain that some codes were not associated with the categories or themes as initially identified. Resultantly, more analysis was conducted to refine the codes and accurately categorise them.

6.2.4 Deductive identification of themes, categories and codes

The research followed a deductive approach using thematic analysis involving structured pre-defined constructs developed from the literature review on branding and social media conducted earlier in Phase 1. In the first task, the researcher did not utilise the categorisation system of branding which was developed during Phase 1 of the study in order to identify the

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themes and categories to ensure accurate representation of the two main constructs (branding and social media).
The analysis utilised three main themes, namely, *Strategy, Brand identity* and *Social media,* with corresponding categories.

Theme 1: Strategy

The categories derived under this theme were developed based on their significance to the strategic orientation of DMOs and role in guiding organisational activities (Barbosa, Castañeda-Ayarza & Ferreira, 2020). These included *vision, mission and positioning***.** Increasing competition amongst destinations highlights the importance for destination planners to adopt strategy focused on maintaining the market share (Ruhanen, 2007). The theme strategy covers a framework that provides guidance to DMOs in achieving destination management objectives (Cronjé & du Plessis, 2020; Crouch, 2011). The strategy theme features prominently in the destination competitive models, highlighting strategic orientation and strategic planning as crucial aspects (Dwyer & Kim, 2003; Ritchie & Crouch, 2003). Traditional strategic planning approaches include a stage of *strategic visioning*, aiming to establish forward-looking vision (Ruhanen, 2007). The concept of destination vision sets out future aspirations and appearance of the destination (Romão, Okada, Machino & Nijkamp, 2021; Ruhanen, 2007), which is a crucial element in achieving organisational success (Wilde & Cox, 2008).

A *mission* statement articulates the organisation purpose, strategic approach, and specifies actions to achieve the desired future image of the destination (Romão *et al.*, 2021). Mission statement provides a scope of activities specifying how the DMO will realise its strategic initiatives (Patterson & Radtke, 2009). Pike and Ryan (2004) add that mission of an organisation incorporates the promotion of the destination brand.

The goal of strategic marketing is effective *brand positioning* (Day, 2011; Gretzel, 2022). Positioning enables a brand to occupy a distinct and memorable place in the mind of the target customer (Pike, 2017). Positioning of a destination brand influences visitors' perceptions on how they recognise its identity and product offerings (Day, 2011; Hodson, 2021).

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Theme 2: Brand identity

The brand identity theme encompassed *values* and *product* as categories, which effectively capture the fundamental elements of destination brand identity. *Values* encapsulate the main beliefs and ethos, these reinforce the DMO's operations and serve as guiding principles (Gasong, Meiyani & Simega, 2024; Wæraas, 2010). *Product* encompasses the tangible and intangible offerings and experiences that are promoted by the DMO (Ryan & Gu, 2009). *Values* provide the basis for managing the organisation and engaging with stakeholders (Barbosa *et al.*, 2020). DMOs are involved in developing *brand identity* of destination, which takes into consideration the distinctive attributes, and aspects that showcase its cultural, natural, historical, and contemporary appeal (Kumpu, Pesonen & Heinonen, 2021; Ritchie & Crouch, 2010).

While brand identity is a lifeblood for any destination in regard to its competitiveness, emphasis on domestic tourism is of equivalent significance for building and reinforcing the sector's resilience, as was the case with COVID-19 restrictions (Williams, 2022). Destinations are progressively utilising domestic tourism as a key contributor to the external tourism economy (Zhou, 2022). Smeral (2010) argues that domestic tourism protects the sector against international markets' volatility. Okello, Kenana and Kieti (2012) add that a strong domestic tourism sector creates a buffer and stabilises the industry against global market shifts. Remarkably, South Africa demonstrates the same trend among developing nations, with the government prioritising domestic tourism (Rogerson, 2005; Rogerson, 2015).

Lubbe, Douglas, Fairer-Wessels and Kruger (2015) highlight that South Africa's DMOs have taken a holistic strategy to boost regional tourist competitiveness, with the aim of boosting the regional tourism's market appeal. Regional tourism competitiveness is based on recognising key attractive aspects that are of interest to the tourists, and specifically to the destination (Booyens & Rogerson, 2019; Du Plessis, 2021; Lubbe *et al.*, 2015).

Lubbe *et al.* (2015) stress that the cultural heritage plays an important role in the development of cultural tourism, particularly destinations such as South Africa, with the urban and rural cultural landscapes supporting its diverse tourism goods, which follow

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worldwide cultural heritage tourism trends (Keahey, 2019). Viljoen and Henama (2017) underline that rural communities' extensive natural landscapes and cultural offerings boost rural tourism.

The notion of *product* in the context of tourism, refers to a wide range of offerings that a destination provides (Barak, Maingi & Ndubi, 2019; Pike & Mason, 2011). The destination offerings in the present study served as the codes. These included offerings ranging from art, adventure, culture, wildlife, nature, heritage, to coastal and marine attractions, along with hospitality and conference facilities, distinctively contribute to the destination's appeal (Adriana, 2019; Hull, 2001; Rogerson & Rogerson, 2023). These different product offerings (used as codes) are appropriate since they play an influential role in defining a destination's brand identity (Cempaka, Sundari, Bima & Emerald, 2023).

Theme 3: Social Media

Worldwide adoption of social media in destination marketing highlights its significance (Hemmonsbey & Tichaawa, 2018), and as a marketing technique for promoting tourism products has proven to be beneficial (Zeng & Gerritsen, 2014). The research-aim of investigating the influence and utilisation of social media by DMOs is directly tied to the theme of 'social media' as the primary focus of the study.

The categories for the social media theme were predetermined, reflecting the DMOs' strategic approach to destination marketing and promotion, and social media engagement. These categories are *platforms, content strategy*, *promotions*, and *monitoring and analytics* were identified to provide structured framework for analysing aspects of social media usage by DMOs.

The selection of social media *platforms* Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram as codes distinguish their influence (Jorge *et al*., 2020; Uşaklı *et al*., 2019). The platforms serve as principal communication channels through which DMOs interact (Ge, Gretzel & Clarke, 2013). Each social media platform offers possibilities and challenges that affect strategic decisions made by DMOs in regard to content creation and audience engagement (Mohamed & Hewedi, 2022).

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The category of *content strategy* refers to the overall approach in which DMOs outline their utilisation of social media to achieve marketing and communication goals (Kilgour *et al.*, 2015; Perreault & Mosconi, 2018). This strategic approach involves establishing objectives, target customer segmentation, content planning, and engagement plans designed to meet marketing objectives (Chaitanya, Saha, Saha, Acharya & Singla, 2023). This category explores creation, and sharing of content through various social media platforms, to influence tourist perceptions (Sorokina, Wang, Fyall, Lugosi, Torres & Jung, 2022) through content that features authentic travel experiences (Chen, 2023). The coordination of the content strategy with destination branding initiatives is crucial for positioning destinations to stand out from competitors (Hemmonsbey & Tichaawa, 2018; Kiráľová & Pavlíčeka, 2015).

The next two categories were *promotions,* and *monitoring and analytics*. They highlight the dynamic nature of social media utilisation by DMOs (Khan & Khan, 2017; Saxena, Chaturvedi & Rakesh, 2018). The categories demonstrate the function of focused campaigns and data-driven insights in maximising social media performance and determining the impact of digital marketing efforts. Social media platforms serve as valuable apparatus for successful marketing campaigns (Baum, Spann, Füller & Thürridl, 2019). Most organisations utilise social media as conventional promotional strategy to introduce new product offerings (Saxena *et al.*, 2018). It is important for DMOs to use social media monitoring and analytics to evaluate levels of engagement monitor key performance metrics to optimise campaigns and gain full understanding of customer behaviours (Stevenson & Hamill, 2016; Zeng & Gerritsen, 2014), thereby ensuring that strategies are appropriately aligned to customer expectations (Nanda & Kumar, 2021).

6.2.4. Document Analysis Per DMO

The evaluation of all documents obtained from each DMO involved the utilisation of standardised themes and codes. These themes and codes were present in all the documents and aligned with the outcomes identified in Phase 1. The subsequent sections present the findings of the document analysis per DMO.

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6.2.4.1 South African Tourism (National)

South African Tourism (SAT) functions as the principal DMO that determines and sets the strategic tone for all DMOs in terms of destination marketing and management. Its core function is to improve tourist experience, optimise stakeholder collaboration, and increase sales of travel packages to South Africa (SAT, 2020a). It realises its mandate through working with establishments in the relevant fields of operation, thereby increasing reach to a broader audience (SAT, 2021b). Results of the document analysis are summarised in Table 13. It indicates the generic themes and categories, as well as the corresponding codes used to describe their occurrence in the case study contexts. A detailed analysis of each component subsequently follows.

Table 13: Data summary – South African Tourism (SAT) ***(table continues on the next page)***

Themes	Categories	Codes
STRATEGY	Vision	Experience Quality Unique Value-for-money
	Mission	Economic growth
	Positioning	Inspire
BRAND IDENTITY	Values	Integrity Authentic and caring Excellence Respect Responsibility
	Product	Adventure Arts Coastal and maritime Culture Heritage Hospitality and conference venues Nature Wildlife
SOCIAL MEDIA	Platforms	Facebook Instagram

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	Content strategy	Content creation Content teaser Influencer Engagement
	Promotions	Campaigns
	Monitoring and analytics	Sentiment analysis

Strategy theme

Table 13 presents various categories, the occurrence of codes, and extracts of code statements that illustrate the context in which SAT employed the codes in strategic documents. Relevant descriptive words and phrases are highlighted in bold. The strategy theme was made up of the categories of *vision*, *mission*, and *positioning*, which are shown in Table 14. The table further shows the codes frequency of occurrence (n-value) as well as context in which it appeared within the text. The chosen excerpts represent clear examples of the meaning of the codes. As shown in the table, the SAT's *vision*, *mission*, and *positioning* statements denote an outstanding and distinctive destination that provides high-quality experiences and value for money. Additionally, it is notable that the extracts of the codes were expressed from the supply side-side which signifies organisational strategy except for the code *unique* which was demand-focused and denoted by an asterisk ***(*).***

Table 14: The strategy theme's categories, codes and code statements) *(table continues on the next page)*

VISION	*"To position South Africa as an exceptional tourist and business events destination that offers a value-for-money, quality tourist experience that is unique" (SAT, 2019:23).*
Experience (n=63)	*"… capacity building and skills development are intended to affect positively the tourist experience that will affect the* ***destination's reputation****, increasing volumes and spend" (SAT, 2020-21:24).*
Quality (n=44)	*"We take pride in and commit to always meeting and exceeding our customers' and stakeholders'* ***expectations*** *with* ***outstanding*** *quality" (SAT, 2019:24).*
Unique (n=16)	***(*)*** *"Inspire travellers to visit South Africa now by welcoming them to meet a South Africa that offers them a unique variety of* ***experiences*** *and* ***hidden gems****…" (SAT, 2019:58).*
Value-for-money (n=16)	*"The goal to keep* ***positioning*** *South Africa as a value-for-money destination was successfully reached with arrivals surpassing targets" (SAT, 2019:58).*

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MISSION	*"To contribute to inclusive economic growth by increasing the volume of tourists and the value they add to the South African economy" (SAT, 2019:23).*
Economic growth (n=40)	*"… to **eliminate poverty and reduce inequality** by 2030, recognises tourism as one of the main drivers of **job creation** and economic growth through marketing South Africa both domestically and internationally. The New Growth Path identifies tourism as one of the six pillars of economic growth" (SAT, 2019:23).*
POSITIONING	*"Inspiring new ways" (SAT, 2017:19).*
Inspire (n=19)	*"…amplify this global impact and inspire travel to South Africa..." (SAT, 2019:58).*

Brand Identity theme

Table 15 presents various categories, the occurrence of codes, and extracts of code statements that illustrate the context in which SAT employed the codes in strategic documents. Relevant descriptive words and phrases are highlighted in bold. The brand identity theme was made up of two categories, namely, values and product. Table 15 shows the frequency of occurrence (n-value) as well as context in which it appeared within the text. The SAT documents highlighted its commitment to the core values, namely, *integrity, respect, authentic caring, responsibility*, and *excellence*. The documents also showcase the range of tourism products that the destination has to offer. Additionally, it is noteworthy that the extracts were expressed from the supply side-side which denotes organisational strategy except for the product category's codes *costal and maritime, culture, heritage and nature* which were demand-focused and marked by an asterisk ***(*)***.

Table 15: The brand identity theme's categories, codes and code statements

(table continues on the next page)

VALUES	*"Our values are integrity, respect, authentic and caring, responsibility, and excellence" (SAT, 2019:24).*
Integrity (n=14)	*"Act with integrity by maintaining the highest **standards for accountability**, serving with respect, honesty and trustworthiness" (SAT, 2019:22).*
Respect (n=37)	*"We **treat** everyone with utmost dignity, inclusiveness, openness, tolerance and a sense of appreciation of diversity" (SAT, 2019:24).*
Authentic Caring (n=10)	*"We show and act with **genuine** care to each other, customers, shareholders, partners, suppliers and the business" (SAT, 2019:24).*
Responsibility (n=63)	*"We take personal **accountability** for delivering work that exceeds customers' and stakeholders' expectations" (SAT, 2019:24).*
Excellence (n=6)	*"We take pride in and commit to always meeting and exceeding our customers' and stakeholders' **expectations** with outstanding **quality**" (SAT, 2019:24).*

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PRODUCT	
Adventure (n=22)	*"South Africa's wide **variety of experiences** in close proximity, including wildlife safaris, active adventure, vibrant cities, and inspiring culture" (SAT, 2019:58).*
Arts (n=7)	*"The show also provided innovative spaces to showcase products ... local **arts and crafts**" (SAT, 2019:70).*
Coastal and maritime (n=13)	***(*)**"Come experience beach days that feel like they should never end and the **finest beach-side hotels**…" (SAT, 2018:1).*
Culture (n=38)	***(*)** "The spirit of **ancient Africa** can still be seen today at the site of the lost Iron Age Kingdom of Mapungubwe…. That spirit lives on **in culture, tradition and myths**, none more fascinating than the Limpopo province's Rain Queen Modjadji who still rules today" (SAT, 2018:1).*
Heritage (n=5)	***(*)** "Take a journey of discovery from the **roots of all humanity to a human story** that inspired the world It was here that the world's human story first began, a staggering four million years ago… as humbling evidence of the earliest origin of modern humans…" (SAT, 2018:1).*
Hospitality and conference venues (n=8)	*"I Do Tourism" …Emerging Young Entrepreneur Award, which is awarded **to black entrepreneurs** who operate small, micro and medium tourism or hospitality related businesses" (SAT, 2019:70).*
Nature (n=35)	***(*)**"See where **breathtaking** nature stretches out in every direction … a country that shifts and changes right before your eyes. From some of the world's most ancient **landscapes** like the awe inspiring **plains** … secluded **beaches or the valleys** of some of the most beautiful winelands you will ever see…" (SAT, 2018:1).*
Wildlife (n=20)	*"Natural wildlife **experience"** and "**adventurous**" are considered strong descriptors for South Africa" (SAT, 2019:42).*

Social media theme

Table 16 presents various categories, the occurrence of codes, and extracts of code statements to show the context in which SAT is mentioned in documents. Relevant descriptive words and phrases are highlighted in bold. The identified categories are social media *platforms*, *content strategy*, *promotions*, social media *monitoring and analytics*, and lastly, social media strategy. It can be seen in the table that SAT used social media to improve tourism promotion and analysed campaign performance to assess impact. Additionally, it is notable that the extracts were all expressed from the supply side-side which denotes organisational strategy and posture towards the use of social media. Additionally, it is notable that the extracts were expressed from the supply side-side which denotes organisational strategy.

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Table 16: SAT social media theme (*table continues on the next page)*

PLATFORMS	
Facebook (n=4)	*"The Facebook travel agents' group reached 265,000* ***industry contacts****" (SAT, 2020a:59).*
Instagram (n=2)	*"The South Africa* ***video*** *created by DJI's content partners was played across various media platforms globally and in China including Instagram..." (SAT, 2019:61).*
CONTENT STRATEGY	
Content creation (31)	*"****Generating*** *content to* ***inspire and convert*** *travellers continuous content generation has been critical to South African Tourism's global brand and marketing strategy" (SAT, 2019:56).*
Content teaser (1)	***Content teasers*** *were available on social media and television. (SAT, 2019:62).*
Influencer (1)	*"To promote South Africa in the Nordic countries, eight Nordic* ***influencers were hosted*** *in South Africa in November 2018" (SAT, 2019).*
Engagement (1)	*"South African Tourism focused on* ***driving awareness and positivity*** *about South Africa as a tourist destination through a global media campaign, content development, continued social media engagement…" (SAT, 2019:42).*
PROMOTIONS	
Campaigns (1)	*"The Nelson Mandela centenary campaign, "100 Ways to Find the Madiba in You",* ***ran throughout the fiscal year*** *on social media and the Madiba's Journey app, and at Africa's Travel Indaba" (SAT, 2019:59).* *Ensured a* ***continuous presence*** *in all the markets through digital and social media platforms, with Cadreon and Adcolony being the newest platforms used" (SAT, 2019:62).*
MONITORING AND ANALYTICS	
Sentiment analysis (2)	*"According to the South African Tourism domestic* ***brand tracker*** *surveys, … according to* ***sentiment analysis****, most conversations on social media about domestic travel are centred around beaches" (SAT, 2019:44-45).*

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6.2.4.2 WESGRO (Western Cape Province)

The aim of WESGRO is to enhance the economic competitiveness of the Western Cape province by implementing strategies that foster demand stimulation, infrastructure, and service alignment, and facilitate entry into targeted international markets (WESGRO, 2022a). Although WESGRO's mandate extends beyond tourism (WESGRO, 2019a), the selection of codes was made to align with the organisation's tourism-related activities. Results of the document analysis are summarised in Table 17. It indicates the generic themes and categories, as well as the corresponding codes used to describe their occurrence in the case study contexts. A detailed analysis of each component subsequently follows.

Table 17: Data summary – WESGRO (*table continues on the next page)*

Themes	Category	Code
STRATEGY	Vision	Economic growth
	Mission	Destination of choice
	Positioning	Inspire
BRAND IDENTITY	Values	Accountability Efficient Enabling Excellence Innovation
	Product	Adventure Arts Coastal and maritime Culture Heritage Hospitality and conference venues Nature Wildlife
SOCIAL MEDIA	Platforms	Facebook X Instagram
	Content strategy	Content creation
	Promotions	Campaigns

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	Monitoring and analytics	Online listening

Strategy theme

Table 18 presents various categories, the occurrence of codes, and extracts of code statements that illustrate the context in which WESGRO employed the codes in strategic documents. Relevant descriptive words and phrases are highlighted in bold. The strategy theme was made up of the categories of *vision*, *mission*, and *positioning*, as shown in Table 18. The table further shows the codes frequency of occurrence (n-value) as well as context in which it appeared within the text. The chosen excerpts represent examples of the meaning of the codes. The WESGRO's strategy is to utilise the region's capabilities and strengths to achieve sustained *economic growth* as a *destination of choice*. Additionally, it is significant that the extracts of the codes were expressed from the supply side-side which denotes organisational strategy except for the positioning statement and the code *inspire* which was demand-focused and marked by an asterisk ***(*).***

Table 18: The strategy theme's categories, codes and code statements

VISION	*"In collaboration with partners, drive inclusive and sustainable economic growth, create jobs" (WESGRO, 2022a:9).*
Economic growth (n=61)	*"Growing the economy through export growth." (WESGRO, 2022a:17).* *"To contribute to the* ***expansion of the economy*** *and the facilitation of jobs within the Province" (WESGRO, 2022a:47).*
MISSION	*"Be instrumental in ensuring that the Western Cape is an investment destination of choice for global and local" (WESGRO, 2022a:13).*
Destination of choice (n=5)	*"...to* ***build confidence*** *in Cape Town and the Western Cape as the destination of choice..." (WESGRO, 2021a:70).*
POSITIONING	***(*)*** *"To visit our* ***inspiring*** *province is to love our province"* (WESGRO, 2019b:2).
Inspire (n=5)	***(*)*** *"The creative will include the destination proposition and a* ***unique reason to believe****, differentiating the destination in a cluttered marketing space" (WESGRO, 2021a:78).*

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The brand identity theme

Table 19 presents categories, the occurrence of codes, and extracts of code statements that illustrate the context in which WESGRO employed the codes in strategic documents. Relevant descriptive words and phrases are highlighted in bold. Table 19 presents two categories, namely, *values* and *product* along with the code frequency of occurrence (n-value) as well as the context in which it appeared within the text. The documents demonstrated that WESGRO has a strategic approach to promote Western Cape through upholding its core values and a diverse range of its unique products. Furthermore, it is significant that the extracts were expressed from the supply side-side which reflects organisational strategy except for the product category's codes *adventure, culture, nature, and wildlife,* which were demand-focused and denoted by an asterisk ***(*)***.

Table 19: The brand identity theme's categories, codes and code statements (*table continues on the next page)*

VALUES	*"Wesgro's Management and Staff will strive to uphold the following values in all its business activities; commitment to excellence, efficiency, accountability, enabling and innovation" (WESGRO, 2021a).*
Accountability (n=16)	*"Effective systems and processes are a necessary component to **maintain credibility**, ensure accountability, improve operating efficiencies and generate institutional memory" (WESGRO, 2022a:p55).*
Efficient (n=21)	***"Managing, monitoring and control of strategic** projects that support Wesgro's mandate of investment, exports and tourism, ultimately contributing to a fully functional, efficient and effective Agency" (WESGRO, 2022a:95).*
Enabling (n=7)	*"The Wesgro Research Unit aims to provide an enabling environment … necessary research to **meet the goals and support** the vision of the Agency" (WESGRO, 2021a:64).*
Excellence (n=7)	*"To provide service excellence in all our **business support** functions" (WESGRO, 2021a:11).*
Innovation (n=15)	*"Implement **demand-led approach** to sectors and markets, underpinned by innovation and technology" (WESGRO, 2022a:40).*
PRODUCT	
Adventure (n=22)	***(*)** "The unique adventure experience allows for **beautiful scenic views** of the Paarl Valley. The abseil is just short of a 100m" (WESGRO, 2019a:7).*
Arts (n=7)	*"Langebaan Arts Route Unearth **original sculptures, photography**, ceramics, illustrations and paintings in a **broad variety of mediums** as the Cape West Coast (Weskus) comes alive on the Langebaan arts Route"* (WESGRO, 2021b:19).

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Coastal and maritime (n=13)	*"And while the Garden Route is often celebrated for its **exquisite coastal beauty**, brilliant beaches and marvellous lagoons…"* (WESGRO, 2019a:5).
Culture (n=38)	***(*)*** *"The inspiration comes from the colourful homes filled with blended aromas … blending in with the rich food culture that brings **"people together"*** (WESGRO, 2021b:8).
Heritage (n=5)	*" The heritage of this great city is **unmatched**, its story to be found in any number of museums and heritage sites around the city"* (WESGRO, 2019a:4).
Hospitality and conference venues (n=8)	*" … **warm hospitality** is centrally situated … in the heart of the Garden Route in South Africa " (WESGRO, 2021b:12).*
Nature (n=35)	***(*)*** *"Each area is worth exploring and has its own charm, … that will make your **journey truly unforgettable**" (WESGRO, 2019b:2).*
Wildlife (n=20)	***(*)*** *"This is where you go to get **off the grid**. A place of **incredible beauty**, wild game, clear skies and magical sunsets, the Cape Karoo has a number of Nature Reserves and game farms, **boasting an abundance of wildlife**"* (WESGRO, 2021b:5).

Social media theme

Table 20 presents categories, the occurrence of codes and extracts of code statements that illustrate the context in which WESGRO employed the codes in strategic documents. Relevant descriptive words and phrases are highlighted in bold. Table 20 presents WESGRO's social media strategy which employed three platforms to capitalise on the unique attributes and opportunities they present to efficiently reach wide audiences. The emphasis on generating content, implementing creative strategies, and utilising analytics to improve social media campaigns indicates dedication to sustaining online presence. Additionally, it can be noted on the extracts that all the codes are expressed from supply side-side which denotes organisational strategy and posture towards the use of social media.

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Table 20: WESGRO social media theme

SOCIAL MEDIA PLATFORMS	
Facebook (n=4)	*"Digital channel selection will be market dependent, and it will be geared mainly towards the preferred channels of the targeted countries; this may include Facebook…for* ***awareness*** *in particular" (WESGRO, 2021a:79).*
X (n=3)	*"… social media (such as … Twitter, …) to* ***promote stories*** *that create a* ***positive perception*** *of the destination" (WESGRO, 2021a:72 – 74).*
Instagram (n=2)	*"Wesgro makes use of both earned media* ***communication*** *(resulting in print, broadcast and digital coverage) and social media (such as … Instagram…." (WESGRO, 2021a:72 – 74).*
CONTENT STRATEGY	
Content creation (30)	*"Digital maintenance and* ***content creation*** *for website and social* ***media platforms****" (WESGRO, 2021a:77).*
PROMOTIONS	
Campaigns (8)	*"'One Day' tourism campaign: 'One Day in the Western Cape' is an innovative campaign developed using digital* ***content tools to virtually showcase the province****..."(WESGRO, 2020/21:12).*
MONITORING AND ANALYTICS	
Online listening (2)	*"By using online reputation management tools, and* ***online listening tools****, we will identify niche groups for targeting, including* ***sentiment tracking*** *along with personal development" (WESGRO, 2021a:71).*

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6.2.4.3 ECPTA (Eastern Cape Province)

The ECPTA aims to promote and develop tourism, conservation, and environmental management within the Eastern Cape province of South Africa (ECPTA, 2020a). Results of the document analysis are summarised in Table 21. It indicates the generic themes and categories, as well as the corresponding codes used to describe their occurrence in the case study contexts. A detailed analysis of each component subsequently follows.

Table 21: Generated codes derived from ECPTA strategic documents

Themes	Category	Code
STRATEGY	Vision	Economic growth Sustainability
	Mission	Responsible tourism
	Positioning	Explore
BRAND IDENTITY	Values	Respect Integrity
	Product	Adventure Arts Coastal and maritime Culture Heritage Nature Wildlife
SOCIAL MEDIA	Monitoring and analytics	Evidence
	Content creation	Trends

Strategy theme

Table 22 presents various categories, the occurrence of codes, and extracts of code statements that illustrate the context in which ECPTA employed the codes in strategic documents. Relevant descriptive words and phrases are highlighted in bold. The strategy theme consists of *vision*, *mission*, and *positioning*. Table 22 indicates the codes derived from the categories of *vision, mission*, and *positioning* statements. The frequency of occurrence is also indicated, along with illustrative excerpts from the documents. As can be seen from table 22, ECPTA's vision put emphasis on sustainability and economic development through its natural resources and supporting environmentally responsible

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tourism activities, The ECPTA positions the Eastern Cape as a destination awaiting visitors' exploration. It can be noted on the extracts that all the codes are expressed from supply side which denotes organisational strategy.

Table 22: ECPTA Strategy theme code statements and frequencies

	Code Statement
VISION	*"ECPTA envisions: Inclusive economic growth in the Eastern Cape supported by the sustainable utilisation of natural resources"* (ECPTA, 2020b:12).
Economic growth (n=9)	*" Eastern Cape has all the assets it may need to* ***succeed in growing*** *its earnings from tourism, and the associated benefits of job creation, wealth creation and economic growth"* (ECPTA, 2010:2). *"The promotion of economic* ***growth and development*** *of the sector..." (ECPTA, 2020a:9 – 10).*
Sustainability (n=40)	*"… creating an enabling environment for investment in the provincial reserves, and promoting sustainable* ***eco-tourism development****."* (ECPTA, 2020a:55) *" This will provide a solid and sustainable foundation for establishing the Eastern Cape's* ***long-term competitiveness*** *in the league of southern African tourism destinations*" (ECPTA, 2010:31).
MISSION	*"ECPTA's mission is to lead responsible conservation and tourism…" (ECPTA, 2020b:12).*
Responsible tourism (n=4)	*"The promotion of* ***responsible tourism*** *practices in the sector"* (ECPTA, 2020a:9 – 10).
POSITIONING	*"Yours to Explore"* (ECPTA, 2019a:5).
Explore (n=60)	*The brand positioning for domestic marketing entices local tourists to* ***"explore"*** *the Eastern Cape and ALL its attractions"* (ECPTA, 2019a:4 – 5). *"… is an ideal destination for those wanting to explore the* ***rich historical, cultural and geological history****…"* (ECPTA, 2019b:10-11).

Brand identity theme

Table 23 presents various categories, the occurrence of codes, and extracts of code statements that illustrate the context in which ECPTA employed the codes in strategic documents. Relevant descriptive words and phrases are highlighted in bold. The brand identity theme is made up of values and *product* as shown in table 23. The table indicates the codes' frequency of occurrence alongside illustrative excerpts from the documents.

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ECPTA's brand identity is anchored in its dedication to its core values and the promotion of the destination's diverse assortment of attractions and experiences.

Additionally, it is notable that the extracts were expressed from the supply side-side indicating organisational strategy, except for the product category's codes *adventure, culture, and nature* which were demand-focused and denoted by an asterisk ***(*)***.

Table 23: ECPTA Brand Identity theme (*table continues on the next page)*

VALUES	*"The exceptional women and men of ECPTA are committed to our values of RESPECT, and INTEGRITY"* (ECPTA, 2020b:3).
Respect (n=14)	*" We **treat** the environment, our communities, our partners and one another with respect and dignity… "* (ECPTA, 2020b:3).
Integrity (n=2)	*" Attention will be given to providing opportunities for tourism products "incubated" by ECPTA, while **strict quality criteria** will be in place and monitored to ensure the integrity of the reserves"* (ECPTA, 2015:3 – 4).
PRODUCT	
Adventure (n=11)	***(*)** " … encouraging existing visitors and locals to **experience** more of the attractions of the Adventure Province, through building citizen pride and educational interventions"* (ECPTA, 2015:6).
Arts (n=11)	*"In the 1970s four **San rock-Arts sites** were recorded in the vicinity of the Mariazell Mission Station. The **Natal Museum** revisited and confirmed these sites in 2005"* (ECPTA, 2019b:20).
Coastal and maritime (n=27)	*" …There is **a rich maritime** history along Wild Coast " (ECPTA, 2012:18).*
Culture (n=4)	***(*)** "The Eastern Cape has an **abundance of attractions**, combining both natural beauty and culture"* (ECPTA, 2010:14).
Heritage (n=30)	*" Key to these efforts will be the sector's ability to take advantage of heritage and **cultural offerings**, to blend rural and urban settings…"* (ECPTA, 2020a:3).
Nature (n=66)	***(*)**"… nature walks and mountain biking. Look out for Eland, Zebra, Red Hartebeest, warthogs and monkeys as you negotiate the reserve's lush fynbos and Albany thicket **landscapes**"* (ECPTA, 2019b:11). ***(*)** "Nature lovers exploring the **natural wonders** that personify the Eastern Cape"* (ECPTA, 2019a:9).
Wildlife (n=39)	*" A **transformed** wildlife industry in the Eastern Cape that is skilled and motivated"* (ECPTA, 2020a:38). *"…experienced rangers are available to take visitors on self-drive game drives, combining 4x4 adventure with wildlife **viewing opportunities**"* (ECPTA, 2019b:24).

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Social media theme

Table 24 presents categories, the occurrence of codes, and extracts of code statements to show the context in which ECPTA is mentioned in the documents. Relevant descriptive words and phrases are highlighted in bold. The identified categories are social media *monitoring and analytics*, and *content creation*. Although the ECPTA documents did not mention any social media platforms, it became clear ECPTA employed strategies to align with and adapt to social media development trends by applying data-driven methodology that analysed social media marketing efforts. Furthermore, it is notable that the extracts were all expressed from the supply side-side, which denotes organisational strategy and posture towards the use of social media. Additionally, the extracts were expressed from the supply side-side, which denotes organisational strategy.

Table 24: ECPTA's social media theme

Monitoring and analytics	
Evidence (2)	*" Depending on the nature of the campaign various sources of **evidence** will be derived from **social media** and web **analytics**..." (ECPTA, 2020a:59 – 60).*
Content creation	
Trends (8)	*"Align to **social media development and** technology **trends** and respect confidentiality legislation…" (ECPTA, 2020b:17).*

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6.2.4.4 TKZN (Kwazulu-Natal Province)

Tourism KwaZulu-Natal has a direct and indirect responsibility for the advancement, endorsement, and advertising of tourism activities within the province (TKZN, 2019/20). The organisation plays a crucial role in developing and sustaining the tourism industry, which contributes significantly to the economic growth of the region (TKZN, 2016).

Results of the document analysis are summarised in Table 25. It indicates the generic themes and categories, as well as the corresponding codes used to describe their occurrence in the case study contexts. A detailed analysis of each component subsequently follows.

Table 25: Data Summary-TKZN ***(table continues on the next page)***

Themes	Category	Code
STRATEGY	Vision	Leading destination
	Mission	Demand-driven tourism development Strategic tourism marketing
	Positioning	Culture Exceptional Heritage
BRAND IDENTITY	Values	Accountability Collaboration Integrity Respect Transformation Warm Welcoming
	Product	Adventure Arts Coastal and maritime Culture Heritage Hospitality and conference venues Nature Shopping, wellness and sports Wildlife

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SOCIAL MEDIA	Platforms	Facebook X Instagram
	Content creation	Influencer
	Monitoring and analytics	Audience
	Promotions	Campaigns

Strategy theme

Table 26 presents various categories, the occurrence of codes, and extracts of code statements that illustrate the context in which TKZN employed the codes in strategic documents. Relevant descriptive words and phrases are highlighted in bold. Table 26 indicates the codes derived from the categories of *vision, mission* and *positioning* statements. The frequency of occurrence is also indicated, along with illustrative excerpts from the documents. The table outlines that TKZN's strategy focused on establishing KwaZulu-Natal as a major tourist destination through targeted marketing and development initiatives by promoting it as a diversified and culturally rich destination with rich cultural heritage and experiences. It is notable that the extracts were expressed from the supply side-side which denotes organisational strategy except for the positioning category's codes *culture and exceptional* which were demand-focused and indicated by an asterisk ***(*)***.

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Table 26: TKZN Strategy theme

Code	Code Statement
VISION	*"To position the province of KwaZulu-Natal as Africa's leading destination, nationally and internationally"* (TKZN, 2019/20:14 – 15).
Leading destination (n=4)	*"…exposing participants to **key KwaZulu-Natal experiences** in line with the markets' interests…"* (TKZN, 2019/20:50-51).
MISSION	*"To initiate, facilitate, co-ordinate and implement strategic tourism marketing and demand-driven tourism development programmes which grow tourism, thereby serving to achieve"* (TKZN, 2019/20:15).
Demand-driven tourism development (n=8)	*"Tourism KwaZulu-Natal... continues working to improve the geographic spread of tourist visits across the province, ensuring demand-driven tourism development … **nurturing** strategic products across the region and creating additional employment opportunities"* (TKZN, 2019/20:9).
Strategic tourism marketing (n=11)	*"The inclusion of the country within BRIC has allowed the country to tap into other markets and further aims to further its developmental agenda which incorporates tourism, providing a **huge shift** in the country's **tourism marketing efforts** towards the BRIC countries"* (TKZN, 2016:11).
POSITIONING	*"Our people, Our Culture The traditional home of the Zulu nation but a shared home to a wonderful tapestry of cultural diversity! KwaZulu-Natal is steeped in heritage and age-old culture which was also influenced by European ideals, together with a significant taste of the east which is what makes our province a melting pot of culture" (TKZN, 2020:4).*
Culture (n=556)	***(*)** "Take in all the sights, sounds and smells of our beautiful province as you … educate yourself about the deep-seated culture and history of the **Zulu Kingdom** with a trip to **traditional villages**..."* (TKZN, 2020:3).
Exceptional (n=808)	***(*)** "KwaZulu-Natal's pride lies in its people and its **impeccable legacy** of being a dream destination!"* (TKZN, 2020:2).
Heritage (n=50)	*"KwaZulu-Natal is steeped in heritage and age-old **culture** which was also influenced by European ideals…."* (TKZN, 2020:4). *"A Rich Heritage The Zulu Kingdom has a rich **history** and is famed for its battlefields of yester-year…"* (TKZN, 2020:3).

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Brand identity theme

Table 27 presents categories, the occurrence of codes, and extracts of code statements that illustrate the context in which TKZN employed the codes in strategic documents. Relevant descriptive words and phrases are highlighted in bold. The documents outlined that the TKZN's brand identity was centred around its values and its range of products. The emphasis on *accountability*, *collaboration*, *integrity*, *respect*, and *transformation* underscores the organisation's commitment to sustainable and inclusive tourism development as stated in the mission statement. In its vision, TKZN positioned KwaZulu-Natal as a top tourism destination owing to its diverse range of attractions. It is important to note that all extracts in the category values were expressed from the supply side-side which denotes organisational strategy except for the code *warm* and *welcoming*. While under the category product, all codes' extracts were tourist-focused and denoted by an asterisk ***(*)***, indicating that they highlight the experiences and perspectives of tourists. TKZN employed a doubled-edged approach in the brand identity strategy to balance supply side-side and the demand-side operational goals.

Table 27: TKZN brand identity theme (*table continues on the next page)*

Code	Code statement
VALUES	*"Our tourism industry is further guided by these values: • Transformation; • Collaboration; • Accountability; • Being warm and welcoming to our visitors; • Respect" (TKZN, 2016:13–14).*
Accountability (n=6)	*"Tourism KwaZulu-Natal's strategy development with overall responsibility for strategic planning and organisational **accountability**" (TKZN, 2019/20:39-40).*
Collaboration (n=10)	*"Tourism KwaZulu-Natal met with Gateway to discuss possible collaboration in **promoting the destination**" (TKZN, 2019/20:51).*
Integrity (n=5)	*"A **good governance** framework remains in place … to effectively further underpin the integrity and efficiency of our organisation within both the KwaZulu-Natal and wider tourism environment" (TKZN, 2019/20:62).*
Respect (n=21)	*"We will **respect** each other and **communicate** in a way that demonstrates this in all our dealings…!"(TKZN, 2019/20:3).*
Transformation (n=52)	*"As access to funding is a real deterrent, this new Fund is a important step **in fast-tracking transformation**" (TKZN, 2019/20:9).*
Warm (n=14)	***(*)**"Welcome to KwaZulu-Natal – a place where the **sun shines** all-year-round and the people are as warm and inviting as the climate!" (TKZN, 2020:2).*

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Welcoming (n=2)	***(*)**"Working as a team, we will once more rollout the **red carpet to welcome** our local and international visitors back to our shores and do what we do best... offer warm Zulu Kingdom **hospitality**" (TKZN, 2019/20:12).*
PRODUCT	
Adventure (n=14)	***(*)**"This is a region of contrasts and one which prides itself on its diversity of attraction…, the tranquillity of natural beauty and **adrenalin-pumping adventure**… offering the ultimate Zulu Kingdom holiday **experience**... we truly have it all, making this one of the world's dream destinations" (TKZN, 2018:2).*
Arts (n=15)	***(*)** "… the first route of its kind in the country and one which offers a fascinatingly eclectic **mix of arts and crafts**…" (TKZN, 2018:2).*
Coastal and maritime (n=84)	***(*)** "… with its extensive coast of unspoiled **beaches**, it goes without saying that Durban and KwaZulu-Natal's north and south **coasts** are abundant with **aquatic** adventures" (TKZN, 2020:3).*
Culture (n=24)	***(*)** "The traditional home of the Zulu nation but a shared home to a wonderful tapestry of **cultural diversity**!" (TKZN, 2020:4).*
Heritage (n=50)	***(*)** "KwaZulu-Natal is steeped in heritage…which was also influenced by European **ideals**, together with a significant taste of the east which is what makes our province a **melting pot of culture** – a place where diversity unites people" (TKZN, 2020:4).*
Hospitality and conference venues (n=46)	***(*)** "The City of Durban has, for many years, been well-known as the **conference capital** of South Africa and one of the leading conference destinations in Africa..." (TKZN, 2018/19:11).*
Nature (n=28)	***(*)**"Coastal provinces, such as ours boasting the **sea, mountains, rivers, dunes, open veld** and nature **reserves** can account for the development of the sector" (TKZN, 2019/20:2).*
Shopping, wellness and sports (n=46)	***(*)** "And for those seeking a spot of **retail therapy**, Durban and its surrounding some of the **best** including the Pavilion, the Gateway Theatre of Shopping, one of the biggest malls in the southern hemisphere, and the Liberty Midlands Mall..."(TKZN, 2020:3).*
Wildlife (n=29)	***(*)** "The KZN "Wildlife" **experience is unique** because it combines land and marine wildlife" …(TKZN, 2016:43).*

Social media theme

Table 28 shows the categories, codes, and excerpts of code, establishing context in which codes were alluded to in the documents. The relevant descriptive words and phrases in relation to the code are highlighted in bold. The categories are social media *platforms*, *content strategy, promotions*, *monitoring and analytics*, and social media strategy. TKZN's documents demonstrated that social media and digital marketing strategies were utilised

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through employment of platforms Facebook, X, and Instagram. The collaboration with i*nfluencers* and social monitoring augment their marketing efforts. Furthermore, it is notable that the extracts were all expressed from the supply side-side which denotes organisational strategy and posture towards the use of social media.

Table 28: TKZN's social media theme

Social media platforms	
Facebook (n=10)	*"We have also been able to gauge that although the website enjoys an* ***international audience****, … The top three* ***social media channels*** *which directed traffic to the website included Facebook"* (TKZN, 2019/20:42).
X (n=9)	*"… participated more aggressively on social media platforms, which has proven to be a worthy investment as more and more* ***tourism consumers*** *are using social media as a* ***communications*** *tool of choice…such as Twitter"* (TKZN, 2019/20:58).
Instagram (n=5)	*"… new users visited the entity's website and gained access to key tourism information…The top source of digital traffic is …Instagram"* (TKZN, 2019/20:11).
Content creation	
Influencer (4)	*" They* ***shared*** *their (influencers) experiences with their combined social media* ***audience*** *of more than 1 million followers"* (TKZN, 2019/20:58). *"Tourism KwaZulu-Natal collaborated with a number of social media influencers, celebrities and tourism writers to promote tourism experiences in the province"* (TKZN, 2019/20).
Monitoring and analytics	
Audience (n=3)	*The publicity was widespread and included platforms such as Facebook, X and YouTube. The organisation has* ***63 000 followers*** *on Facebook"* (TKZN, 2019/20:58). *" The top sources of digital traffic are South Africa, the United States, the United Kingdom, Germany and India"* (TKZN, 2019/20).
Promotions	
Campaigns (n=16)	*"As different forms of media become increasingly more* ***instant****,* ***digital*** *and* ***fast-paced****, Tourism KwaZulu-Natal has adapted its strategies to create* ***widespread awareness****…achieved by using high-level campaigns in social media…"* (TKZN, 2019/20:11).

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6.2.4.5. MTPA (Mpumalanga Province)

The Mpumalanga Tourism and Parks Agency (MTPA) is a South African government entity responsible for promoting tourism, conservation, and environmental management within the Mpumalanga province (MTPA, 2019/2020). Results of the document analysis are summarised in Table 29. It indicates the generic themes and categories, as well as the corresponding codes used to describe their occurrence in the case study contexts. A detailed analysis of each component subsequently follows.

Table 29: Generated codes derived from MTPA strategic documents

Themes	Category	Code
STRATEGY	Vision	Wildlife World class
	Mission	Tourism growth
	Positioning	Nature Culture Heritage Wildlife
BRAND IDENTITY	Values	Integrity Quality Teamwork
	Product	Adventure Culture Heritage Hospitality and conference venues Nature Wildlife
SOCIAL MEDIA	*Note: The MTPA documents to did not contain quotes attributable to any of the predetermined categories, such as platforms, content strategy, promotions, and monitoring and analytics.*	

Strategy theme

The strategy theme consists of the categories of *vision, mission*, and *positioning.* Table 30 indicates the codes derived and positioning statements. The frequency of occurrence is also indicated, along with illustrative excerpts from the documents. Relevant descriptive words and phrases are highlighted in bold. The table demonstrates that MTPA's strategy focused

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on positioning Mpumalanga as a world-class destination by leveraging its distinguished natural and wildlife resources while promoting sustainable tourism development. It can be noted that all extracts on the category values were expressed from the supply side-side which denotes organisational strategy.

Table 30: MTPA Strategy theme

Code	Code Statement
VISION	*"Mpumalanga, a world-class tourism and wildlife economy"* (MTPA, 2019/2020:1 – 6).
World class (n=12)	*" In a bid to transform the MTPA into a **world class** institution, a set of business fundamentals were approved by the Board"* (MTPA, 2012:12 – 13).
Wildlife (n=47)	*"Mpumalanga is defined by **its unique** natural tourism offerings such as the scenic beauty, rich culture and heritage, as well as wildlife"* (MTPA, 2019/2020:10 – 11).
MISSION	*"Grow tourism and manage biodiversity to stimulate sustainable economic growth that is inclusive and creates decent employment"* (MTPA, 2019/2020:6).
Sustainable tourism growth (n=31)	*"To **promote tourism growth** by increasing the number of both domestic and international tourists"* (MTPA, 2019/2020:10).
POSITIONING	*" Mpumalanga is defined by its unique natural tourism offerings such as the scenic beauty "* (MTPA, 2019/2020:10 – 11).
Nature (n=137)	*"Promote the MTPA managed **nature** reserves to increase tourist arrivals "* (MTPA, 2019/2020:58 – 60).

Brand identity theme

Table 31 presents various categories, the occurrence of codes, and extracts of code statements that illustrate the context in which MTPA employed the codes in strategic documents. Relevant descriptive words and phrases are highlighted in bold. The documents revealed that the MTPA brand identity was established on the values, *integrity, quality* and *teamwork* together with a diverse range of distinctive products offered in the destination. Notably, the excerpts on values and products were expressed from the supply side-side which denotes organisational strategy, while the focus on culture and wildlife reflects a demand-driven approach, denoted by an asterisk ***(*)***, aimed at highlighting the allure of Mpumalanga through the utilisation of its unique assets.

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Table 31: MTPA brand identity theme

Code	Code statement
VALUES	*"The MTPA subscribes to the following core values: integrity, teamwork, and quality" (MTPA, 2019/2020:6 – 7).*
Integrity (n=7)	*"Management and employees operated within a framework requiring* ***compliance*** *with all applicable* ***laws*** *and maintenance of the highest integrity in the conduct of all aspects of the business…."* (MTPA, 2019/2020:113).
Quality (n=23)	*"… information systems and audit procedures … , including information systems controls and security, the* ***quality*** *of the financial and other management information produced to ensure integrity and reliability"* (MTPA, 2019/2020:93 – 94) .
Teamwork (n=4)	*"We are confident that through* ***teamwork****, we will have a positive final audit performance report"* (MTPA, 2019/2020:6 – 7).
PRODUCT	
Adventure (n=7)	*… This is greatly facilitated by the diverse natural endowments and adventure experiences such as the wildlife, scenic beauty, adventure and shopping tourism…"* (MTPA, 2022/2023:10).
Culture (n=10)	***(*)*** *" Mpumalanga is defined by its* ***unique*** *natural tourism offerings such as the scenic beauty,* ***rich culture*** *…." (MTPA, 2019/2020:10-11).*
Heritage (68)	*"In an endeavor to* diversify the tourism experience *in the province the Entity developed and launched the Ehlanzeni Liberation Heritage and Resistance Route and the strategic heritage towns of Pilgrim's Rest and Emgwenya"* (MTPA, 2019/2020:117).
Hospitality and conference venues (n=68)	*"The grading of our facilities, this includes* ***upgrade of hospitality tourism*** *facilities to be compliant with the standards set by the Grading Council of South Africa*" (MTPA, 2019/2020:80).
Nature (n=136)	*"Tourism … contributes significantly towards economic growth and job creation. It is the sector that showcases and* ***promotes*** *our Province's tourism product offerings,* ***our culture*** *… to the world"* (MTPA, 2019/2020:10-11).
Wildlife (n=47)	***(*)****"Mpumalanga as a world class tourism and wildlife economy by leading a number of destination marketing initiatives and developments of offerings"* (MTPA, 2022/2023:10).

Social media theme

The MTPA documents did not make a specific mention of the term *'social media'* or associated terms. However, they did reference digital media, as illustrated in the quotation below.

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"During this period, the Mpumalanga Tourism and Parks Agency promoted the Mpumalanga province as a preferred tourism destination through a number of marketing activities. These included destination promotion using platforms such as ***digital*** *and print* ***media****, trade shows and workshops…"* (MTPA, 2019/2020:15).

Notably, this reference was not exclusively indicative of social media; it could also relate to websites and other forms of digital platforms, as the term *digital media* encompasses a broader range of online resources and technologies.

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6.2.4.6 GTA (Gauteng Province)

The Gauteng Tourism Authority (GTA) has been given the mandate to position the Gauteng Province as an internationally competitive tourism destination (GTA, 2018-2019b). Results of the document analysis are summarised in Table 32. It indicates the generic themes and categories, together with the corresponding codes used to describe their occurrence in the case study contexts. A detailed analysis of each component subsequently follows.

Table 32: Generated codes derived from GTA strategic documents

Themes	Category	Code
STRATEGY	Vision	Experience
	Mission	World class Tourism growth
	Positioning	Desirable Competitive
BRAND IDENTITY	Values	Alliance and partnership Corporate governance Excellence Integrity Passion Sustainability
	Product	Adventure Arts Culture Heritage Hospitality and conference venues Nature Wildlife
SOCIAL MEDIA	Platforms	Facebook X Instagram
	Content Strategy	User generated content
	Promotions	Campaigns
	Monitoring and analytics	Tracking

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Strategy theme

The strategy theme consists of vision, mission, and positioning. The frequency of occurrence is also indicated, along with illustrative excerpts from the documents as shown in Table 33. Relevant descriptive words and phrases are highlighted in bold. According to the documents, the GTA's strategy focused on positioning Gauteng as a leading destination in Africa, through enhanced tourist experience and sustainable tourism development. It is important to note that the excerpts on the category vision statement and positioning statement together with the code *starts here* were expressed from a demand-driven approach and denoted by an asterisk ***(*)***. The supply side-side reflects organisational strategy.

Table 33: GTA's Strategy theme

VISION	***(*)*** *"Gauteng is Africa's must see, big-city region experience*!" (GTA, 2017/18:38 – 41).
Experience (n=126)	*"There are a number of key attributes and values that are critically important to improve …visitor experience in Gauteng of paramount importance is …* ***safety*** *and* ***perceptions of safety****"* (GTA, 2019/20:20).
MISSION	*"To create a world-class destination that attracts business visitors and all other tourists to the province, benefits our people and contributes to job creation and economic growth"* (GTA, 2019/20:33).
World-class (n=54)	*Gauteng is a world class destination renowned for its* ***quality tourism experiences****" (GTA, 2013/14:61).*
Tourism growth (n=22)	*"…the government's commitment to address major barriers* ***to improved tourism growth*** *in the country like the* ***visa regime****, curbing incidents of crime and* ***investing*** *in domestic tourism marketing efforts"* (GTA, 2018-2019a:15).
POSITIONING	***(*)*** *"Gauteng - It starts here, alive with possibilities"* (GTA, 2019:2).
Starts here (n=14)	***(*)****"Welcome to energetic, creative, culturally diverse and* ***authentic*** *Gauteng province. This is* ***where it all starts****"* (GTA, 2019:2).

Brand identity theme

Table 34 presents various categories, the occurrence of codes, and extracts of code statements that illustrate the context in which GTA employed the codes in strategic documents. Relevant descriptive words and phrases are highlighted in bold. The documents revealed that the GTA brand identity was established on the values, namely, *corporate governance*, *excellence*, *integrity*, *passion*, and *transformation and sustainability*, together

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with a diverse range of distinctive products offered in the destination. Notably, the excerpts on values and products were expressed from the supply side-side which denotes organisational strategy, while for the category product, the codes *adventure, heritage, nature, wildlife* reflect a demand-driven approach, marked by an asterisk ***(*)*** and aimed at highlighting the allure of Gauteng by utilising its unique assets.

Table 34: GTA's brand identity theme ***(table continues on the next page)***

VALUES	*"Transformation and sustainability, integrity and business process, excellence, passion, corporative governance, and alliance and partnership" (GTA, 2018-2019a:22 – 24).*
Corporate governance (n=27)	*"The Board must maintain oversight of the implementation of structured, good corporate **governance principles** in relation to strategy development…"* (GTA, 2019/20:65).
Excellence (n=27)	*"Nothing sells a country more than a big, warm welcome, matched with **service excellence** and **quality experiences** at every stage of a visit"* (GTA, 2013/14:15).
Integrity (n=25)	*"GTA is committed to conducting all its activities to the **highest standard** of competence, integrity and **ethical behaviour** and to ensure that its conduct is beyond reproach"* (GTA, 2019/20:69).
Passion (n=3)	*"The strategy aims to reawaken passion among all employees by creating a **high-performance** culture within South African Tourism to contribute to achieving its goals"* (GTA, 2018-2019b:112).
Transformation and sustainability (n=64)	*"This process included the rationalisation of the tourism function in that GTA was mandated to play a leading role in promoting destination Gauteng thereby ensuring sustainable **tourism development and growth**..."* (GTA, 2019/20:72).
PRODUCT	
Adventure (n=21)	*" Adventurers operate in the wild caves…and cater for adventure seekers looking for **opportunities to explore** extreme areas safely"* (GTA, 2019:57). ***(*)**"The Vaal River is one of South Africa's largest rivers, and delivers fun and adventure ranging from **cruises to river rafting**"* (GTA, 2019:57).
Arts (n=21)	*"Sustainability Village, which showcased local **arts and crafts** in a unique green space, as parts of South African Tourism's commitment to local procurement and contributing to the local economy"* (GTA, 2018-2019a:70). *".. its aim of establishing and supporting a **thriving** contemporary **arts landscape** in Africa"* (GTA, 2019:31).
Culture (n=47)	*The heart of South Africa's business-events industry resides in Gauteng, and delegates flock from all over the globe to experience the **unique blend** of distinctly African culture and world-class infrastructure (GTA, 2019:2).*

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Heritage (n=45	***(*)*** *"…exploring and celebrating modern humankind's history… it allows visitors to* ***experience Africa's rich, complex*** *heritage"* (GTA, 2019:28).
Hospitality and conference venues (n=125)	*"The key objective for this work was to monitor and determine satisfaction levels in the Gauteng tourism, hospitality and accommodation sector. This involved verification and analysis of* ***customer satisfaction*** *with tourism … The outcomes were designed to guide the strategic interventions of the agency in ensuring better* ***service quality****"* (GTA, 2013/14:59).
Nature (n=49)	***(*)*** *" With our* ***unique offerings*** *of natural beauty, wildlife, culture and adventure, South Africa is well placed to increase our share of this growing market"* (GTA, 2018-2019a:15).
Wildlife (n=12)	***(*)*** *"Gauteng offers a plethora of pre- and post-show opportunities; from delving into the country's fascinating political past, to visiting some of the finest culinary destinations in Africa, to marvelling at our incredible wildlife, there is an* ***experience for everyone"*** (GTA, 2019:2).

Social media theme

Table 35 shows the social media theme, its categories, codes, and excerpts of codes which shows the context in which the codes are alluded to in the documents. The descriptive words and phrases that relate to the code are highlighted in bold. The categories are social media *platforms*, *content strategy*, *promotions*, and *monitoring and analytics*. As noted, the table shows that the GTA's documents demonstrated the use of social media and digital marketing strategies through the employment of platforms such as Facebook, X, and Instagram. Furthermore, it is significant that the extracts were all expressed from the supply side-side, indicating organisational strategy and posture towards the use of social media.

Table 35: GTA's social media theme *(table continues on the next page)*

PLATFORMS	
Facebook (n=11)	*GTA* ***social media channels*** *include a destination Facebook account to broadcast our* ***key messages****… (GTA, 2019/20:52).*
X (n=7)	*We also have the massive Twitter account which* ***drives our engagement****…(GTA, 2019/20:52).*
Instagram (n=6)	*Social media services:… Instagram act as* ***complementary tools*** *to Gauteng.net (GTA, 2019/20:48).*
CONTENT STRATEGY	
User generated content (n=4)	*GTA continued to use its social media channels to interact with the public, broadcast key travel and tourism content,* ***inspire local and***

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	international audiences *and allow for user generated content to shape our* ***communications efforts*** *(GTA, 2019/20:52).*
PROMOTIONS	
Campaigns (n=1)	*Hundreds of* ***events were promoted*** *on our various digital channels throughout the year" (GTA, 2013/14:46).*
MONITORING AND ANALYTICS	
Tracking (10)	*Over* ***990 images*** *were taken and tagged as part of the campaign; over* ***380 mentions*** *were made on Twitter;* ***495 Facebook likes*** *were inspired and 9675* ***mobile app downloads*** *were made"(GTA, 2013/14:46).*

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6.2.4.7 LTA (Limpopo Province)

The LTA promotes tourism in the province through marketing and promotional efforts to position Limpopo Province as a desirable global destination (LTA, 2020). Table 36 displays specific codes used in Atlas.ti to assess the groundedness of quotations. These codes were collected and composed from statements mentioned under the categories as shown in Table 68.

Table 36: Generated codes derived from LTA strategic documents

Themes	Category	Code
STRATEGY	Vision	Leading destination
	Mission	Experience Tourism development
	Positioning	Enjoy
BRAND IDENTITY	Values	Accountability Communication Excellence Learning
	Product	Adventure Arts Culture Heritage Hospitality and conference venues Nature Shopping, wellness and sports Wildlife
SOCIAL MEDIA	Content strategy	Influencer
	Promotions	Campaigns
	Monitoring and analysis	Presence

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Strategy theme

The strategy theme consists of the categories of vision, mission, and positioning. Table 37 indicates the codes derived and positioning statements. The frequency of occurrence is also indicated, along with illustrative excerpts from the documents. Relevant descriptive words and phrases are highlighted in bold. The table demonstrates that the LTA's strategy focused on positioning Limpopo as a *leading destination* by leveraging its diverse tourism experience offerings. It is noteworthy that all extracts in the category of values were expressed from the supply side-side, reflecting organisational strategy. In contrast, for the category of *mission*, the code *experience* indicated a demand-driven approach, denoted by an asterisk ***(*)***.

Table 37: LTA Strategy theme

VISION	*" To position Limpopo as a leading tourism destination in Southern Africa"* (LTA, 2018-2019:13-14).
Leading destination (n=21)	*"… the implementation of the organisation's marketing strategy with a* ***plethora of activities*** *that sought to move our beautiful Province from good to* ***great*** *as a leading destination"* (LTA, 2018-2019:14).
MISSION	*"To promote and offer a sustainable and diverse tourism experience through strategic marketing (destination marketing) and support and facilitate tourism development programmes."* (LTA, 2018-2019:7)
Experience (n=24)	***(*)*** *"…to offer participants, especially buyers, a* ***personal experience*** *of the different attractions, tourist destinations and products of Limpopo"* (LTA, 2018-2019:10 – 11).
Tourism development (n=20)	*" All* ***tourism development*** *activities shall deliver sustainability on all areas of economic, social, and environmental dimensions"* (LTA, 2018-2019:7).
POSITIONING	*"… it Limpopo Province as a premier adventure Tourism destination with so much to enjoy"* (LTA, 2018-2019:15).
Enjoy (n=7)	*"… there were visitors from Europe who came to the centre where Nelson Mandela day and centenary activities were held to* ***enjoy*** *the dance from traditional groups"* (LTA, 2018-2019:57 – 59).

Brand identity theme

Table 38 presents various categories, the occurrence of codes, and extracts of code statements that illustrate the context in which LTA employed the codes in strategic documents. Relevant descriptive words and phrases are highlighted in bold. The documents

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revealed that the LTA's brand identity was anchored in the *values*, namely, *integrity, respect, accountability, communication, excellence*, and continuous l*earning*, together with a diverse range of distinctive products offered in the region, ranging from adventure and *arts* to *culture, heritage, hospitality, nature*, and *wildlife*, highlighting the region's unique attractions. Notably, the excerpts on values and products were expressed from the supply side-side which indicates organisational strategy except for the product's *adventure* code which reflected a demand-driven approach and was denoted by an asterisk ***(*)***.

Table 38: GTA's brand identity theme *(table continues on the next page)*

VALUES	*"Our values are accountability, communication, excellence, and learning"* (LTA, 2018-2019:6).
Accountability (n=33)	*"Financial Management: the subprogram aims to provide sound financial management and* ***accountability*** *in the entity"* (LTA, 2018-2019:32).
Communication (n=63)	*" LTA will strive to communicate* ***effectively and efficiently*** *within and outside the organisation"* (LTA, 2018-2019:7).
Excellence (n=12)	*"The entire LTA organisation, shall continually* ***strive for service excellence*** *delivery towards all our tourists"* (LTA, 2018-2019:8).
Learning (n=8)	*"Learning organisation culture of* ***continuous improvement*** *by adopting best practices"* (LTA, 2018-2019:7).
PRODUCT	
Adventure (n=6)	***(*)*** *"… an opportunity to showcase Limpopo Province as a* ***premier adventure*** *Tourism destination with so much to enjoy…"* (LTA, 2018-2019:15).
Arts (n=9)	*"Major events that LTA* ***supported*** *include arts and Culture Heritage Festival"* (LTA, 2018-2019:14).
Culture (n=56)	*"LTA's approach … to highlight* ***culture*** *cluster as the main strategic focus for marketing"* (LTA, 2018-2019:14).
Heritage (n=47)	*"The Province highlighted* ***heritage****…at this mega travel show, where Limpopo stand won a Silver Award in the category of tourism authorities"* (LTA, 2018-2019:11).
Hospitality and conference venues (n=25)	*"To initiate product development, tourism investment, strategic partnerships and provide* ***quality hospitality*** *services..."* (LTA, 2018-2019:9)
Nature (n=44)	*" Enhance and enable* ***tourism investment*** *opportunities on provincial nature reserves"* (LTA, 2016:9 – 12).

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Wildlife (n=33)	*"Limpopo Tourism Growth Strategy is founded in the implementation of priority actions within the six clusters embedded in the* ***unique wildlife*** *settings offered in the mega conservation areas of Limpopo"* (LTA, 2018-2019:17).

Social media theme

Table 39 presents various categories, the occurrence of codes, and extracts of code statements that illustrate the context in which LTA employed the codes in strategic documents. Relevant descriptive words and phrases are highlighted in bold. The categories identified are *promotions*, and *monitoring and analytics*. It can be seen in the table that LTA employed social media platforms and utilised social media to improve tourism promotion. It is also noteworthy that all the codes are expressed from supply side-side which denotes organisational strategy and posture towards the use of social media.

Table 39: LTA's social media themes

CONTENT STRATEGY	
Influencer (n=1)	*"The campaign went live on digital media through influencers…"* (LTA, 2020:11-12).
PROMOTIONS	
Campaigns (n=1)	*"The entity managed to* ***create awareness*** *about the importance of sharing and working for the communities by posting the Nelson Mandela Day banner on social media platforms" (LTA, 2020:66).*
MONITORING AND ANALYTICS	
Presence (n=1)	*"The brand association and awareness of the entity and the province* ***grew significantly*** *through this association, evidenced in the* ***growth in social media presence*** *and word of mouth interactions" (LTA, 2020:66).*

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6.3 Results of Phase 3: Social Media Content Analysis

Phase 3 of the study involved social media content analysis, building on the foundational work developed in Phase 1 and Phase 2, and focusing chiefly on the themes, categories and codes developed in Phase 2. These were applied in Phase 3 for each respective DMO. This involved systematically examining the inclusion and the extent to which the themes, categories and codes were integrated as part of the social media content to determine frequency of mention, manner in which codes were integrated in the content, either as an image, text, or both, and the resulting post engagement. The assessment took place across three social media platforms, namely, Facebook, Instagram and X.

The analysis starts off with a **general overview of all DMOs (total sample) encompassing their social media profiles.** This step is important for setting context and as a substratum for subsequent analysis of content and engagement. This section incorporated DMO handles across Facebook, Instagram and X, platform membership dates, and audience size (followers). The general overview analysis of the total DMO sample is followed by the analyses of each individual DMO. The same analysis process was followed for all the DMOs. Data collected was captured on a Microsoft Excel Spreadsheet (refer to Appendix B).

6.3.1 DMO Online Profiles

The analysis was conducted on 03 March 2022 by accessing DMOs' social media accounts on their official websites. The social media handles for each DMO were collected through accessing the DMO's official website page, then following the social media icon link. This step was crucial for ensuring that only authentic social media accounts and accurate data was collected. Social media's fickle nature makes it not uncommon for DMOs to change display names, handles or create new account profiles (Uşaklı *et al.*, 2019). Consequently, it is likely that the social media accounts and handles will change at some point and differ from those listed on Table 40.

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Table 40: Selected DMO accounts

DMO	DMO website	Facebook Profile	Facebook account	X	X handle	Instagram	Instagram handle
South Africa Tourism	https://www.shotleft.co.za/	Sho't Left	@Shotleft	Sho't Left	@ShotLeft	Shotleft	@Shotleft
KwaZulu-Natal Tourism Authority	https://zulu.org.za/	Tourism KwaZulu-Natal	@KZNTourism	Tourism KZN	@TourismKZN	Tourism KwaZulu-Natal	@tourism_kzn
Mpumalanga Tourism Authority	http://www.mpumalanga.com/	Mpumalanga Tourism and Parks Agency	@MTPATourism	Mpumalanga Tourism	@Mtpatourism	Mpumalanga Tourism	@mpumalangatourism
Eastern Cape Tourism Authority	https://visiteasternCape.co.za/	Eastern Cape Tourism	@tourismEC	Eastern Cape Tourism	@EC_Tourism	Eastern Cape Tourism	@easterncapetourism
Limpopo Tourism Authority	https://golimpopo.com/	Limpopo Tourism Agency	@golimpopo	Limpopo Tourism Agency	@golimpopo	go_limpopo	@go_limpopo
Gauteng Tourism Authority		I love Gauteng	@ilovegauteng	Visit Gauteng	@visitgauteng	Gauteng Tourism	@visitgauteng
WESGRO	https://www.capetown.travel/	Love Cape Town	@CapeTown.Travel	Cape Town Tourism	@CapeTownTourism	lovecapetown	@lovecapetown

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6.3.2 Social Media Platform Membership Dates

The study sought to establish when each DMO joined each of the respective three social media platforms, namely, Facebook, Instagram and X. The platform membership dates were crucial for obtaining social media adoption timelines and its integration into the destination marketing strategy. Table 41 shows dates when DMOs first set up their social media accounts on Facebook, X, and Instagram. The analysis is useful for comparing the timing of social media adoption between different DMOs.

As seen in the table, the DMOs adopted social media at a different rate, for instance, SAT was the earliest adopter of Facebook in June 2009. Facebook was started in 2004, but gained widespread adoption and notoriety between the period 2007 and 2008 (Carter & Levy, 2011). In contrast, WESGRO was the late adopter, joining Facebook in 2014. For X (formerly known as Twitter), multiple DMOs were early adopters while a late adopter was ECPTA. X gained worldwide popularity in 2009 (Takhteyev, Gruzd & Wellman, 2012). Instagram gained popularity in 2011 (McNely, 2012). Amongst the DMOs, SAT was the early adopter in 2013, while LTA was the late adopter in 2016. It is worth noting that there is a two-year gap between ECPTA joining Facebook in 2011 and Instagram in 2015. LTA was among the early adopters of X in 2009 but took three years to join Facebook and seven years to adopt Instagram, making it the last adopter of all DMOs.

Membership dates: This step sought to establish when each DMO joined each of the respective three social media platforms, namely, Facebook, Instagram and X. The platform membership dates were crucial to obtain the timeline of social media adoption and its integration as part of integrated marketing communication strategy.

Table 41: Membership dates of selected DMOs for social media platforms (table continues on the next page)

DMO	Facebook	X	Instagram
SAT	June 2009	April 2009	September 2013
TKZN	April 2012	April 2012	July 2015
MTPA	June 2010	June 2010	June 2014
ECPTA	August 2011	May 2013	November 2015

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LTA	February 2012	June 2009	August 2016
GTA	November 2010	April 2009	November 2013
WESGRO	March 2014	June 2009	March 2014

6.3.3 Follower Size

"Follower" refers to the number of social media platform users who opted to receive content updates from a specific social media account (Gong, Lim & Zhu, 2015; Macarthy, 2021). Follower size serves as a basis for determining an account's reach and influence (Karagür, Becker, Klein & Edeling, 2022). When users follow an account, they are likely to spend more time consuming content shared by the account they follow (Wei, Xiao & Rong, 2021). These users will be exposed to every content shared by that account and are likely to engage with it through a like, comment or share (Wies, Bleier & Edeling, 2023).

Table 42 provides information on the number of followers for different DMOs on Facebook, X, and Instagram as of 03 March 2022. A follower count is a key criterion for assessing the potential audience reach for the content disseminated on the platform (Ben Gibson, Sutton, Vos & Butts, 2023; Wies *et al.*, 2023). Early adoption of social media does not guarantee higher follower count (Tafesse & Wood, 2021). However, with SAT it is the case, which stands out as having the highest follower count on all three platforms (Tafesse & Wood, 2021). Some DMOs proactively devise strategies to manage their social media accounts and increase follower count, while other arbitrarily join without a clearly articulated social media plan and strategy to maintain the accounts (Hays *et al.*, 2013).

Table 42: The audience size for each social media platform as at 14/05/23

DMO	Facebook (followers)	X (Followers)	Instagram (Followers)
SAT	184 482	292 832	64 400
TKZN	86 124	18 403	24 273
MTPA	96 713	10 635	12 119
ECPTA	29 685	4 098	6 683
LTA	31 229	44 106	17 081
GTA	99 912	257 604	12 586
WESGRO	26726	16908	23222

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In the following sections, the post-composition and the engagement across all DMOs are summarised to show a comparative view of the extent to which they utilise social media.

Content format

Table 43 provides an overview of the content format used in the posts by the DMOs across the social media platforms, Facebook, X, and Instagram at the time of data collection (03 March 2022). More textual posts were examined than photographic content. For the photograph-based platform Instagram, all posts were made of images that were supported with a text. For Facebook and X posts either text or image or both were used.

Table 43: Content format across social media platforms

DMO	Text	Photos
SAT	160	157
LTA	172	156
ECTA	167	164
KZN	177	178
MTPA	148	171
GTA	164	163
WESGRO	180	146
Total	**1 168**	**1 135**

6.3.4 Results Per DMO

This section report on the findings of the analysis on three key aspects of social media usage by DMOs, including (1) social media post content composition, (2) content format, and (3) user engagement. The analysis addressed the purpose of Phase 3 by providing an evaluation of the extent to which, and in what format, DMOs communicated their strategic brand identity on the respective platforms, as well as to determine whether users engaged with this content.

For **social media post content composition**, the aim was to categorise social media posts according to the posts' thematic composition developed in Phase 2 (the categories and codes of strategy and brand identity as identified in Phase 2). The analysis was conducted through selecting a sample of 60 posts for each social media platform (Facebook, X, and

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Instagram) that contained relevant elements attributable to the two themes, namely, strategy and brand identity, together with their respective codes.

For **content format,** social media content disseminated by the DMO was examined. Social media content dissemination takes three forms, namely, textual, photographic, and videography (Gough, Hunter, Ajao, Jurek, McKeown, Hong, Barrett, Ferguson, McElwee & McCarthy, 2017; Tuten, 2023). Only two content formats, textual and photographic content, were considered, while video content was excluded from the analysis. If the post that followed the selected text or photograph was a video, it was omitted, and the following valid post was considered.

User engagement with posts was measured based on engagement metrics, including likes, comments and shares. These were used to examine how users engaged with content related to the themes (categories and codes of strategy and brand identity). Furthermore, it also determined which content formats garnered highest engagement. These were particularly significant for isolating posts with the highest engagement across the three-engagement metrics per social media platform. Each post with highest engagement was further analysed to establish its thematic composition (graphic depictions of these posts are provided with the analyses).

The analysis of the results provided a breakdown and comparison of the themes, categories and codes as they occurred across the different social media platforms. For instance, category ‘mission’ was compared across all three social media platforms to examine the codes that appeared prominently in each. The analysis helped with understanding how thematic elements were carried across each social media platform.

The analysis focused on each post individually, selecting every second post from DMOs' social media pages as applied by Hays *et al.* (2013), and Tran and Rudolf (2022) . The selection of posts was done retrospectively, beginning from 03 March 2022, working backwards until the 60th post. As mentioned in the exclusionary criteria, video posts were excluded as the study focussed on textual and photographic content. The textual posts were examined to identify aspects attributable to the codes. Photographic content was analysed using Google's Vision AI tool, which assessed the composition of the images through its

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photo analysis and detection capabilities. The top two aspects that composed the majority of the photo content were taken as the main message portrayed and attributed to relevant codes. While the process was subject to researcher bias, it was mitigated through an iterative process with the second and third researcher until there was consensus among the team.

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6.3.4.1. SAT

The themes, categories and corresponding codes that guided the SAT's social media content analysis process, are summarised in Table 44. It also provides the engagement metric and content format used for the analysis. Each post was assessed to determine its composition elements attributable to any of the categories and codes related to the two main themes, namely, *strategy* and *brand identity*.

Table 44: Data summary of SAT

Social media platforms	Themes	Categories	Codes	Engagement matric	Content format
Facebook X Instagram	STRATEGY	Vision	Experience Quality Unique Value-for-money	Like Comment Share	Text Photo
		Mission	Economic growth		
		Positioning	Inspire		
	BRAND IDENTITY	Values	Integrity Authentic and caring Excellence Respect Responsibility		
		Product	Adventure Arts Coastal and marine Culture Heritage Hospitality and conference venues Nature Wildlife		

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A. CONTENT FORMAT AND USER ENGAGEMENT

This section presents a summary of content format and social media engagement along with platform specific details on Facebook, X, and Instagram. Throughout this section, screenshots are provided of the posts that generated the highest engagement. The purpose of including the actual posts' screenshot is to visually demonstrate the post and content themes applied, offering contextual insight into the format and post composition discussed in the analysis.

Summary of content format and social media engagement

Table 45 demonstrates how users engaged with the content updated by SAT across three platforms. It shows social media engagement metrics cumulative data for 60 posts examined across Facebook, X, and Instagram. The data includes *likes*, *comments*, *shares* (reposts), while content format is categorised based on whether the post was text or photo-based. It should be noted that Instagram did not support the repost of another user's content within the platform. Users utilise other third-party applications such as Repost (Alfonzo, 2019; Dharta, Firdaus, Pranawukir, Angellia & Hamboer, 2024), and this was still the case at the time of this study. Across all the 60 posts examined, Instagram posts received the highest engagement in terms of likes and comments, while X received the highest number of shares.

Table 45: Social media user engagement and content format

Social media	Likes	Comments	Share	Text	Photo
Facebook	2 786	241	165	60	58
X	3 837	226	777	60	39
Instagram	29 512	561		60	60

Platform specific details

Facebook

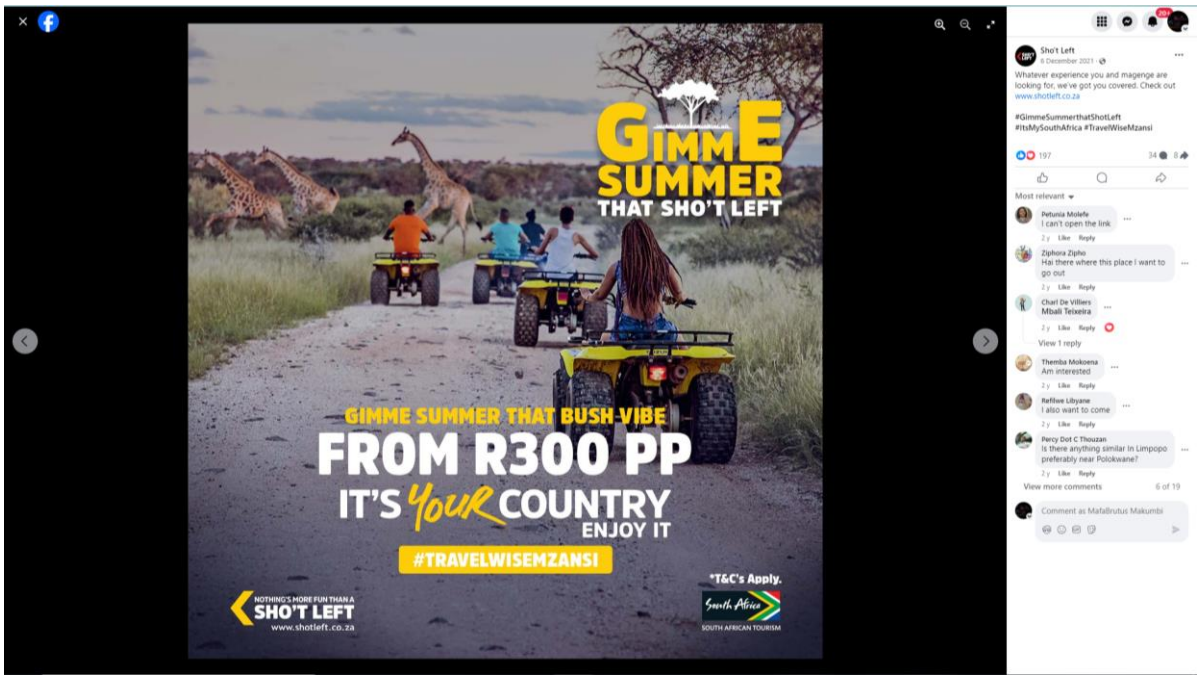
Likes

SAT's Facebook post that garnered the highest number of *likes*, contained elements attributable to specific codes that were created, based on the *vision* category's *experience, quality*, and *unique* codes. For the *positioning* category it was the code *inspire*, aiming to

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encourage and motivate potential tourists to visit South Africa. The *values* reflected in the post were *authentic and caring*, *responsibility*, and *excellence*. In terms of product category, the post showcased *adventure*, and *wildlife* attractions of South Africa. The post was disseminated using a text and a photo (Table 46). The image in Figure 10 is the actual post screenshot which was posted on 06/12/2021. It shows the text and image together with the post's engagement metrics.

Figure 10: Facebook post engagement



Source: https://www.facebook.com/photo/?fbid=10160120675933675&set=a.96808148674

Table 46: Most liked post: Facebook

Vision	Positioning	Values	Product	Content format	Likes
Experience, quality, unique	Inspire	Authentic and caring, responsibility, excellence	Adventure, wildlife	Photo, text	197

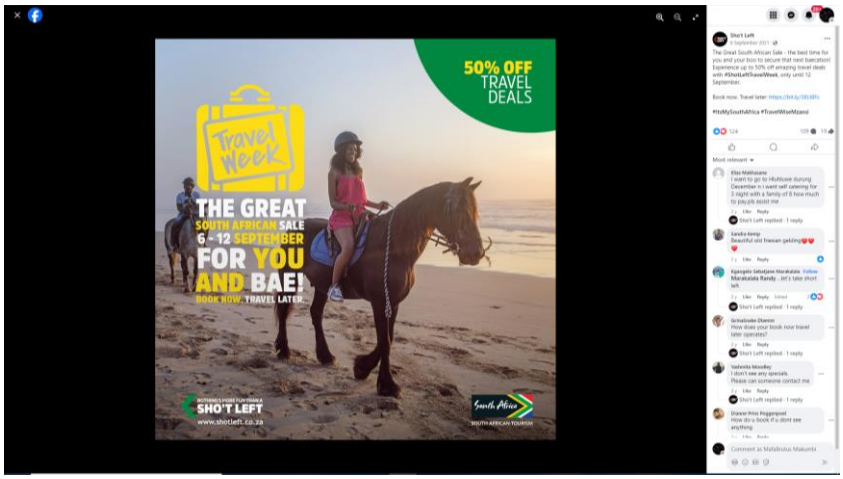
Comments and shares

In terms of the engagement metrics of *comments* and *shares*, there was one post that received the highest count for both. The post contained elements attributable to specific codes that were created, based on the *vision* category's *experience,* and *quality* codes. In

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the *positioning* category it was the code *inspire*, aiming to encourage and motivate potential tourists to visit South Africa. The *values* reflected in the post were *authentic and caring*, *responsibility*, and *excellence*. In terms of *product* category, the post showcased *adventure, and coastal and marine* attractions of South Africa. The post was disseminated using a text and a photo (Table 47). The image in Figure 11 is the actual post which was posted on 06/09/2021, showing the text and image together with the post's engagement metrics.

Figure 11: Facebook post engagement



Source: https://www.facebook.com/photo?fbid=10159929783678675&set=a.96808148674

Table 47: Most commented and shared post: Facebook

Vision	Positioning	Values	Product	Content format	Comments	Shares
Experience, quality	Inspire	Authentic and caring, responsibility, excellence	Adventure, coastal and marine	Photo and text	109	19

X

Likes, comments, and share

Regarding X, there was one post that received the most user engagement across all three metrics (*likes, comments, and shares*). Its composition is presented in Table 83. The post contained elements attributable to specific codes that were created, based on the *vision* category's *experience*, and *quality* codes. For the *mission* category it was *tourism demand*, and *economic growth*, and for the *positioning* category it was the code *inspire*, aiming to encourage and motivate potential tourists to visit South Africa. The *values* reflected in the

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post were *authentic and caring*, and *excellence*. In terms of the *product* category, the post showcased *adventure, coastal and marine* attractions of South Africa. The post was disseminated using a text and a photo (Table 48). The image in Figure 12 is the actual post which was posted on 06/09/2021, showing the text and image together with the post's engagement metrics.

Figure 12: X post engagement



Source: https://x.com/ShotLeft/status/1434745729264795652

Table 48: Most liked, commented and shared post: X

Vision	Mission	Positioning	Values	Product	Content format	Likes	Comments	Shares
Experience, quality	Economic growth	Inspire	Authentic and caring, excellence.	Adventure, coastal and marine	Photo, text	605	90	149

Instagram

Likes and comments

On the side of Instagram, there was one post that received most user engagement on two metrics (*likes, and comments*). Instagram does not support repost/sharing of another user's content within the platform (Alfonzo, 2019; Dharta *et al.*, 2024). The post contained elements attributable to specific codes that were created, based on the *vision* category's *experience*, *quality*, and *unique* codes, the *positioning* category being the code *inspire*, aiming to

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encourage and motivate potential tourists to visit South Africa. The *values* reflected in the post were *authentic and caring*, *responsibility*, and *excellence*. In terms of the *product* category, the post showcased *adventure* and *wildlife* attractions of South Africa. The post was disseminated using a text and a photo (Table 49). The image in Figure 13 is the actual post which was posted on 02/09/2020. It shows the text and image together with the post's engagement metrics.

Figure 13: Instagram post engagement



Source: https://www.instagram.com/p/CEoIkImBpGB/

Table 49: Most liked and commented post: Instagram

Vision	Positioning	Values	Product	Content format	Likes	Comments
Experience, quality, unique	Inspire	Authentic and caring, responsibility, excellence	Adventure, wildlife	Photo, text	184	35

B. Comparison of the Themes and Codes across the Platforms

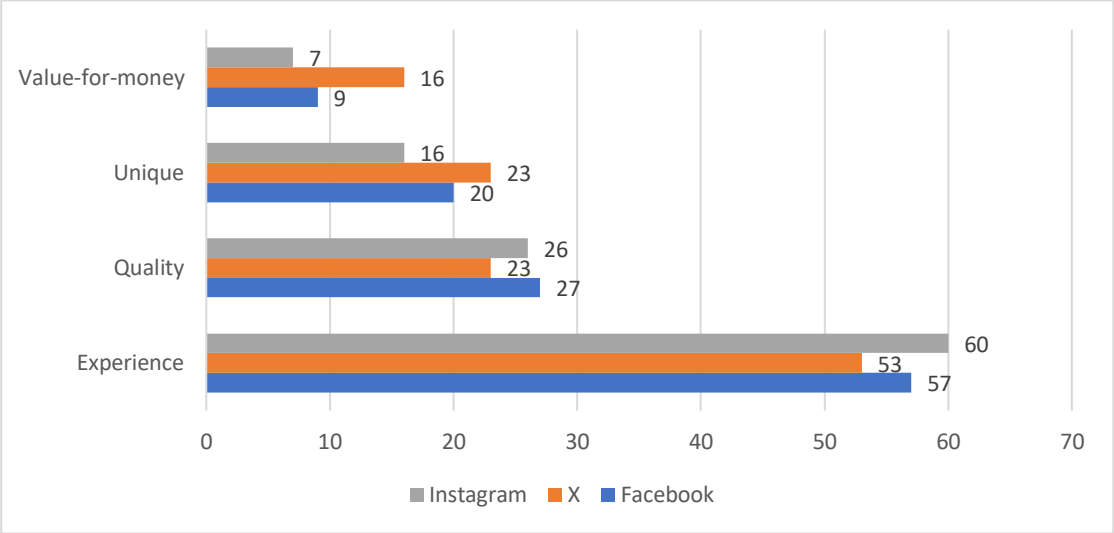
The following sections present the comparison of the frequencies at which codes occurred across Facebook, X, and Instagram.

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Strategy (vision, mission, positioning)

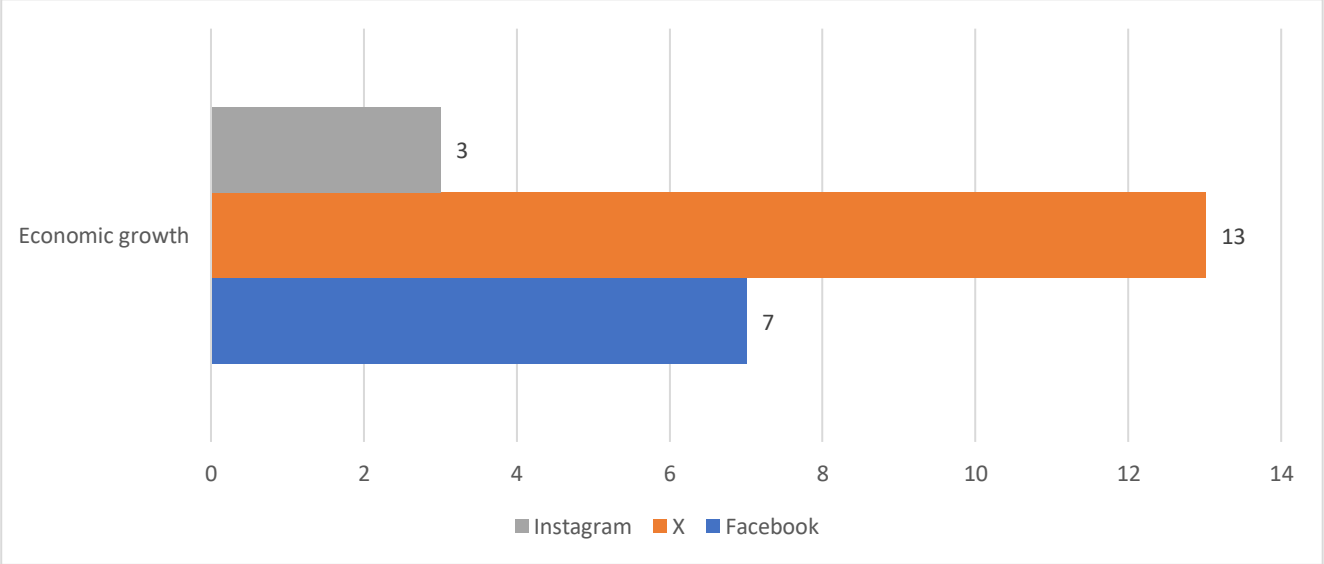
The code most frequently occurring in the posts across all social media platforms for the *vision* category was *experience*. It featured most often on Facebook (n=57), X (n=53) and Instagram (n=60). The least mentioned was *value-for-money* (Figure 14).

Figure 14: Posts across the platforms: Vision



The code that occurred most frequently in the posts across all social media platforms for the *mission* category was *economic growth*, featuring most often on Facebook (n=7), X (n=13) and Instagram (n=3). There were only two codes on this category (Figure 15).

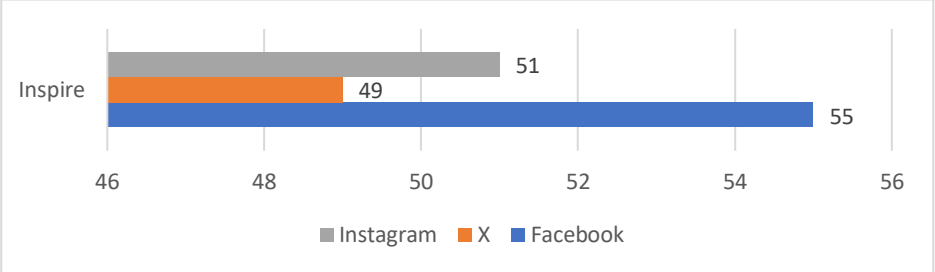
Figure 15: Posts across the platforms: mission



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For the ***positioning*** category, there was only one code, *inspire*, which appeared across all social media platforms. It featured prominently on Facebook and least on X (Figure 16).

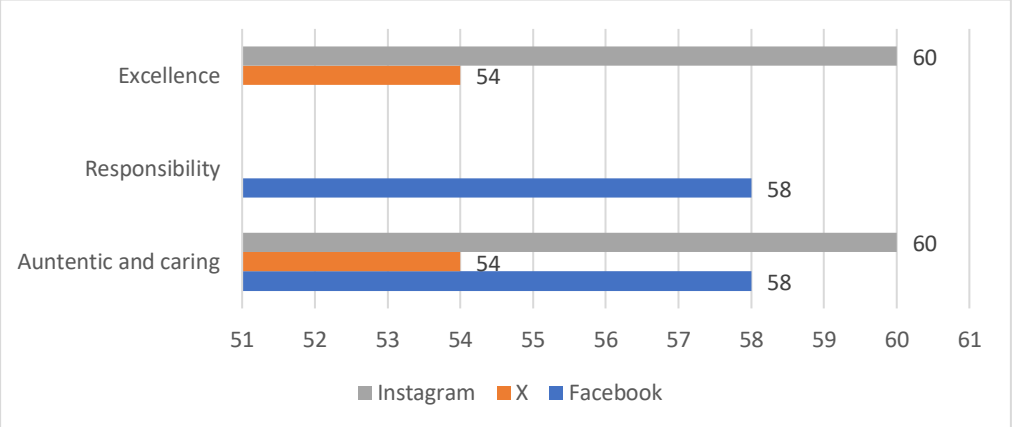
Figure 16: Posts across the platforms: mission



<u>Brand identity (values, product)</u>

The code that occurred across all social media platforms for *values* was *authentic and caring* (Figure 17). The code *excellence* appeared on Instagram and X, while only *responsibility* was on Facebook.

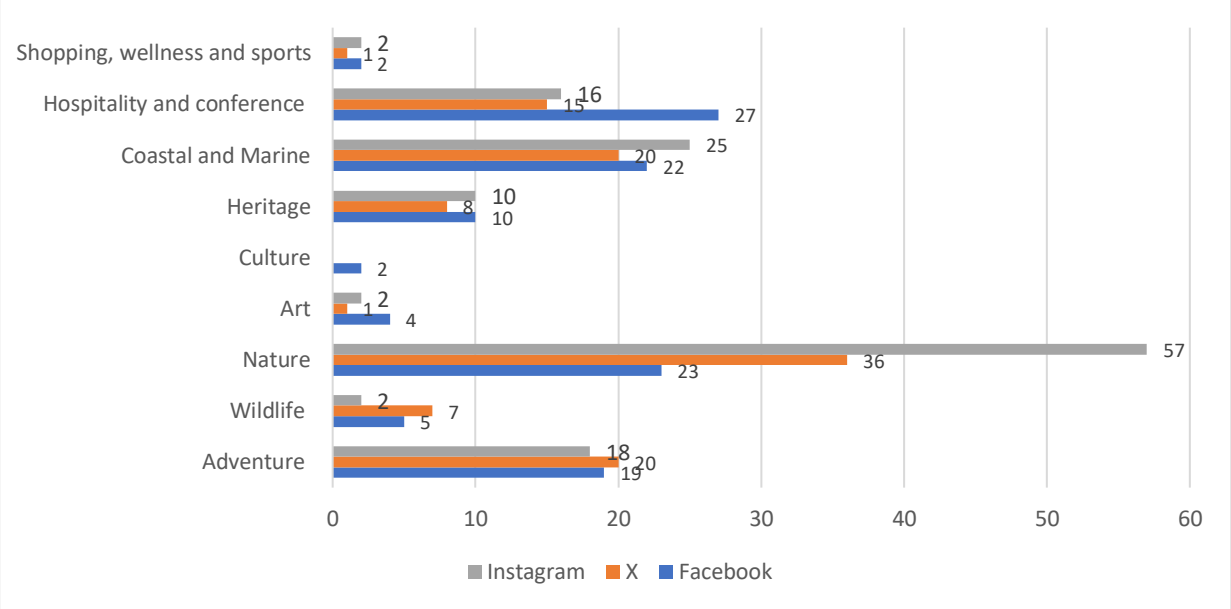
Figure 17: Posts across the platforms: Values



Overall, the codes that featured prominently, occurring in the posts across all social media platforms collectively for the *product* category, were *nature, coastal and marine, and hospitality and conference* (Figure 18). On Instagram, the code *nature* was most prominently featured (n=57), on X (n=36), and the most featured code on Facebook was *hospitality and conference*. The code that featured the least, and only occurred on Facebook and no other platforms, was *culture*.

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Figure 18: Posts across the platforms: product



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6.3.4.2. WESGRO

The themes, categories and corresponding codes that guided WESGRO's social media content analysis process, are summarised in Table 50. It also provides the engagement metrics and content format used for the social media content analysis. Each post was assessed to determine its composition elements attributable to any of the categories and codes related to the two main themes, namely, *strategy* and *brand identity.*

Table 50: Data summary – WESGRO

Social media platforms	Themes	Categories	Codes	Engagement matric	Content format
Facebook X Instagram	STRATEGY	Vision	Economic growth	Like Comment Share	Text Photo
		Mission	Destination of choice		
		Positioning	Inspire		
	BRAND IDENTITY	Values	Accountability Efficient Enabling Excellence Innovation		
		Product	Adventure Arts Coastal and marine Culture Heritage Hospitality and conference venues Nature Wildlife		

A. CONTENT FORMAT AND USER ENGAGEMENT

<u>Summary of content format and social media engagement</u>

Table 51 demonstrates how users engaged with the content updated by WESGRO across three platforms. It shows social media engagement metrics cumulative data for 60 posts examined across Facebook, X, and Instagram. The data includes *likes, comments, shares*

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(reposts), the content format being classified according to text or photo. Across all the 60 posts examined, Instagram posts received the highest engagement in terms of the count for *likes* and comments, while Facebook received the highest number of *shares*. The least engagement was seen on X's count of *comments* (n=35), (Figure 86).

Table 51: Total social media engagement and content format

Social media	Likes	Comments	Share	Text	Photo
Facebook	7 447	254	478	60	60
X	321	35	90	60	26
Instagram	23 646	572		60	60

Platform specific details

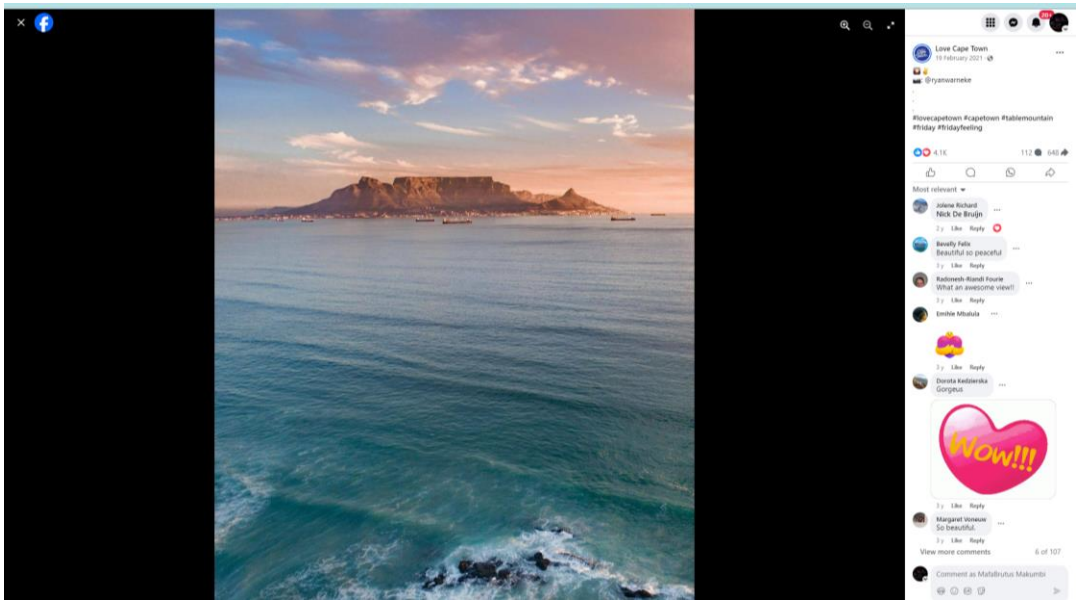
Facebook

Likes, comments, and shares

WESGRO's Facebook post that garnered the highest count of *likes* contained elements attributable to the codes, based on the *vision* category's *economic growth.* For the *mission* category it was the code *destination of choice*. For *positioning*, the code was, *inspire*. The *values* reflected in the post was *excellence*. In terms of the *product* category, the post showcased *nature*, and *coastal and marine* attractions of the Western Cape. The post was disseminated using a text and a photo (Table 52). The image in Figure 19 is the actual post which was posted on 19/02/2022, where it shows the text and image together with the post's engagement metrics.

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Figure 19: Facebook post engagement



Source: https://www.facebook.com/photo/?fbid=10159967064050579&set=a.432919790578

Table 52: Most liked post: Facebook

Vision	Mission	Positioning	Values	Product	Content format	Likes	Comments	Shares
Economic growth	Destination of choice	Inspire	excellence	Nature, coastal and marine	Photo, text	4163	112	648

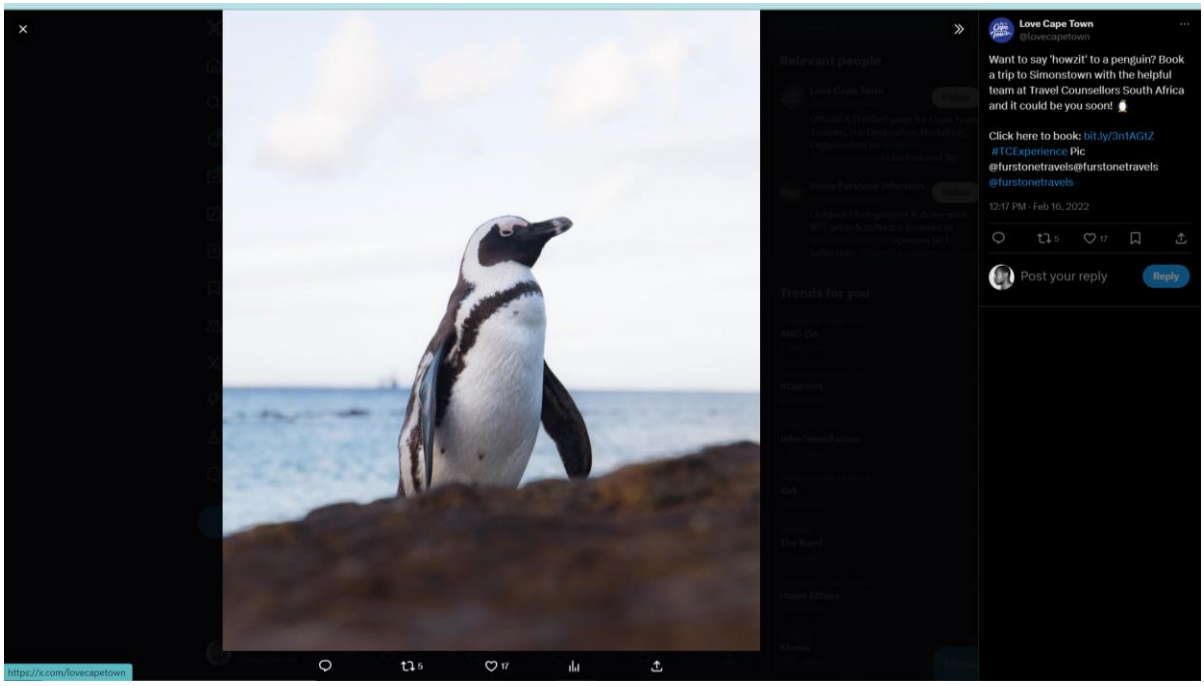
X

Likes

The post that received the highest user engagement across all metrics (*likes, comments, and shares)* containing elements attributable to *mission* was *destination of choice*. *Positioning* codes were, *inspire.* For *values*, the code was *excellence*. In terms of the *product* category, the post showcased *hospitality and conference venue* attractions of the Western Cape. The post was disseminated using both text and photo (Table 53). The image in Figure 20 is the actual post which was posted on 16/02/2022, showing the text and image together with the post's engagement metrics.

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Figure 20: X post engagement



Source: https://x.com/lovecapetown/status/1493892404419735552/photo/1

Table 53: Most liked post: X

Mission	Positioning	Values	Product	Content format	Likes	Shares
Destination of choice	Inspire	Excellence	Coastal and marine	Photo, text	17	5

Comments

The number of comments on the posts ranged between 1 and 4. Based on the low number they were deemed insignificant and insufficient for drawing any conclusions.

Instagram

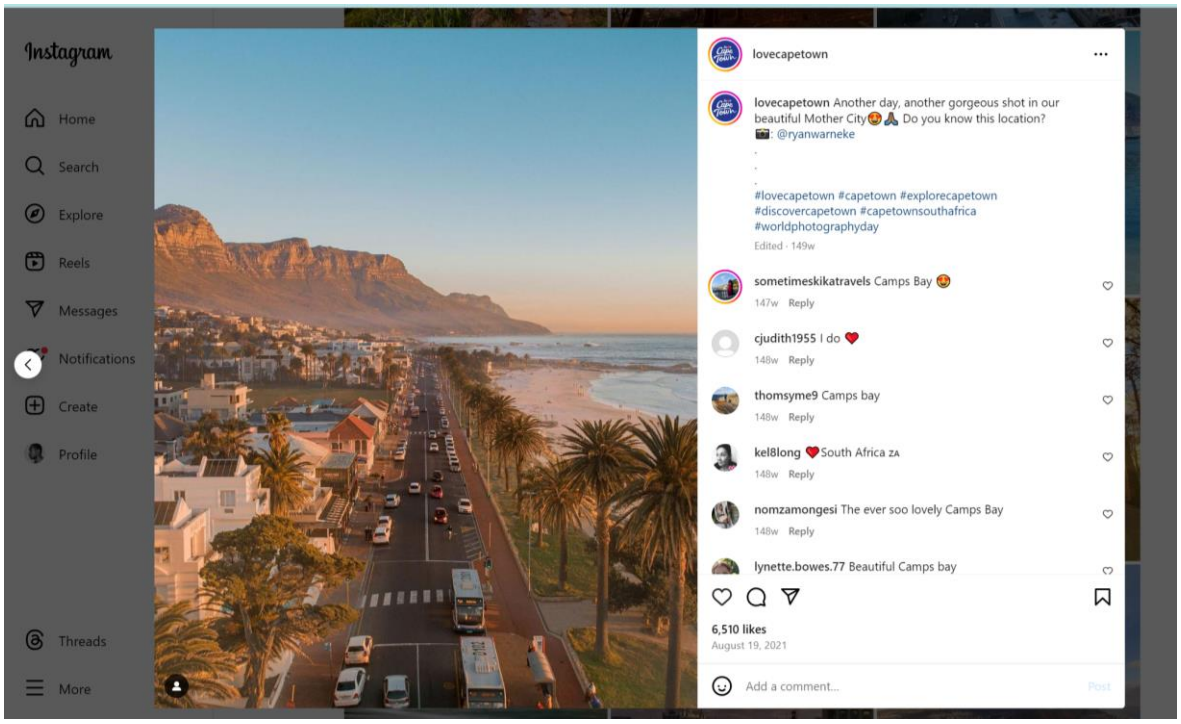
Likes and comments

The Instagram post that received the highest frequency on *likes*, contained elements attributable to the codes based on the *mission* category's *destination of choice*. The *positioning* category had the code, *inspire*. The *value* integrated in the post was *excellence*. In terms of the *product* category, the post showcased *nature,* and *coastal and marine* attractions. The post was disseminated using content format of a text and a photo (Table

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54). The image in Figure 21 is the actual Instagram post which was posted on 19/08/2021. The text and image are shown together with the post's engagement metrics.

Figure 21: Instagram post engagement



Source: https://www.instagram.com/p/CSwCOGuo8k-/

Table 54: Most liked post: Instagram

Mission	Positioning	Values	Product	Content format	Likes	Comments
Destination of choice	Inspire	Excellence	Nature, coastal and marine	Photo, text	6510	148

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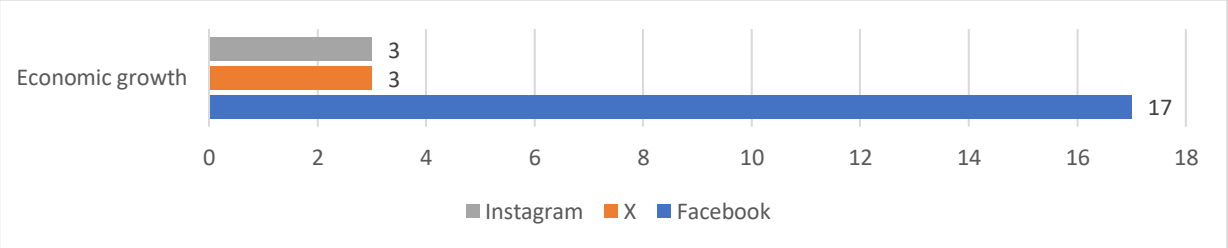
B. COMPARISON OF THE THEMES AND CODES ACROSS THE PLATFORMS

The following sections present a comparison of the frequencies with which codes occurred across Facebook, X, and Instagram.

Strategy (vision, mission, positioning)

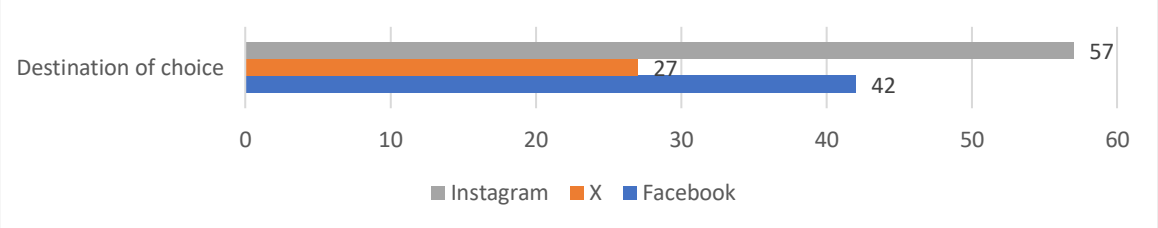
Economic growth was the only code for the *vision* category, which appeared across all social media platforms. It featured prominently on Facebook, but received less attention on X and Instagram (Figure 22).

Figure 22: Posts across the platforms: Vision



For the *mission* category, there was only one code, *economic growth*, which appeared across all social media platforms. It was prominently featured on Facebook and least on X and Instagram (Figure 23).

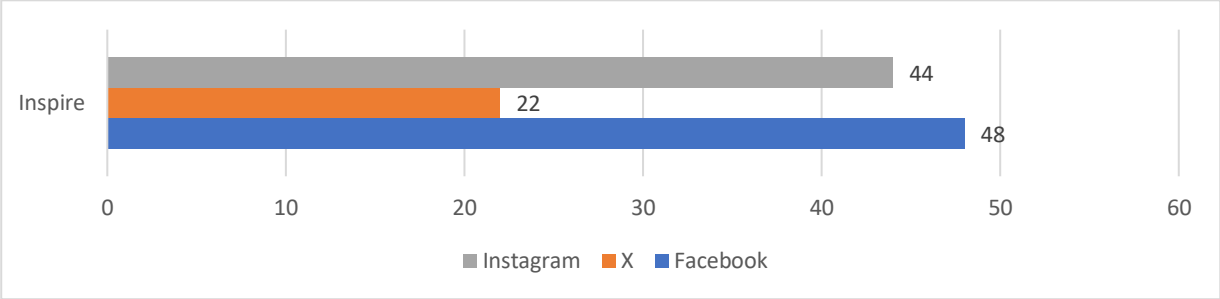
Figure 23: Posts across the platforms: Mission



There was only one code, *inspire*, for the *positioning* category. It reflected across all social media platforms, featuring prominently on Facebook and least on X (Figure 24).

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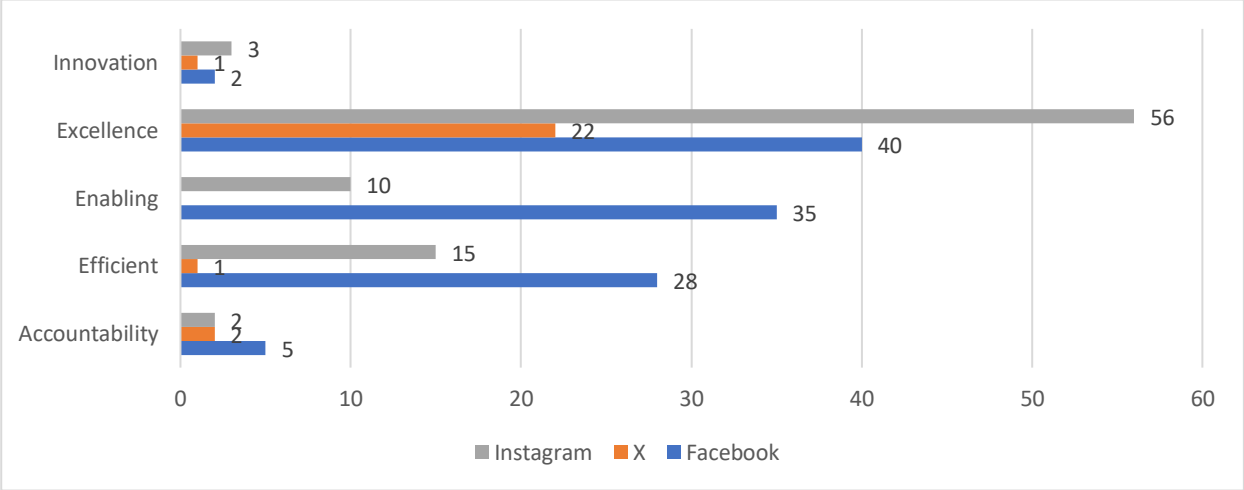
Figure 24: Posts across the platforms: Positioning



Brand identity (values, product)

The code that occurred prominently across all social media platforms for the *values* category was *excellence,* having the highest count on Instagram. The code *enabling* did not feature on X (Figure 25).

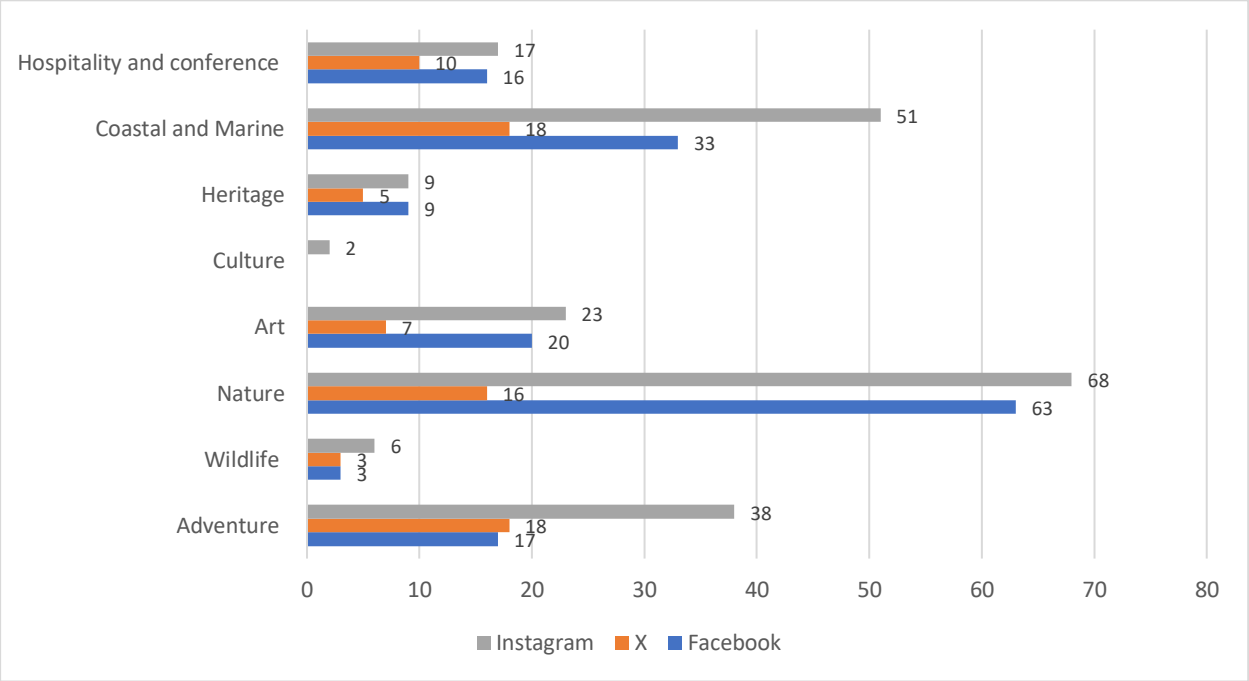
Figure 25: Posts across the platforms: Values



Overall, as shown in Figure 26, the codes that featured prominently, occurring in the posts across all social media platforms collectively for the *product* category were *nature, coastal and marine,* and *adventure*. On Instagram, the code *nature* was featured most frequently (n=68), and slightly less on Facebook (n=63). The most featured code on X was *coastal and marine*.

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Figure 26: Posts across the platforms: Product



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6.3.4.3. ECPTA

The themes, categories and corresponding codes that guided the ECPTA's social media content analysis process, are summarised in Table 55. This table provides the engagement metric and content format utilised for the analysis. Each post was assessed to determine its composition elements attributable to any of the categories and codes related to the two main themes, namely, *strategy* and *brand identity*.

Table 55: Data summary of ECPTA

Social media platforms	Themes	Categories	Codes	Engagement matric	Content format
Facebook X Instagram	STRATEGY	Vision	Economic growth Sustainability	Like Comment Share	Text Photo
		Mission	Responsible tourism		
		Positioning	Explore		
	BRAND IDENTITY	Values	Respect Integrity		
		Product	Adventure Arts Coastal and marine Culture Heritage Nature Wildlife		

A. CONTENT FORMAT AND USER ENGAGEMENT

This section presents a summary of content format and social media engagement along with platform specific details on Facebook, X, and Instagram. ***Summary of content format and social media engagement***

The analysis of user engagement with the content posted by ECPTA across Facebook, X, and Instagram was consolidated into cumulative data for 60 posts. The dataset incorporated likes, comments, shares. Across all the 60 posts examined, Instagram posts received the

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highest engagement in terms of *likes* and *comments*, while Facebook received the highest number of *shares*. The lowest user engagement count across all metrics was on the X platform (Table 56).

Table 56: Total social media engagement and content format

Social media	Likes	Comments	Share	Text	Photo
Facebook	1416	170	518	60	55
X	269	11	89	60	49
Instagram	105757	237		60	60

Platform specific details

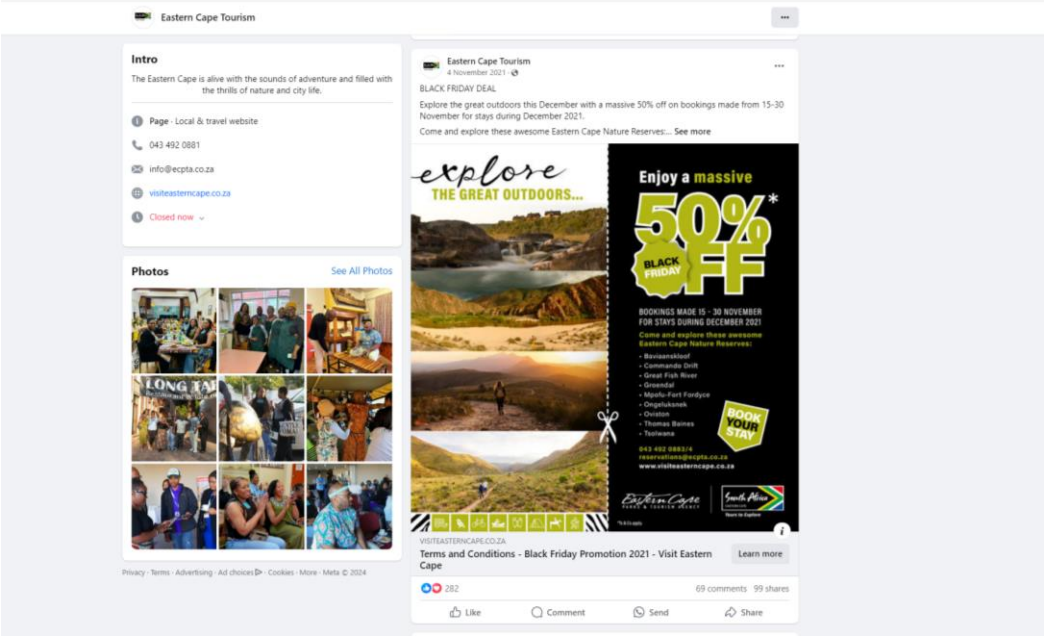
Facebook

Likes, comments, and shares

Across all user engagement metrics, *likes*, *comments* and *share*, there was one post that received the highest count on the three metrics. The post was composed of elements attributable to the codes based on the *values* category's *respect,* and *quality* codes. In terms of the *product* category, the post showcased *coastal and marine* attractions of the Eastern Cape. This post was disseminated using a text and a photo (Table 57). The image in Figure 27 is the actual post which was posted on 04/11/2021, showing the text and image together with the post's engagement metrics.

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Figure 27: Facebook post engagement



Source: https://www.facebook.com/tourismEC

Table 57: Most liked, commented, and shared post: Facebook

Positioning	Product	Content format	Likes	Comments	Shares
Explore	Nature, adventure	Photo, text	283	69	99

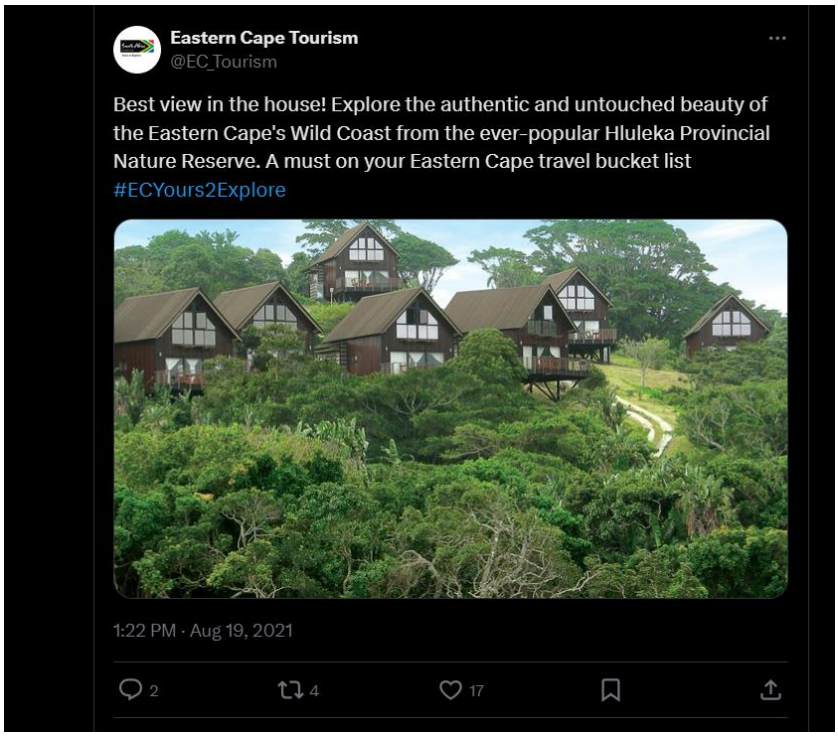
X

Likes and shares

There was one post that received the most user engagement across the two user engagement metrics (*likes*, and *shares*). The post contained elements attributable to specific codes that were created, based on the *positioning* category's *explore*. The *value* reflected in the post was. In terms of the *product* category, the post showcased *nature, heritage, and coastal and marine*. The post was disseminated using a text and a photo (Table 58). The image in Figure 28 is the actual post which was posted on 19/08/2021, where it shows the text and image together with the post's engagement metrics.

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Figure 28: X post engagement



Source: https://x.com/EC_Tourism/status/1428316419305967620

Table 58: Most liked, and shared post: X

Positioning	Product	Content format	Likes	Shares
Explore	Nature, Hospitality and conference venues	Photo, text	17	4

Comments

The number of comments on the posts ranged between 1 and 4. Based on the low number, they were deemed insignificant and insufficient for drawing any conclusions.

Instagram

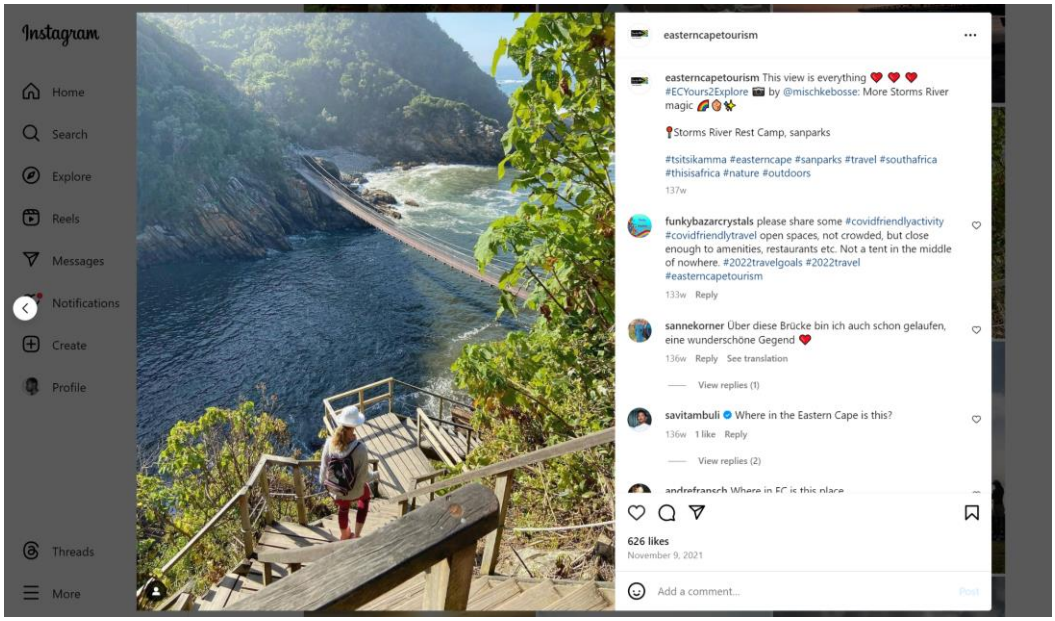
Likes

There was one post that received the most user engagement across the two user engagement metrics (*likes*, and *shares*). The post contained elements attributable to specific codes created, based on the *positioning* category's *explore*. The *value* reflected in the post was. In terms of the *product* category, the post showcased *nature, heritage, and coastal and marine*. The post was disseminated using a text and a photo (Table 59). In relation to *comments*, none of the 60 examined posts garnered more than one comment. The image

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in Figure 29 is the actual Instagram post which was posted on 09/11/2021. It shows the text and image together with the post's engagement metrics.

Figure 29: Instagram post engagement



Source: Instagram.com: https://www.instagram.com/p/CWDrJS9MBHN/

Table 59 Most liked, and shared post: Instagram

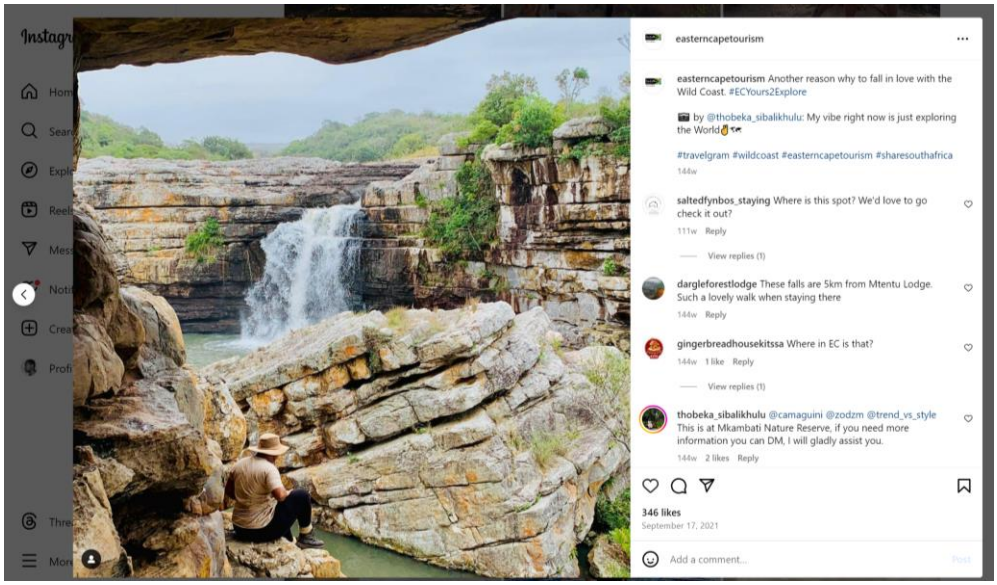
Vision	Mission	Positioning	Values	Product	Content format	Likes
Economic growth	Responsible tourism	Explore	Optimism	Nature, coastal and maritime	Photo, text	626

Comments

The post that received the highest count on *comments* contained elements attributable to the codes that were created, based on the *vision* category's *economic growth*. For the *mission* category it was *responsible tourism*, and for the *positioning* category it was the code *explore*. The *value* reflected in the post was *respect.* In terms of the *product* category, the post showcased *nature code*. The post was disseminated using a text and a photo (Table 60). The image in figure 30 is the actual Instagram post which was posted on 17/09/2021. It shows the text and image together with the post's engagement metrics.

Figure 30: Instagram post engagement

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Source: https://www.instagram.com/p/CT61jQXslZq/

The image below the engagement matrics received the highest number of *comments* (n=26).

Table 60: Most commented post: Instagram

Vision	Mission	Positioning	Values	Product	Content format	Comments
Economic growth	Responsible tourism	Explore	Respect	Nature	Photo, text	27

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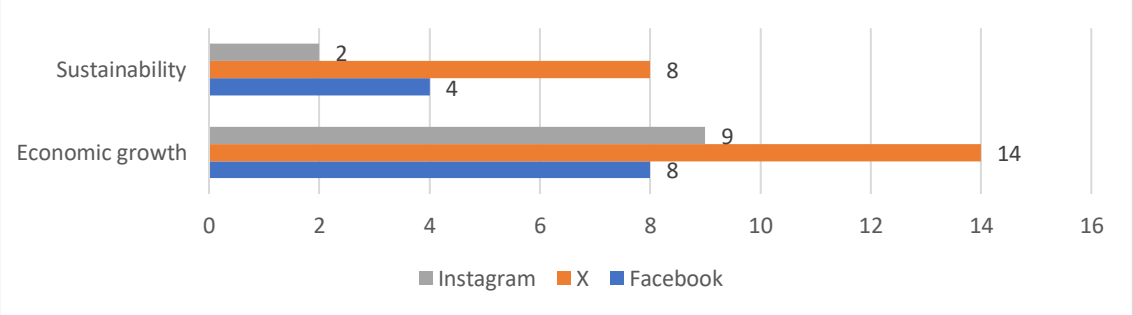
B. COMPARISON OF THE THEMES AND CODES ACROSS THE PLATFORMS

The following sections present a comparison of the frequencies with which codes occurred across Facebook, X, and Instagram.

Strategy (vision, mission, positioning)

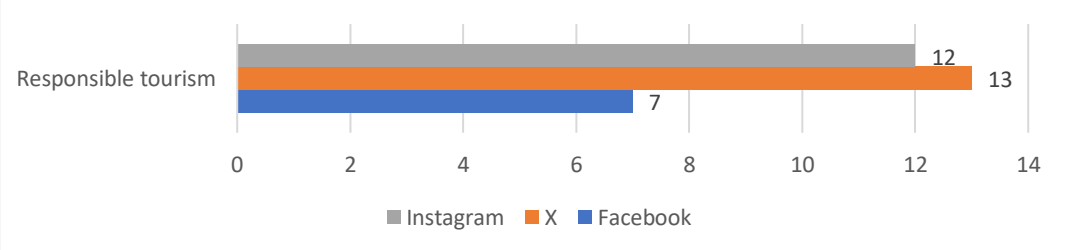
The code that occurred most frequently in the posts across all social media platforms for the *vision* category was *economic growth*. It featured most often on X (n=14), and less frequently on Instagram (n=9) and Facebook (n=8). On Instagram, the code sustainability was featured the least (n=2) (Figure 31).

Figure 31: Posts across the platforms: Vision



For the *mission* category, there was only one code, *responsible tourism*, which appeared across all social media platforms. It featured prominently on X and least on Facebook (Figure 32).

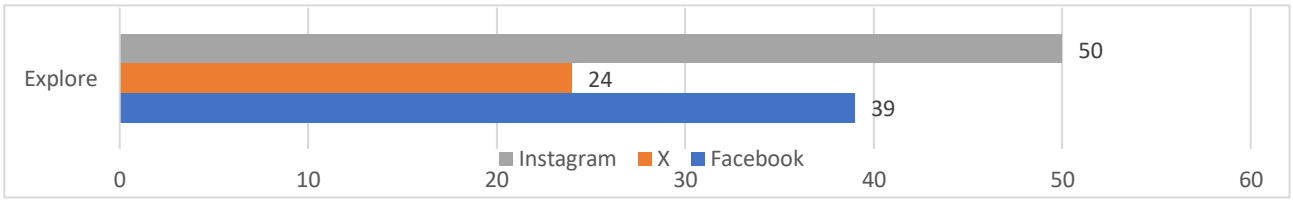
Figure 32: Posts across the platforms: Mission



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There was only one code for the *positioning* category, *explore*, which appeared across all social media platforms. It featured prominently on Instagram and received the least attention on X (Figure 33).

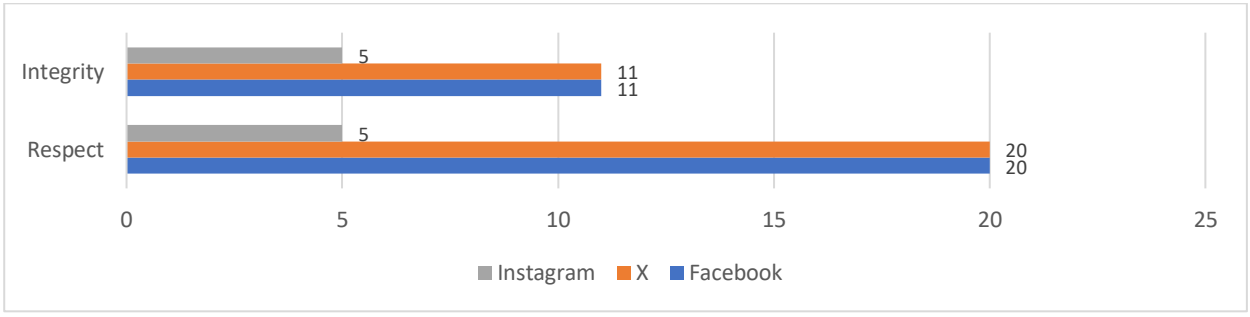
Figure 33: Posts across the platforms: Positioning



Brand identity (values, product)

The code that appeared most frequently in the posts across all social media platforms within the *values* category was *respect*. It was featured most frequently on Facebook and X, showing equal occurrences (n=20). The second code was *integrity*, which was least featured on Instagram, alongside *respec*t (n=5) (Figure 34).

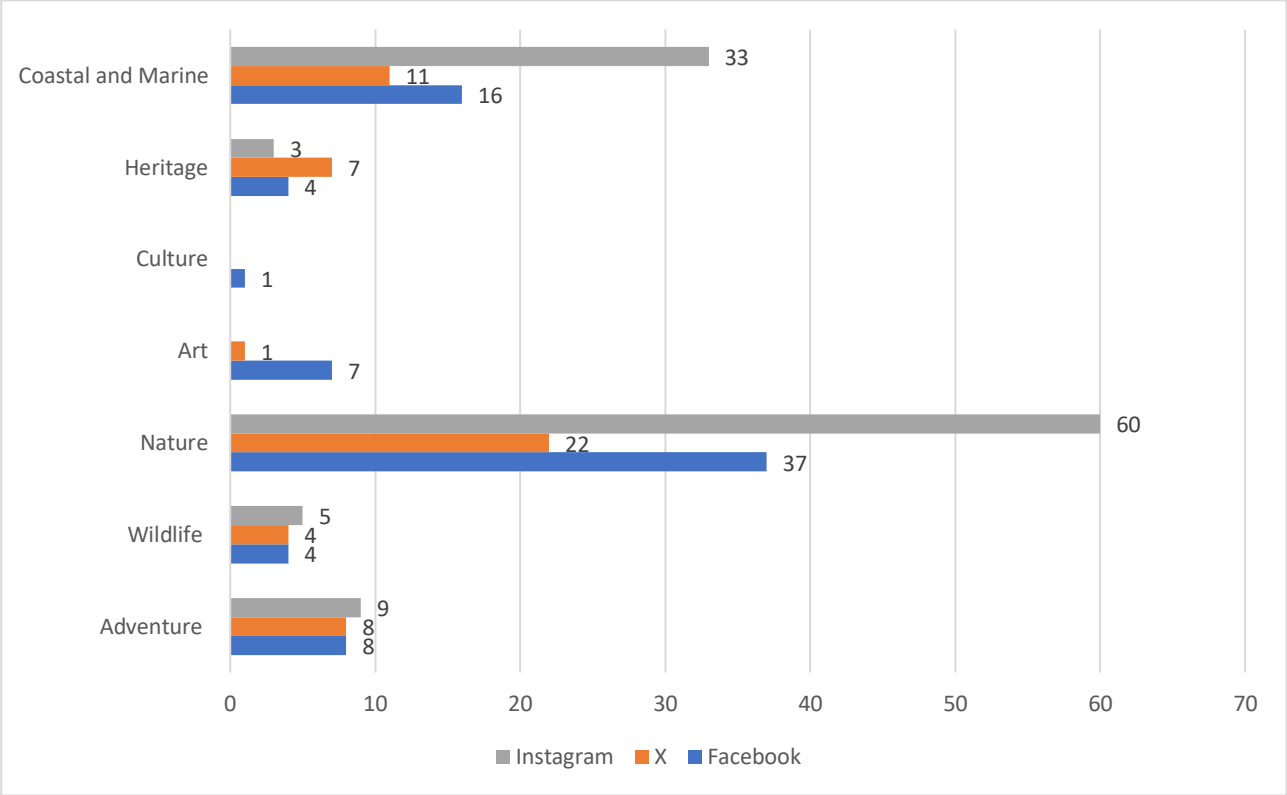
Figure 34: Posts across the platforms: Values



Overall, as shown in Figure 35, the codes that featured prominently, occurring in the posts across all social media platforms collectively for the *product* category were *nature,* and *coastal and marine*. On Instagram, the code *nature* was featured the most (n=60), and less frequently on Facebook (n=37). The least featured code was *arts*, and *culture*, not making any appearance on Instagram and X at all.

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Figure 35: Posts across the platforms: Product



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6.3.4.4. TKZN

The themes, categories and corresponding codes that guided TKZN's social media content analysis process, are summarised in Table 26. It also provides the user engagement metrics and content format used for the social content analysis. Each post was assessed to determine its composition elements attributable to any of the categories and codes related to the two main themes, namely, *strategy* and *brand identity.*

Table 61: Data summary of TKZN (*table continues on the next page)*

Social media platforms	Themes	Categories	Codes	Engagement matric	Content format
Facebook X Instagram	STRATEGY	Vision	Leading destination	Like Comment Share	Text Photo
		Mission	Demand-driven tourism development Strategic tourism marketing		
		Positioning	Culture Exceptional Heritage		
	BRAND IDENTITY	Values	Accountability Collaboration Integrity Respect Transformation Warm Welcoming		
		Product	Adventure Arts Coastal and marine Culture Heritage Hospitality and conference venues Nature Shopping, wellness and sports Wildlife		

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A. CONTENT FORMAT AND USER ENGAGEMENT

This section presents a summary of content format and social media engagement along with platform specific details on Facebook, X, and Instagram. ***Summary of content format and social media engagement***

The analysis of user engagement with the content posted by TKZN on Facebook, X, and Instagram was consolidated into cumulative data for 60 posts. The dataset incorporated likes, comments, shares. Across all the 60 posts examined, Instagram posts received the highest engagement in terms of *likes* and *comments*, while Facebook received the highest number of *comments*. The highest number of shares was seen on the X platform, which also had a significant count on *comments* (Table 62).

Table 62: Total social media engagement metrics and content format

Social media	Likes	Comments	Retweet/Share	Text	Photo
Facebook	1 670	244	258	60	60
X	1 745	52	355	60	60
Instagram	5 088	166		60	60

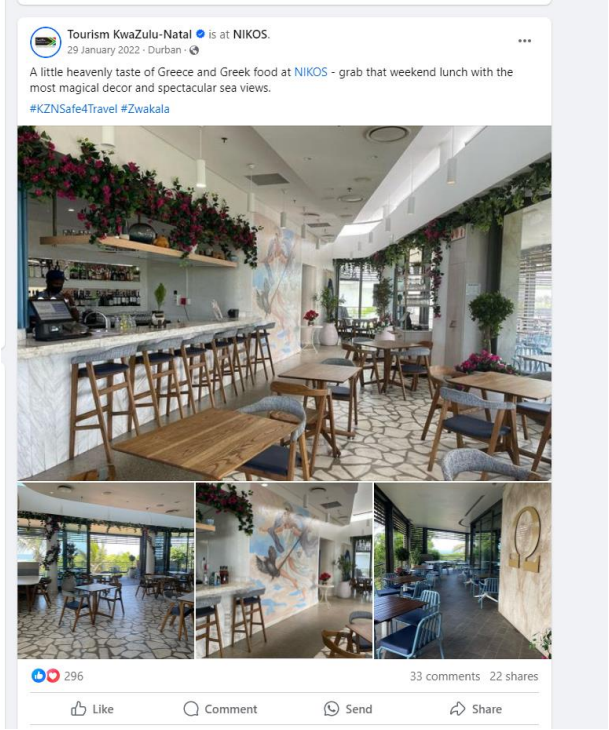
Facebook

Likes

TKZN's Facebook post that garnered the highest number of *likes*, contained elements attributable to the *vision* category's *leading destination.* The *mission* code was *strategic tourism marketing*, *positioning* category had the code *exceptional*, and the *values* reflected in the post were *welcoming* and *collaboration*. In terms of the *product* category, the post showcased *hospitality and conference* attractions of South Africa. The post was disseminated using a text and a photo (Table 63). The image in Figure 36 is the actual post which was posted on 29/01/2022 and shows the text and image together with the post's engagement metrics.

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Figure 36: Facebook post engagement



Source: https://www.facebook.com/photo/?fbid=4789100674491637&set=a.299154456819637

Table 63: Most liked post: Facebook

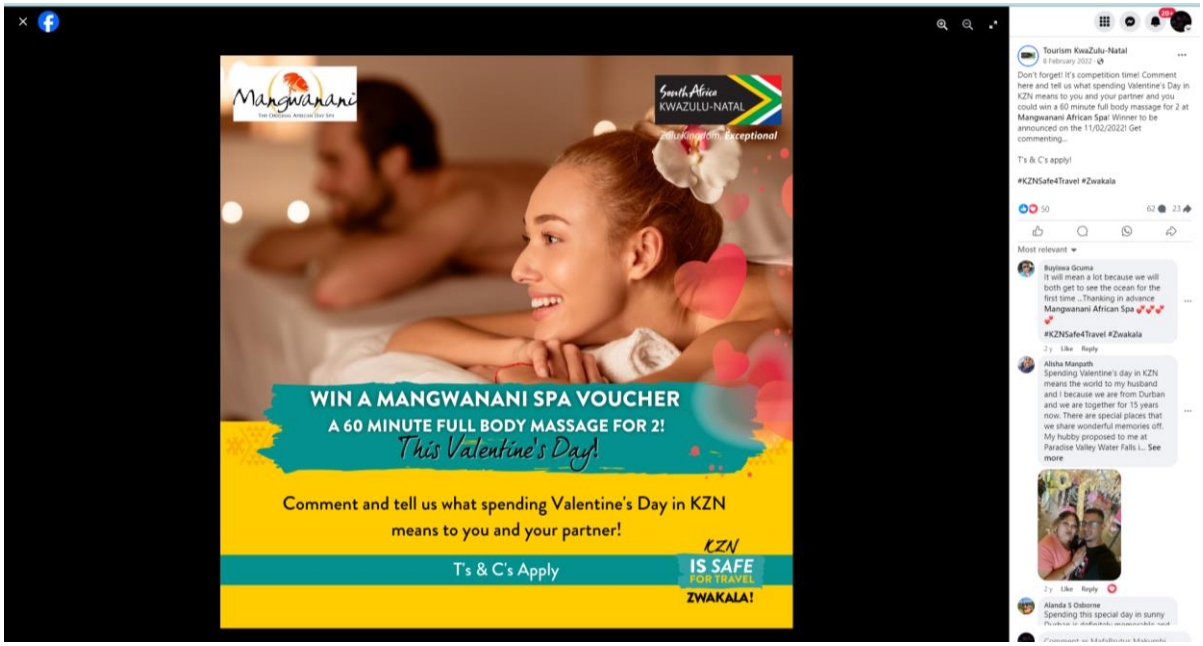
Vision	Mission	Positioning	Values	Product	Content format	Likes
Leading destination	Strategic tourism marketing	Exceptional	Welcoming, collaboration	Hospitality and conference	Photo, text	296

Comments and shares

TKZN's Facebook post that received the highest count of *comments* also garnered the highest number of *shares*, and contained elements attributable to the *mission* category's *demand-driven tourism development.* The *positioning* category had the code *exceptional*. The *values* reflected in the post were *warm, welcoming* and *collaboration*. In terms of the *product* category, the post showcased *hospitality and conference, shopping, wellness and sports* attractions of KwaZulu Natal. The post was disseminated using a text and a photo (Table 64). The image in Figure 37 is the actual post which was posted on 08/02/2022, showing the text and image together with the post's engagement metrics.

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Figure 37: Facebook post engagement



Source: https://www.facebook.com/photo/?fbid=4789100674491637&set=a.299154456819637

Table 64: Most commented and shared post: Facebook

Mission	Positioning	Values	Product	Content format	Comments	Shares
Demand-driven tourism development	Exceptional	Warm, welcoming, collaboration	Hospitality and conference, Shopping, wellness and sports	Photo, text	63	54

X

Likes, comments, and shares

The post that received the highest user engagement across all metrics (*likes, comments*, and *shares*) contained elements attributable to the *vision's* code *leading destination, value's* codes *welcoming, collaboration, and* for *positioning*, the code was *exceptional*. In terms of the *product* category, the post showcased *coastal and marine* attractions of KwaZulu Natal. The post was disseminated using both text and photo (Table 65). The image in Figure 38 is the actual post which was posted on 19/02/2022 where it shows the text and image together with the post's engagement metrics.

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Figure 38: X post engagement



Source: https://x.com/FilmInKZN/status/1829518290655601030

Table 65: Most liked, commented, and shared post: X

Vision	Mission	Positioning	Values	Product	Content format	Likes	Comments	Shares
Leading destination	Demand-driven tourism, tourism	Exceptional	Welcoming, collaboration	Coastal and marine	Photo, text	30	3	13

Comments

The number of comments on the posts ranged between 1 and 4. Based on the low number they were deemed insignificant and insufficient for drawing any conclusions.

Instagram

The Instagram post with the highest user engagement in terms of *likes* and *comments* contained elements attributable to *vision's* code *leading destination*. For *positioning*, the code was *exceptional*. *Value* reflected in the post were *welcoming, respect,* and *collaboration.* In terms of the *product* category, the post showcased *shopping, wellness and sports* attractions of KwaZulu Natal. The post was disseminated using both text and photo

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(Table 66). The image in Figure 39 is the actual Instagram post which was posted on 27/01/2022, showing the text and image together with the post's engagement metrics.

Figure 39: Instagram post engagement



Source: https://www.instagram.com/p/CZPFNZpMXLn/

Table 66: Most commented and shared post: Instagram

Vision	Positioning	Values	Product	Content format	Likes	Comments
Leading destination	Exceptional	Welcoming, respect, collaboration	Shopping, wellness and sports	Photo, text	1 600	63

B. COMPARISON OF THE THEMES AND CODES ACROSS THE PLATFORMS

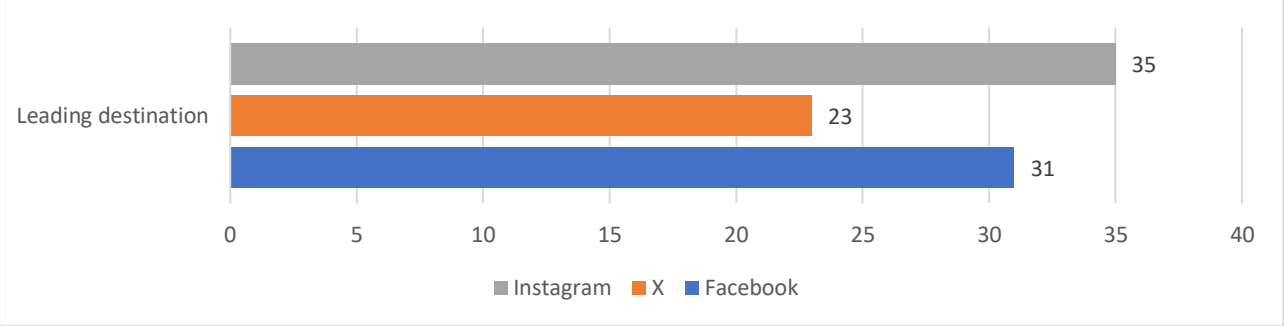
The following sections present the comparison of the frequencies at which codes occurred across Facebook, X, and Instagram.

Strategy (vision, mission, positioning)

For the *vision* category, there was only one code, *leading destination*, which appeared across all social media platforms. It featured prominently on Facebook (n=35) and least on Instagram (n=23), (Figure 40).

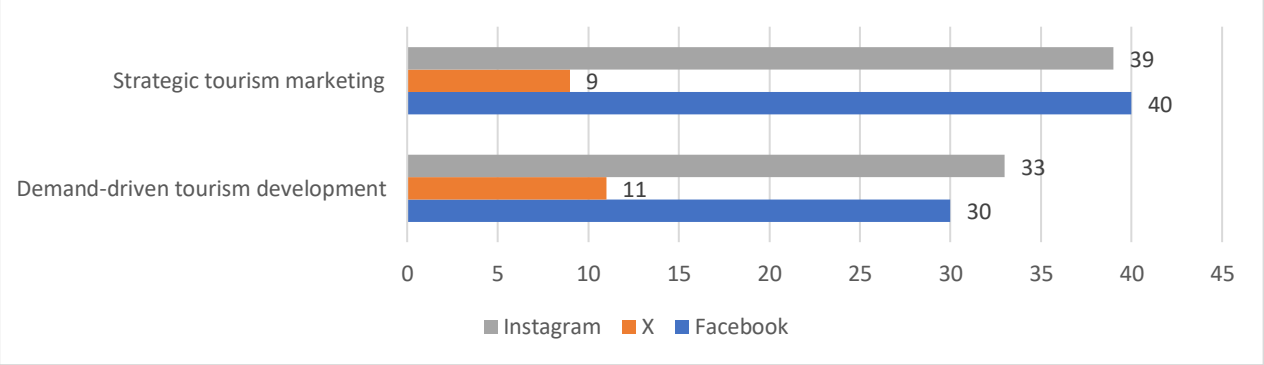
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Figure 40: Posts across the platforms: Vision



The code that occurred most frequently in the posts across all social media platforms for the *mission* category was *strategic tourism marketing*. It featured prominently on Facebook and Instagram (n=40, n=39, respectively). On X, the code *strategic tourism marketing* was least featured (n=9) (Figure 40).

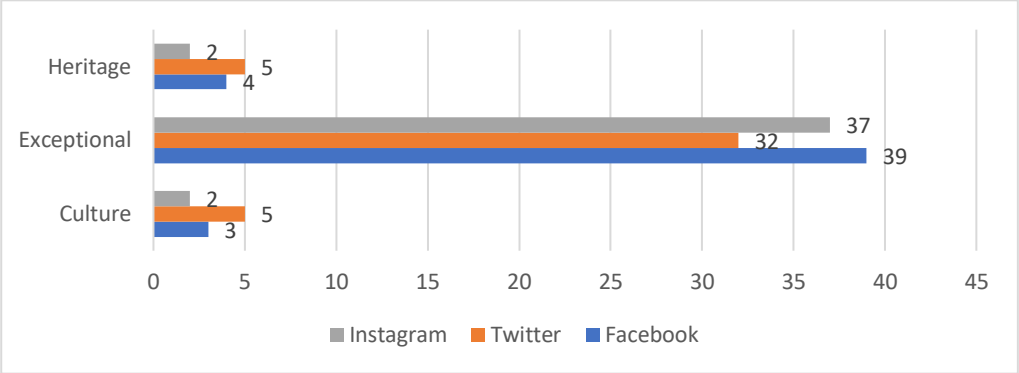
Figure 41: Posts across the platforms: Mission



The code that featured most frequently in the posts across all social media platforms for the *positioning* category was *exceptional*. It occurred most often on Facebook (n=39), Instagram (n=37) and X (n=32). The codes *heritage* and *culture* were least featured across all platforms (Figure 42).

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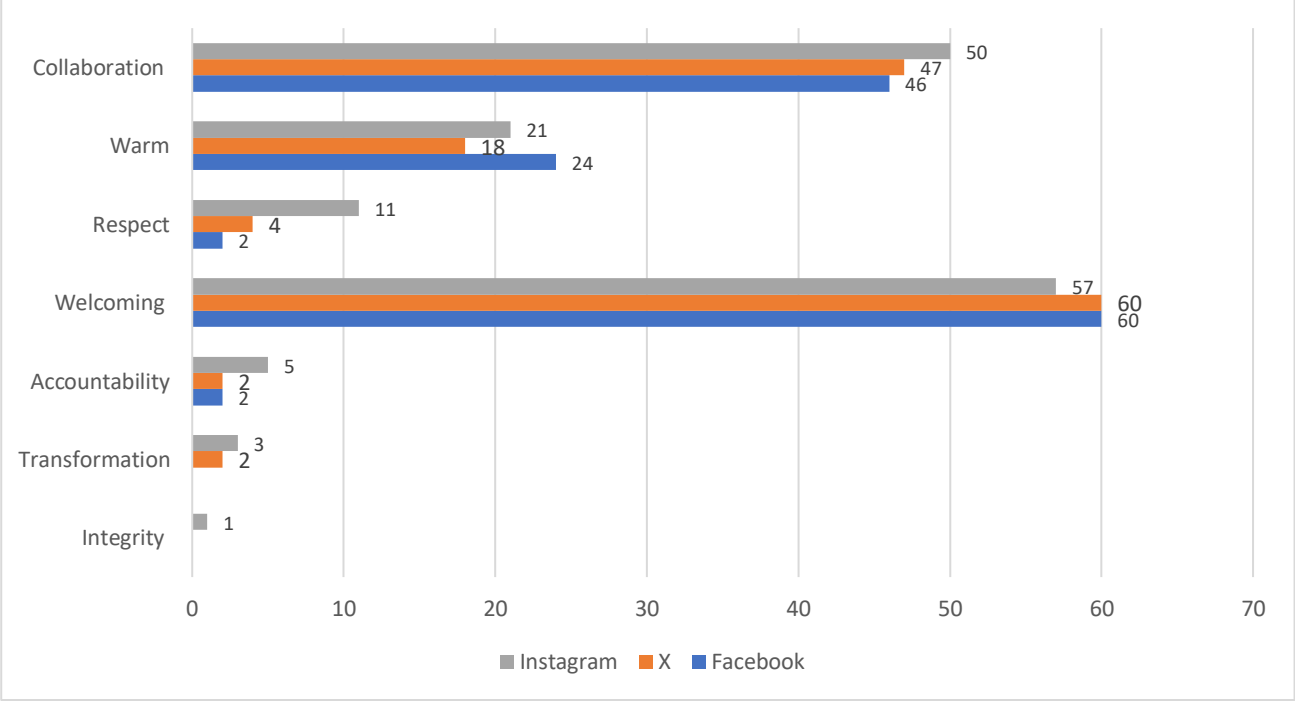
Figure 42: Posts across the platforms: Positioning



Brand identity (values, product)

The codes occurring most frequently in the posts across all social media platforms for the *value* category, *welcoming,* and *collaboration*. The *welcoming* code featured most prominently on Facebook and X (n=60). The least featured code was *integrity*, only appearing on Instagram (Figure 43).

Figure 43: Posts across the platforms: Values

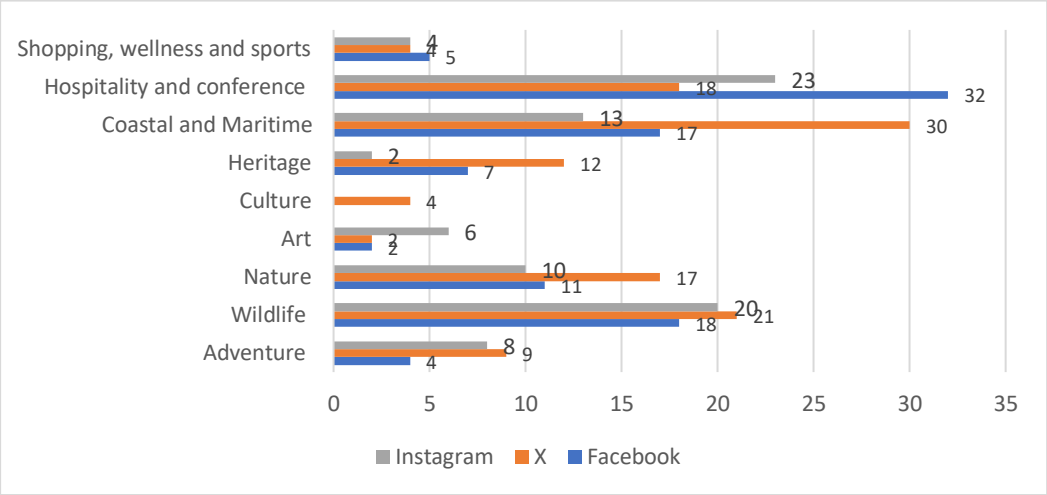


Overall, as shown in Figure 44, the codes that featured prominently, occurring in the posts across all social media platforms collectively for the *product* category, were *hospitality and*

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conference venues, coastal and marine, and *wildlife*. On Facebook, the code *hospitality and conference venues,* was featured most prominently (n=32), while on X it was *coastal and marine.*

Figure 44: Posts across the platforms: Product



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6.3.4.5. MTPA

The themes, categories and corresponding codes that guided MTPA's social media content analysis process, are summarised in Table 67. This table provides the engagement metric and content format utilised for the analysis. Each post was assessed to determine its composition elements attributable to any of the categories and codes related to the two main themes, namely, *strategy* and *brand identity.*

Table 67: Data summary of MTPA

Social media platforms	Themes	Categories	Codes	Engagement matric	Content format
Facebook X Instagram	STRATEGY	Vision	Wildlife World class	Like Comment Share	Text Photo
		Mission	Sustainable tourism growth		
		Positioning	Nature		
	BRAND IDENTITY	Values	Integrity Quality Teamwork		
		Product	Adventure Culture Heritage Hospitality and conference venues Nature Wildlife		

A. CONTENT FORMAT AND USER ENGAGEMENT

This section presents a summary of content format and social media engagement along with platform specific details on Facebook, X, and Instagram.

Summary of content format and social media engagement

The analysis of user engagement with the content posted by MTPA on Facebook, X, and Instagram was consolidated into cumulative data for 60 posts. The dataset included metrics

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such as *likes, comments,* and *shares*. Across all 60 posts examined, Instagram posts has the highest user engagement in terms of *likes* and *comments*, while X received the highest count of *shares*. Notably, the table indicates that in terms of content format, all posts on Instagram were shared as text and photo as it is a photo-based platform. However, on Facebook and X some posts were communicated as text without accompanying photos while others were shared as photos without text descriptions (Table 68).

Table 68: Total social media engagement and content format

Social media	Likes	Comments	Share	Text	Photo
Facebook	1 041	74	163	44	58
X	431	32	194	44	53
Instagram	4 426	104		60	60

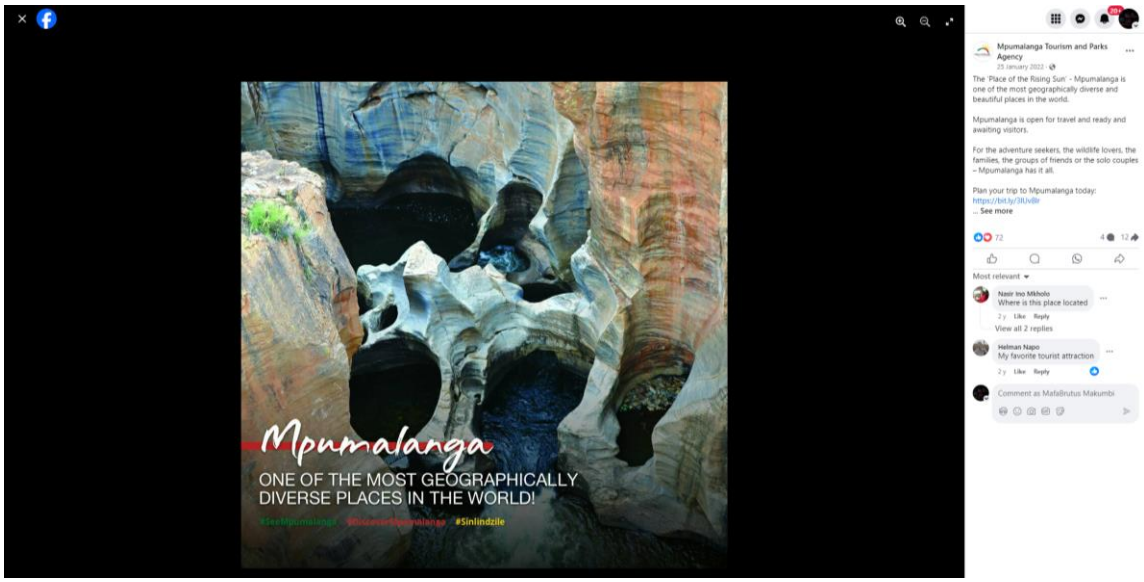
Facebook

Likes

MTPA's Facebook post that received the highest user engagement in terms of *likes* contained elements attributable to the *vision* category's *world-class.* For the *mission*, the code was *tourism growth*. The *positioning* category had the code *naturel*. The *values* reflected in the post was *quality*. In terms of the *product* category, the post showcased *nature* reinforcing Mpumalanga's natural attraction assets, which is also emphasised on *positioning*, demonstrating coherent strategy. The post was disseminated using a combination of text and photo (Table 69). The image in Figure 45 is the actual post which was posted on 25/01/2022. It shows the text and image together with the post's engagement metrics.

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Figure 45: Facebook post engagement



Source: https://www.facebook.com/photo/?fbid=4878580735525852&set=a.192304594153513

Table 69: Most liked post: Facebook

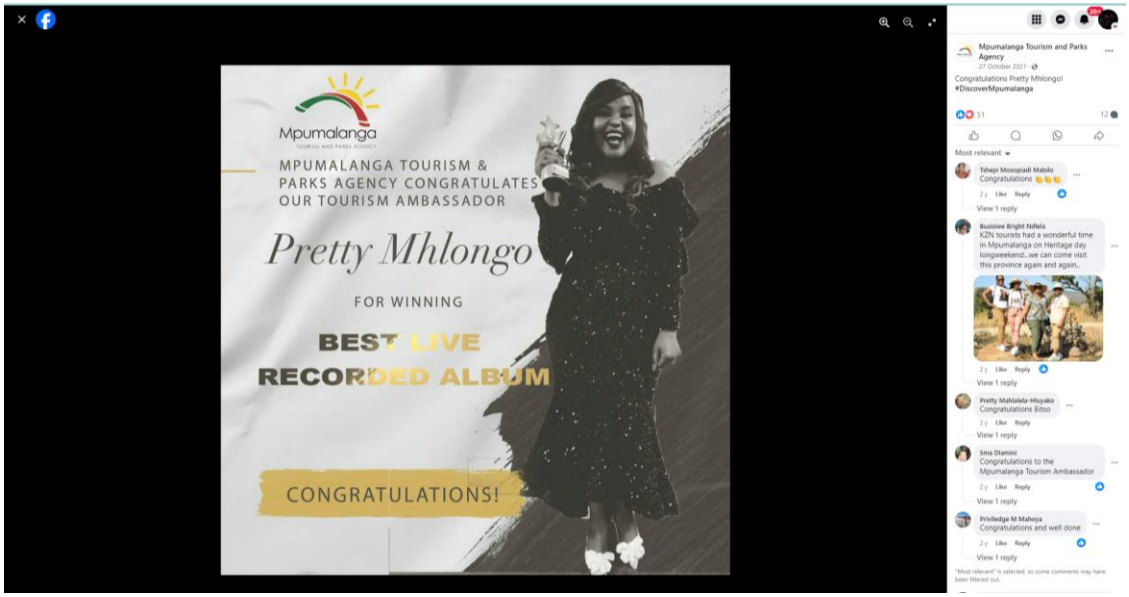
Vision	Mission	Positioning	Values	Product	Content format	Likes
World class	Sustainable tourism growth	Nature	Quality, innovative	Nature	Photo, text	74

Comments

MTPA's Facebook post that received the highest user engagement in terms of *comments* composed of elements attributable to the *values* reflected in the post were *excellent,* and *communication*. In terms of the *product* category, the post showcased *arts*. The post was disseminated using a combination of both text and photo formats (Table 70). The image in Figure 46 is the actual post which was posted on 27/10/2021, showing the text and image together with the post's engagement metrics.

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Figure 46: Facebook post engagement



Source: https://www.facebook.com/photo/?fbid=4560308380686424&set=a.192304594153513

Table 70: Most commented post: Facebook

Values	Product	Content format	Comments
Excellence, communication	Arts	Photo, text	12

Shares

MTPA's Facebook post that received the highest user engagement in terms of *shares* was made up of elements attributable to the *mission* category, having the code *sustainable tourism growth*. The *positioning* category reflected *excellent* in the post. In terms of the *product* category, the post showcased *arts*. The post was presented using a combination of both a text and a photo format (Table 71). The image in Figure 47 is the actual post which was posted on 22/10/2021. It shows the text and image together with the post's engagement metrics.

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Figure 47: Facebook post engagement



Source: https://www.facebook.com/photo/?fbid=4544337335616862&set=a.192304594153513

Table 71: Most commented post: Facebook

Mission	Values	Product	Content format	Shares
Sustainable tourism growth	Teamwork	Arts	Photo, text	15

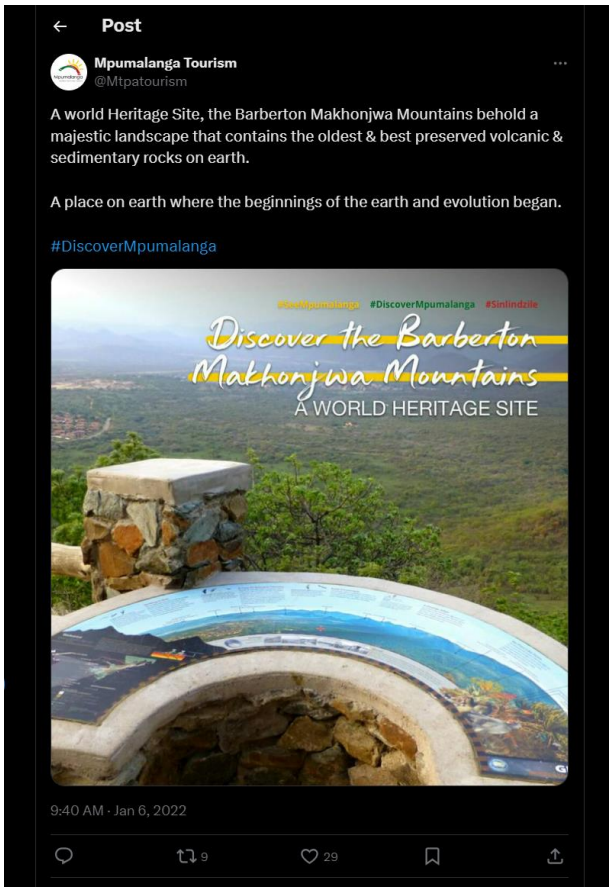
X

Likes

The X post that received the highest user engagement in terms of *likes* contained elements attributable to the *vision* category's *wildlife*. The *positioning* category had the code *heritage*, and *nature*. In terms of the *product* category, the post showcased *nature, and heritage* as key attractions in Mpumalanga. This post was conveyed in both text and photo formats (Table 72). The image in Figure 48 is the actual post which was posted on 06/01/2022. It shows the text and image together with the post's engagement metrics.

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Figure 48: X post engagement



Source: https://x.com/Mtpatourism/status/1478994755321217024

Table 72: Most liked post: X

Vision	Positioning	Product	Content format	Likes
Wildlife	Nature	Nature, heritage	Photo, text	29

Comments

The number of *comments* on the posts ranged between 1 and 3. Based on the low number, they were deemed insignificant and insufficient for drawing any conclusions.

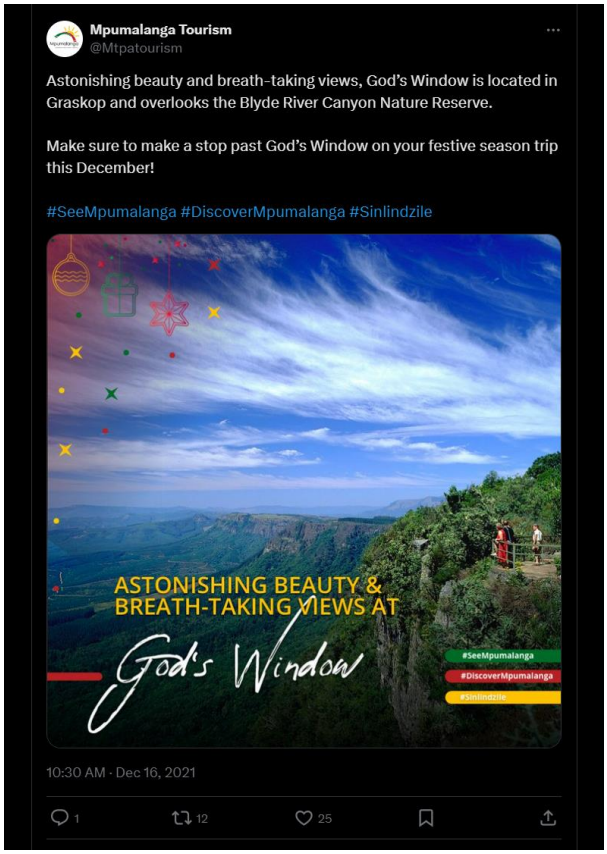
Shares

The X post that received the highest user engagement in terms of *comments* contained elements attributable to the *vision* category's *world-class.* For the *mission* category, the code was *tourism growth*. The *positioning* category had the code *nature*. The *values* reflected in the post was *quality*. In terms of the product category, the post showcased *nature* reinforcing Mpumalanga's natural attraction assets, which is also emphasised on *positioning*,

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demonstrating coherent strategy. The post was conveyed using a combination of both text and photo formats (Table 73). The image in Figure 49 is the actual post which was posted on 16/12/2022, showing the text and image together with the post's engagement metrics.

Figure 49: X post engagement



Source: https://x.com/Mtpatourism/status/1471397231299342336

Table 73: Table 74: Most shared post: X

Vision	Mission	Positioning	Values	Product	Content format	Shares
World class	Sustainable tourism growth	Nature	Quality	Nature	Photo, text	12

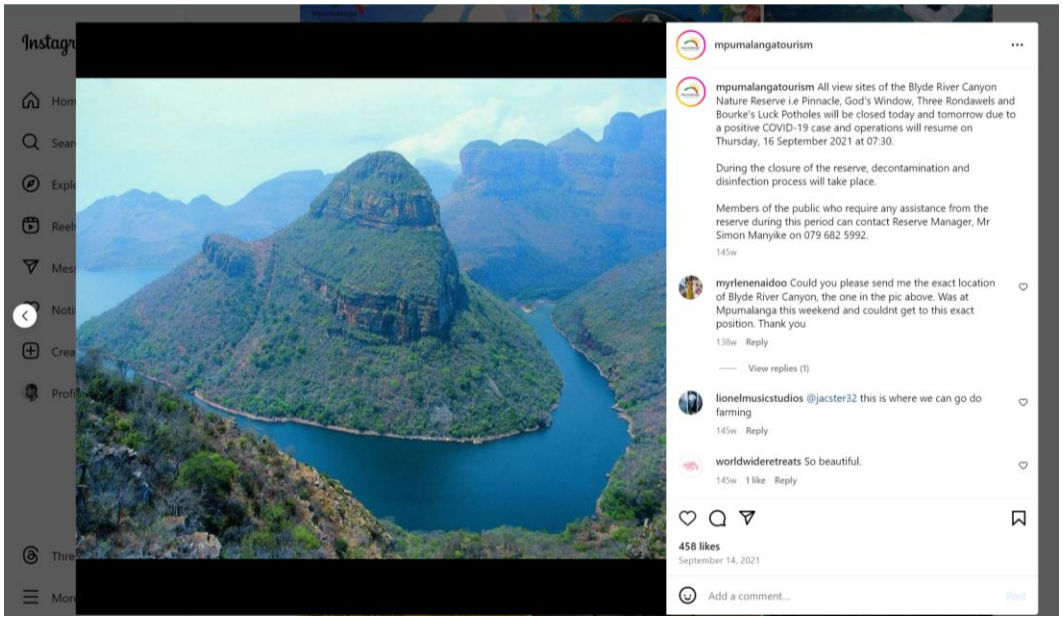
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Instagram

Likes

The Instagram post that received the highest user engagement in terms of *likes* contained elements attributable to the *vision* category's *wildlife, and world-class* codes. For the *mission*, the code was *tourism growth*. The *positioning* category had the code *nature*. The *values* reflected in the post was *quality*. In terms of the *product* category, the post showcased *nature,* reinforcing the attraction of Mpumalanga's natural assets. This is also emphasised on *positioning*, indicating a coherent strategy. The post was conveyed using a combination of both text and photo formats (Table 75). The image in Figure 50 is the actual Instagram post which was posted on 14/09/2021, where it shows the text and image together with the post's engagement metrics.

Figure 50: Instagram post engagement



Source: https://www.instagram.com/p/CTysgCtsuWk/

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Table 75: Most liked post: Instagram

Vision	Mission	Positioning	Values	Product	Content format	Likes
Wildlife, world class	Sustainable tourism growth	Nature	Quality	Nature	Photo, text	458

Comments

The Instagram post that received the highest user engagement in terms of *likes* contained elements attributable to the *vision* category's *wildlife, and world-class* codes, and for the *mission*, the code was *tourism growth*. The *positioning* category had the code *nature*. The *value* category reflected in the post were *quality*. In terms of the *product* category, the post showcased *hospitality and conference venues* reinforcing Mpumalanga's natural attraction assets. This is also emphasised on *positioning*, indicating a coherent strategy. The post was conveyed using a combination of textual and photographic formats (Table 76). The image in Figure 51 is the actual Instagram post, showing the text and image together with the post's engagement metrics.

Figure 51: Instagram post engagement



Source: https://www.instagram.com/p/CToeoupgzx7/

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Table 76: Most commented post: Instagram

Vision	Mission	Positioning	Values	Product	Content format	Comments
Wildlife, world class	Sustainable tourism growth	Adventure	Quality	Hospitality and conference venues	Photo, text	39

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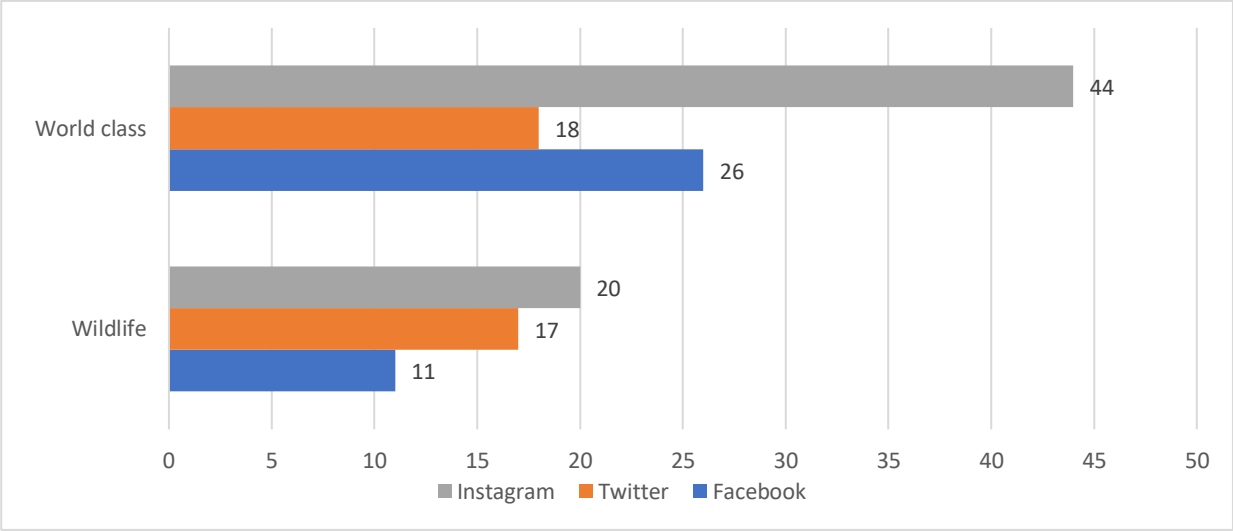
B. COMPARISON OF THE THEMES AND CODES ACROSS THE PLATFORMS

The following sections present the comparison of the frequencies at which codes occurred across Facebook, X, and Instagram.

Strategy (vision, mission, positioning)

Across all social media platforms, the code that occurred most frequently was *vision* category's *world-class* code. Instagram had the highest count relating to the posts containing elements attributable to the code *world-class,* while the lowest count was seen on Facebook with the code *wildlife* (Figure 52).

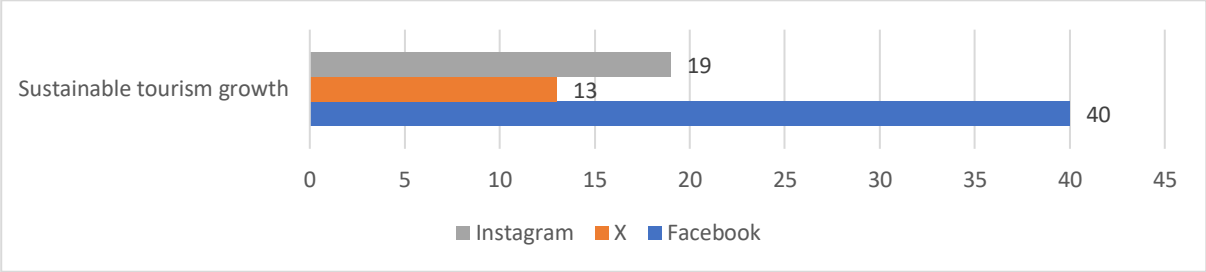
Figure 52: Posts across the platforms: Vision



The *mission* category only had one code, *sustainable tourism growth,* which was contained in the posts updated across the three platforms. Facebook had the highest count relating to the posts containing elements attributable to the code *tourism growth,* while the lowest count was seen on X for the code *wildlife* (Figure 53).

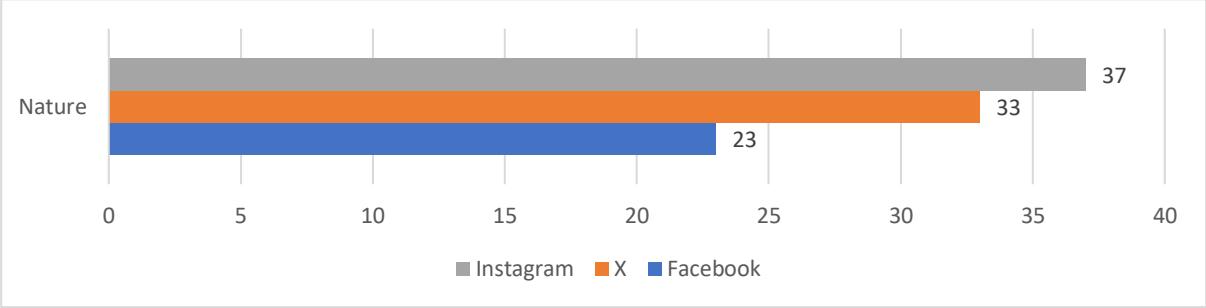
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Figure 53: Posts across the platforms: Mission



The *positioning* category only had one code, *nature,* which was contained in the posts updated across the three platforms. X had the highest count relating to the posts containing elements attributable to the code *nature,* while the lowest count was seen on Facebook for the code *wildlife* (Figure 54).

Figure 54: Posts across the platforms: Positioning

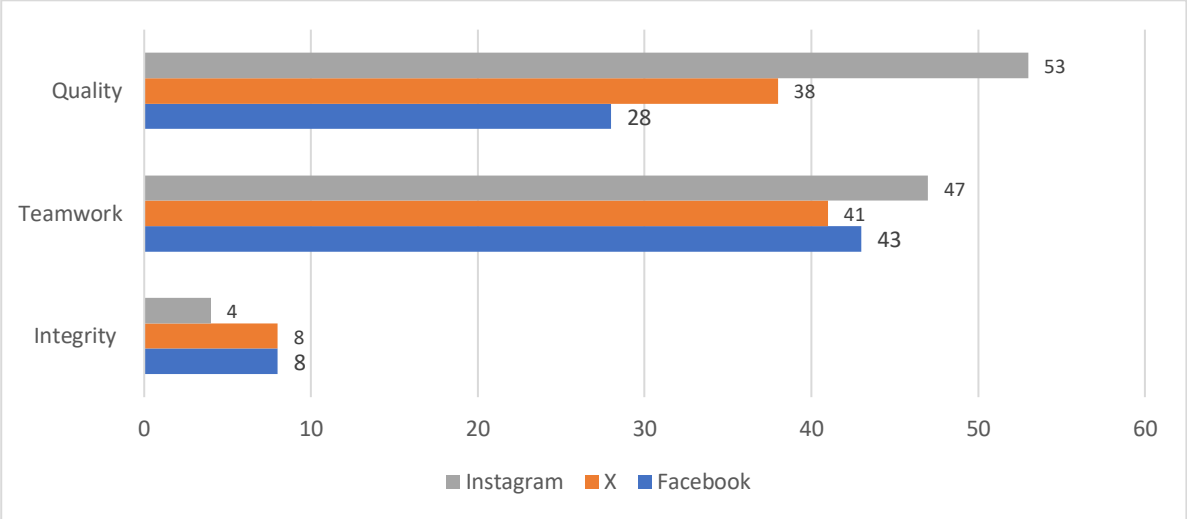


Strategy (values, product)

The code that most often occurred on Instagram for the *value* category was *quality*, while the lowest count was seen on Instagram for the code *integrity* (Figure 55).

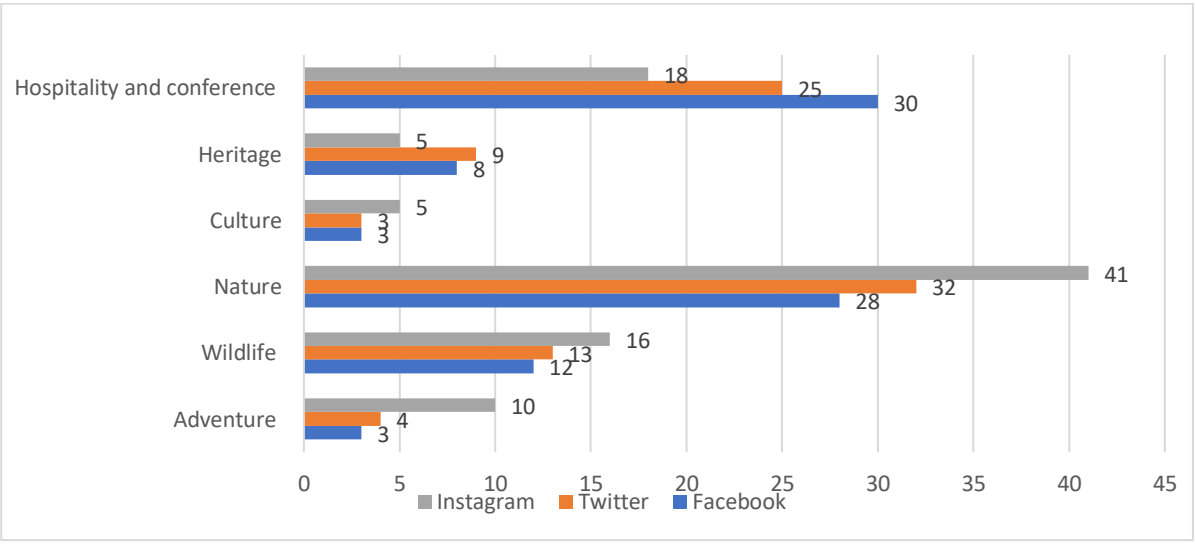
© University of Pretoria

Figure 55: Posts across the platforms: Values



The code that occurred most often in the posts across all social media platforms for the *product* category was *nature*. Instagram had the highest count relating to the posts containing elements attributable to the code *nature* (n=41), while the lowest count was seen on Facebook for the code *shopping, wellness and sports* contained in a single post (Figure 56).

Figure 56: Posts across the platforms: Product



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6.3.4.6. GTA

The themes, categories and corresponding codes that guided GTA's social media content analysis process, are summarised in Table 77. This table provides the engagement metric and content format utilised for the analysis. Each post was assessed to determine its composition elements attributable to any of the categories and codes related to the two main themes, namely, *strategy* and *brand identity.*

Table 77: Data summary of GTA

Social media platforms	**Themes**	**Categories**	**Codes**	**Engagement matric**	**Content format**
Facebook X Instagram	STRATEGY	Vision	Experience	Like Comment Share	Text Photo
		Mission	World class Tourism growth		
		Positioning	Starts here		
	BRAND IDENTITY	Values	Corporate governance Excellence Integrity Passion Transformation and sustainability		
		Product	Adventure Arts Culture Heritage Hospitality and conference venues Nature Wildlife		

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A. CONTENT FORMAT AND USER ENGAGEMENT

This section presents a summary of content format and social media engagement along with platform specific details on Facebook, X, and Instagram***Summary of content format and social media engagement***

The analysis of user engagement with the content posted by GTA on Facebook, X, and Instagram was consolidated into cumulative data for 60 posts. The dataset included metrics, such as likes, comments, shares. Across all 60 examined posts, Instagram posts had the highest user engagement in terms of likes and comments, while X received the highest count of shares. Notably, in Table 78, it can be seen that all the posts on Instagram were presented as text and photo, as it is a photo-based platform. However, for Facebook and X some posts were communicated as text without accompanying photos, while others were shared as photos without text descriptions (Table 78).

Table 78: Total social media engagement and content format

Social media	Likes	Comments	Share	Text	Photo
Facebook	167	10	41	54	52
X	528	25	158	50	51
Instagram	1 097	27		60	60

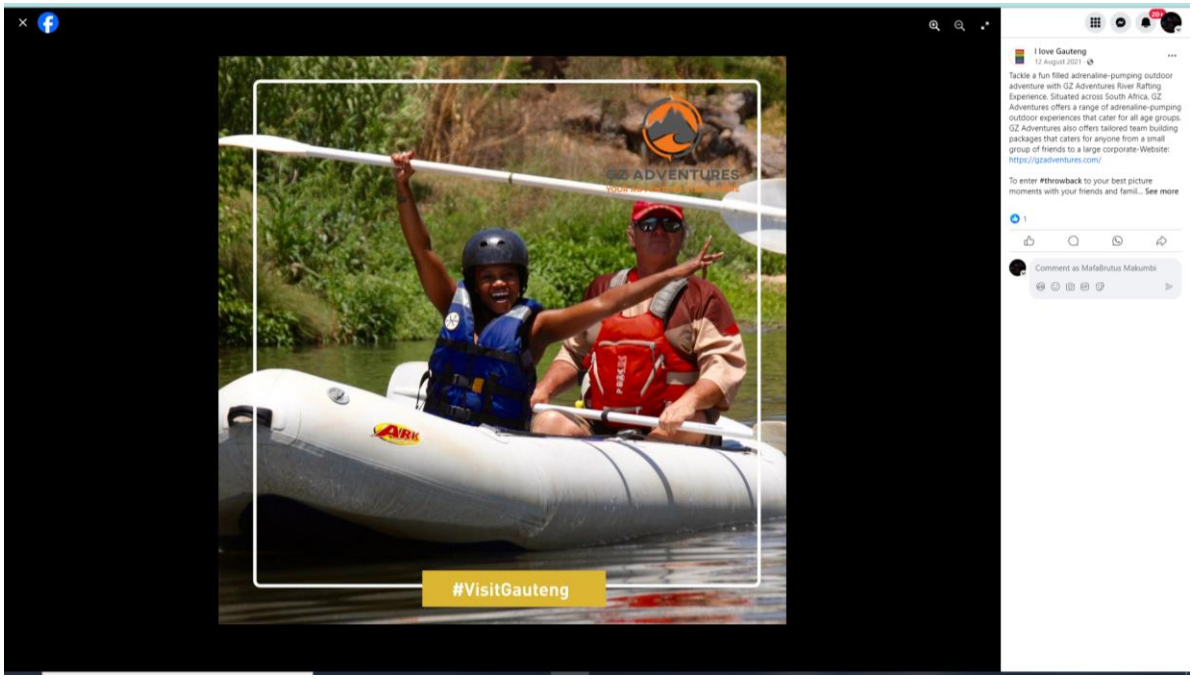
Facebook

Likes

GTA's Facebook post that received highest user engagement in terms of *likes* contained elements attributable to the *vision* category's *experience.* For the *mission*, the code was *world-class*. The *positioning* category had the code *starts here*. The *value* reflected in the post were *passion*. In terms of the *product* category, the post showcased *Hospitality and conference venues*. The post was communicated using a combination of text and photographs (Table 79) and disseminated using a text and a photo (Table 83). The image in Figure 57 is the actual post which was posted on 12/08/2021, reflecting the text and image together with the post's engagement metrics.

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Figure 57: Facebook post engagement



Source: https://www.facebook.com/photo/?fbid=4627734347276802&set=a.182703541779927

Table 79: Most liked post: Facebook

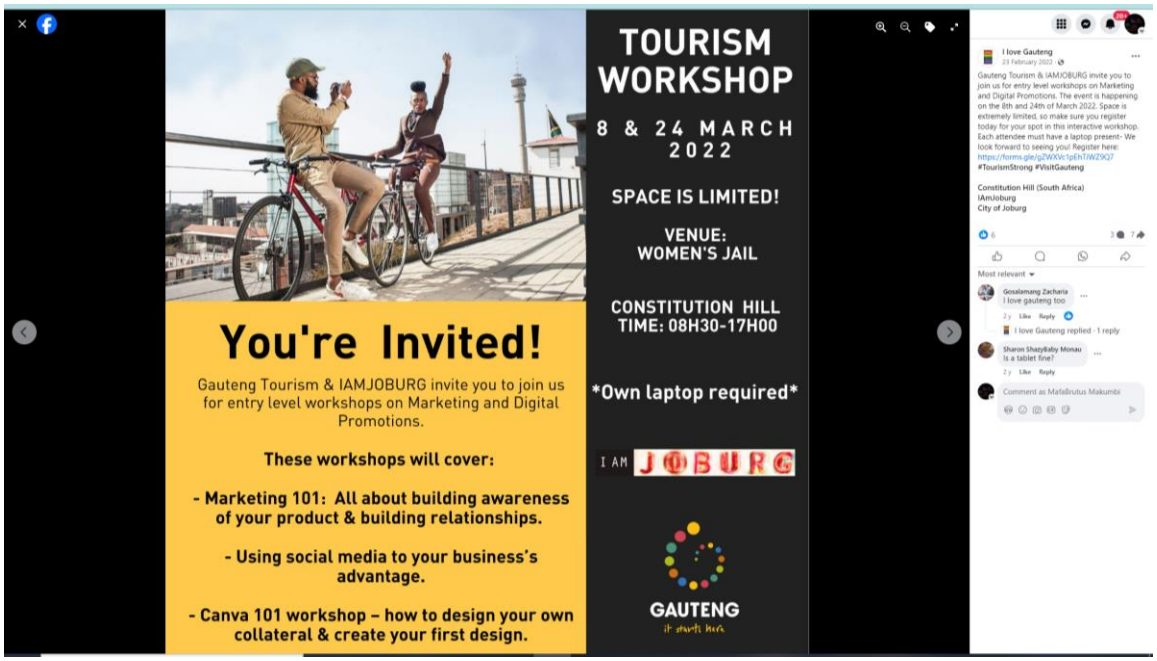
Vision	Mission	Positioning	Values	Product	Content format	Likes
Experience	World class	Starts here	Passion	Hospitality and conference venues	Photo, text	12

Comments and Shares

GTA's Facebook post that received the highest user engagement in terms of *likes* and *comments* (same post) contained elements attributable to the *vision* category's *experience.* For the *mission*, the code was *world-class, and tourism growth*. The *positioning* category had the code *starts here*. The *value* reflected in the post were *passion*. In terms of *product* category, the post showcased *Hospitality and conference venues*. The post was communicated using a combination of text and photographs (Table 80). The image in Figure 58 is the actual post which was posted on 23/02/2022, showing the text and image together with the post's engagement metrics.

Figure 58: Facebook post engagement

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Source: https://www.facebook.com/photo/?fbid=262551169396906&set=a.234542302197793

Table 80: Most commented and shared post: Facebook

Vision	Mission	Positioning	Values	Product	Content format	Comments	Shares
Experience	World class, tourism growth	Starts here	Passion	Hospitality and conference venues	Photo, text	5	6

X

Likes, and shares

GTA's X post that received highest user engagement in terms of *likes, comments*, and shares (same post) contained elements attributable to the *mission*, with the code *tourism growth. Value* category reflected in the post were *passion,* and *alliance and partnership*. In terms of the *product* category, the post showcased *hospitality and conference venues.* The post was communicated using a combination of text and photographs (Table 81). The post was disseminated using a text and a photo (Table 81). The image in Figure 59 is the actual post which was posted on 01/03/2022, reflecting the text and image together with the post's engagement metrics.

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Figure 59: X post engagement



Source: https://x.com/visitgauteng/status/1498598753342791682

Table 81: Most liked, commented, and shared post: Facebook

Mission	Values	Product	Content format	Likes	Shares
Tourism growth	Passion, alliance and partnership	Hospitality and conference venues	Photo, text	28	8

Comments

The number of comments on the posts ranged between 1 and 3. Based on the low number they were deemed insignificant and insufficient for drawing any conclusions.

Instagram

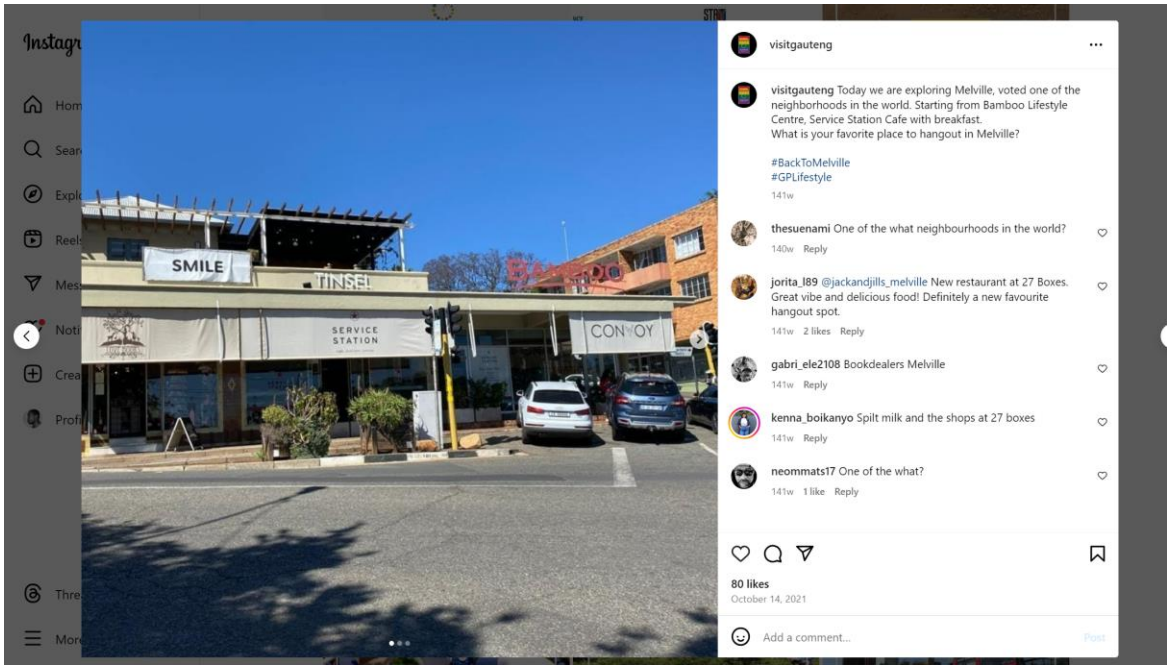
Likes

GTA's Instagram post that received the highest user engagement in terms of *likes* contained elements attributable to the *vision* category's *experience,* while for the *mission*, the code was *world-class, and tourism growth*. In terms of the *product* category, the post showcased *hospitality and conference venues*. The post was communicated using a combination of text

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and photographs, which is a typical format on Instagram (Table 82). The image in Figure 60 is the actual Instagram post which was posted on 14/10/2021, showing the text and image together with the post's engagement metrics.

Figure 60: Instagram post engagement



Source: https://www.instagram.com/p/CVAQ7dBjYR1/?img_index=1

Table 82: Most liked post: Instagram

Vision	Mission	Product	Content format	Likes
Experience	World class, tourism growth	Hospitality and conference venues	Photo, text	80

Comments

GTA's Instagram post that received the highest user engagement in terms of *comments* contained elements attributable to the *vision* category's *experience.* For the *mission*, the code was *world-class*. In terms of the *product* category, the post showcased *Hospitality and conference venues*. The post was communicated using a combination of text and photographs, which is a typical format on Instagram (Table 83). The image in Figure 61 is the actual Instagram post, reflecting the text and image together with the post's engagement metrics.

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Figure 61: Instagram post engagement



Source: https://www.instagram.com/p/CZUU6iLL1xA/?img_index=1

Table 83: Most commented post: Instagram

Vision	Mission	Positioning	Values	Product	Content format	Comments
Experience	World class	Starts here	Passion	Hospitality and conference venues	Photo, text	5

B. COMPARISON OF THE THEMES AND CODES ACROSS THE PLATFORMS

The following sections present the comparison of the frequencies at which codes occurred across Facebook, X, and Instagram.

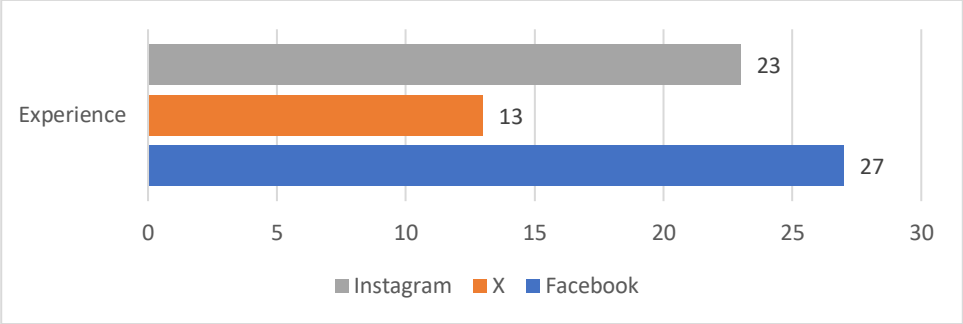
Strategy (vision, mission, positioning)

Across all social media platforms, the code that occurred most frequently was *vision* category's *experience* code. Facebook had the highest count relating to the posts containing

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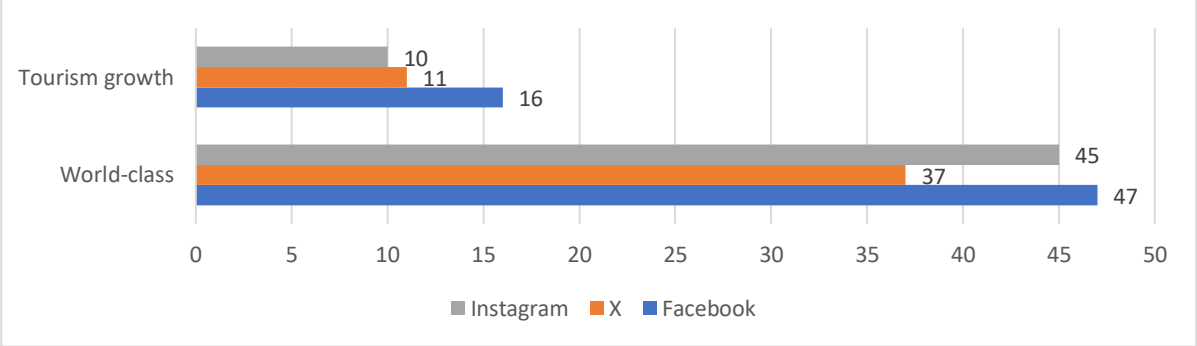
elements attributable to the code *experience* while the lowest count was seen on X (Figure 62).

Figure 62: Posts across the platforms: Vision



The code that occurred most frequently in the posts across all social media platforms for the *mission* category was *world-class*. It featured prominently on Facebook and Instagram (n=47, n=45, respectively). On Instagram, the code *tourism growth* was least featured (n=10) (Figure 63).

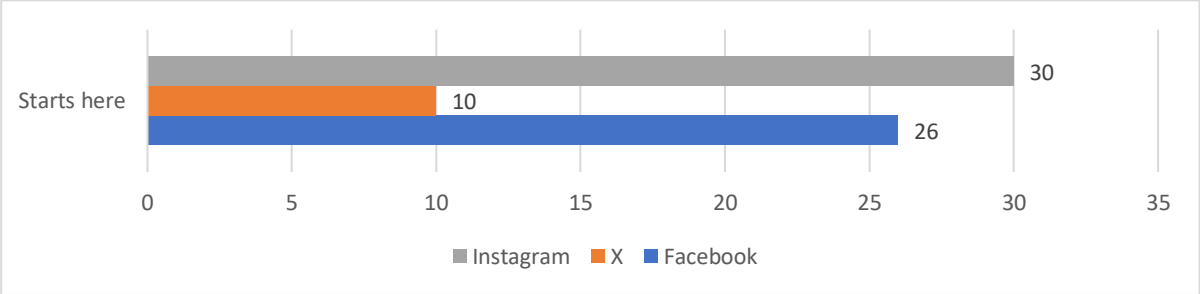
Figure 63: Posts across the platforms: Mission



The code that occurred most frequently in the posts across all social media platforms for the *positioning* category was *starts here*. It featured prominently on Instagram and Facebook (n=30, n=26, respectively). On X, the code was least featured (Figure 64).

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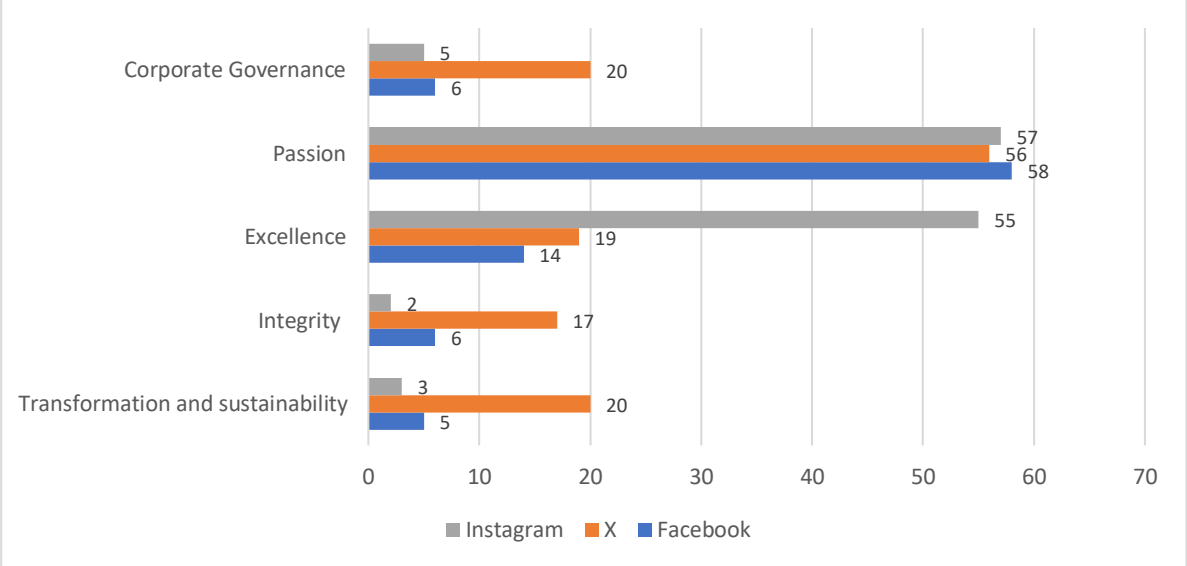
Figure 64: Posts across the platforms: Positioning



Strategy (values, product)

The code that occurred most frequently in the posts across all social media platforms within the *value* category was *passion*. This was consistent across all platforms, with each post displaying a nearly equal frequency of elements attributable to the code *passion*. On the other hand, for Instagram, the code *integrity* received the lowest count (n=2) (Figure 65).

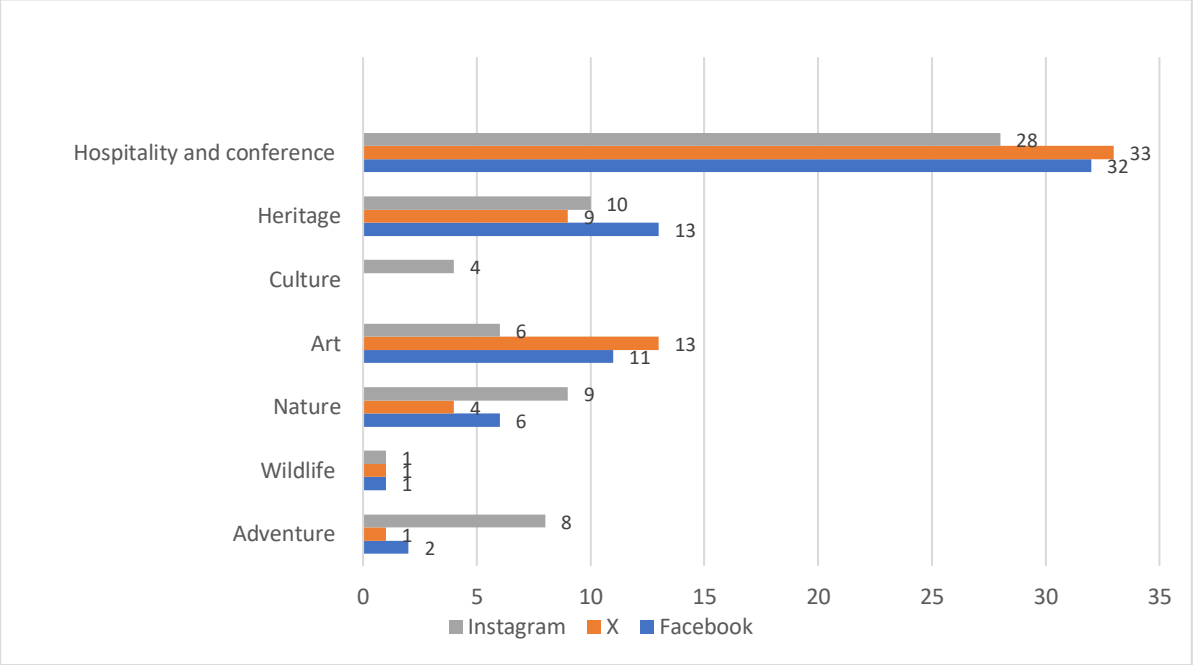
Figure 65: Posts across the platforms: Values



Overall, as shown in Figure 66, the codes that prominently featured in the posts across all social media platforms collectively for the *product* category were *Hospitality and conference venues, heritage* and *art*. On all platforms, the code *Hospitality and conference venues* received almost the same frequencies emphasising a consistent communication regarding Gauteng's key offering. In contrast the lowest count was seen across all platforms for the code *wildlife*.

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Figure 66: Posts across the platforms: Product



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6.3.4.7. LTA

The themes, categories and corresponding codes that guided LTA's social media content analysis process, are summarised in Table 84. This table provides the engagement metric and content format utilised for the analysis. Each post was assessed to determine its composition elements attributable to any of the categories and codes related to the two main themes, namely, *strategy* and *brand identity.*

Table 84: Data summary of LTA

Social media platforms	Themes	Categories	Codes	Engagement matric	Content format
Facebook X Instagram	STRATEGY	Vision	Leading destination	Like Comment Share	Text Photo
		Mission	Experience Tourism development		
		Positioning	Enjoy		
	BRAND IDENTITY	Values	Accountability Communication Excellence Learning		
		Product	Adventure Arts Culture Heritage Hospitality and conference venues Nature Wildlife		

A. CONTENT FORMAT AND USER ENGAGEMENT

This section presents a summary of content format and social media engagement along with platform specific details on Facebook, X, and Instagram

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Summary of content format and social media engagement

The analysis of user engagement with the content posted by LTA on Facebook, X, and Instagram was consolidated into cumulative data for 60 posts. The dataset included metrics such as *likes, comments*, and *shares*. Across all the 60 posts examined, Instagram posts had the highest user engagement in terms of *likes*, while Facebook was leading on the highest count on *comments* and *shares*. Notably, the table shows that in terms of content format, all posts on Instagram were shared as text and photos, as it is a photo-based platform. However, on Facebook and X some posts were communicated as text without accompanying photos while others were shared as photos without text descriptions (Table 85).

Table 85: Total social media engagement and content format

Social media	Likes	Comments	Share	Text	Photo
Facebook	2 927	333	1 528	58	60
X	2 791	82	655	54	36
Instagram	6 169	204		60	60

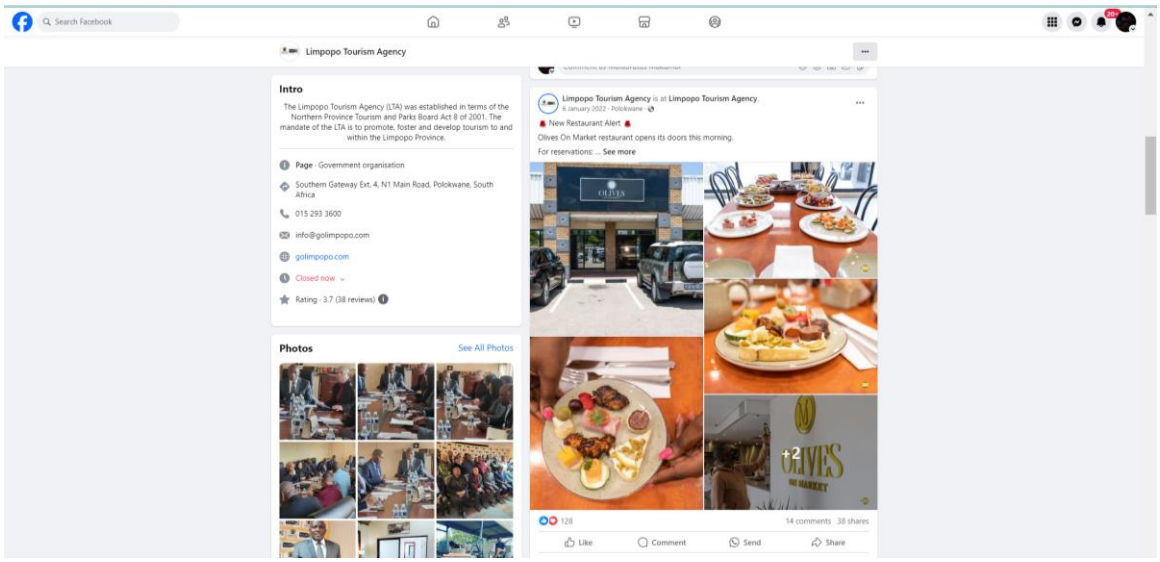
Facebook

Likes, comments, and shares

One Facebook post achieved the highest user engagement across all the metrics in terms of *likes, comments*, and *shares*. The post was composed of the elements attributable to the *positioning* category's code, *enjoy*. The *values* reflected in the post were *excellence* and *communication*. In terms of the *product* category, the post showcased *arts*. The post was conveyed using a combination of text and photos (Table 115). The image in Figure 67 is the actual post which was posted on 06/01/2022, showing the text and image together with the post's engagement metrics.

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Figure 67: Facebook post engagement



Source: https://www.facebook.com/photo/?fbid=4363214067122652&set=pcb.4363214183789307

Table 86: Most liked, commented, and shared post: Facebook

Mission	Positioning	Values	Product	Content format	Likes	Comments	Shares
Experience	Enjoy	Excellence, communication	Hospitality and conference venues	Photo, text	128	14	38

X

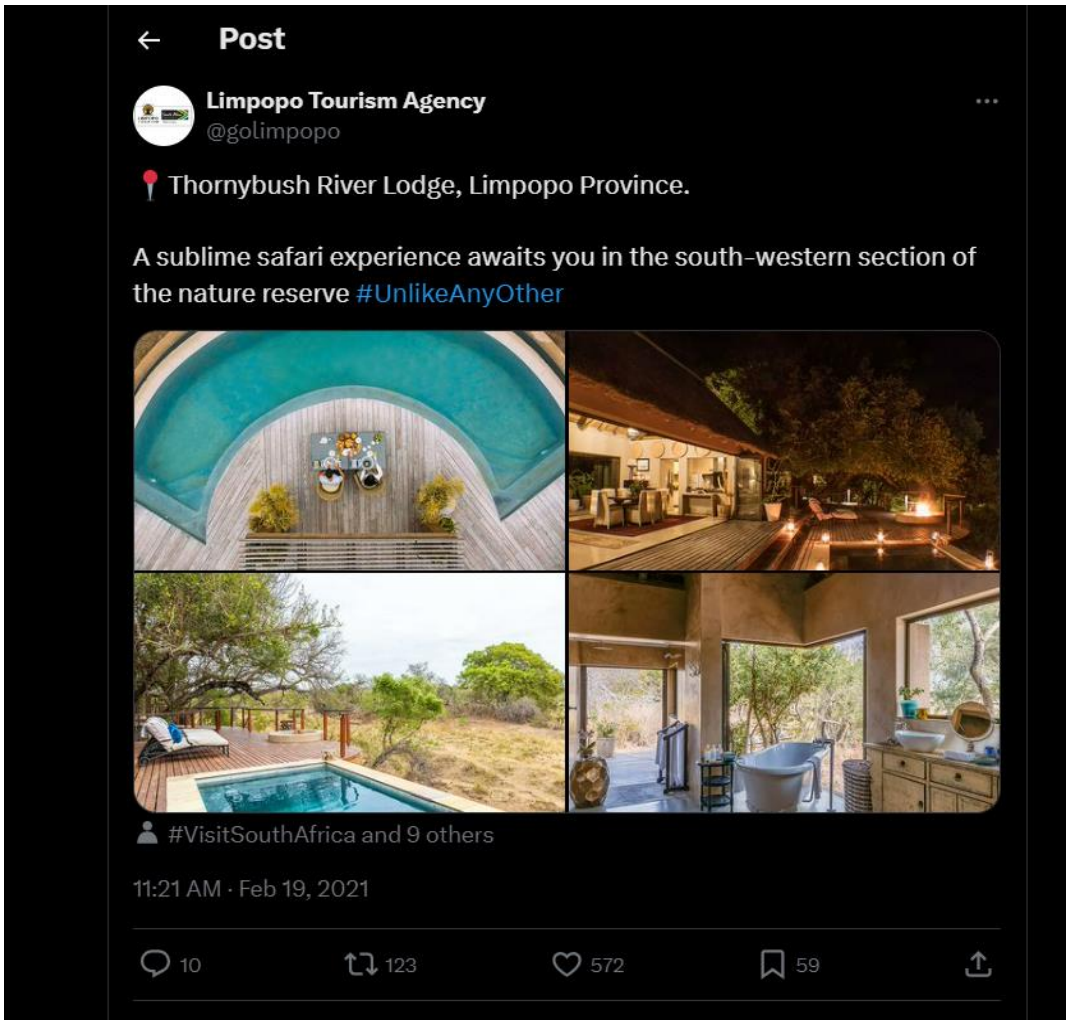
Likes, comments and shares

One X post achieved the highest user engagement across the metrics in terms of *likes*, and *shares*. The post was composed of the elements attributable to the *vision* category's code, *leading destination*. The *mission* codes reflected in the post were *experience* and *tourism development*. The post's *positioning* category focused on the code *enjoy*. The post further highlights aspects related to the *value* category's *excellence and communication* codes.

In terms of the *product* category, the post showcased *hospitality and conference*, showing Limpopo's attractions. The post was conveyed using a combination of text and photo (Table 115). The post was disseminated using a text and a photo (Table 87). The image in Figure 68 is the actual post which was posted on 09/02/2021. It shows the text and image together with the post's engagement metrics.

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Figure 68: X post engagement



Source: https://x.com/golimpopo/status/1362693820719263746

Table 87: Most liked, comment and shared post: X

Vision	Mission	Positioning	Values	Product	Content format	Likes	Comment	Shares
Leading destination	Experience, tourism development	Enjoy	Excellence, communication	Hospitality and conference	Photo, text	157	10	27

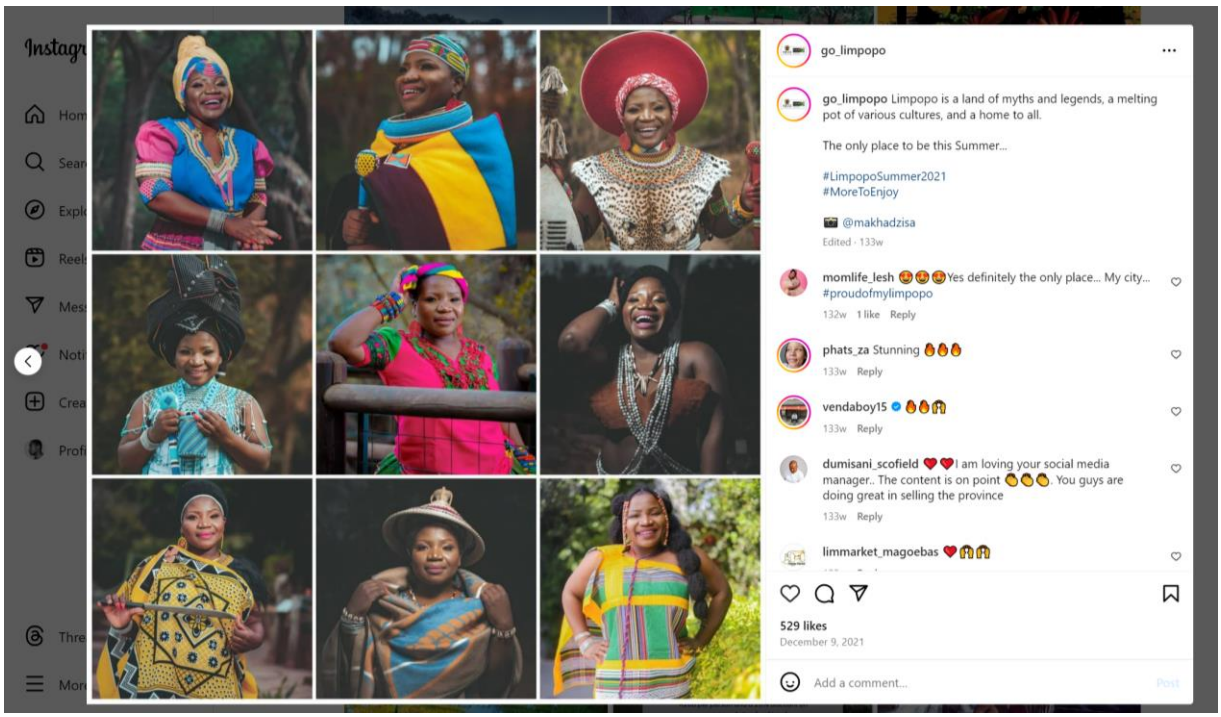
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Instagram

Likes

LTA's Instagram post that received the highest user engagement in terms of *likes* contained elements attributable to the *positioning* category's *enjoy.* The post further highlighted aspects related to the *value* category's *excellence, accountability,* and *learning* codes. In terms of the *product* category, the post showcased *culture* and *heritage*. The post was communicated using a combination of texts and photographs, which is a typical format on Instagram (Table 88). The image in Figure 69 is the actual Instagram post which was posted on 09/12/2021, where it shows the text and image together with the post's engagement metrics.

Figure 69: Instagram post engagement



Source: https://www.instagram.com/p/CXQTb55Mt6X/

Table 88: Most liked post: Instagram

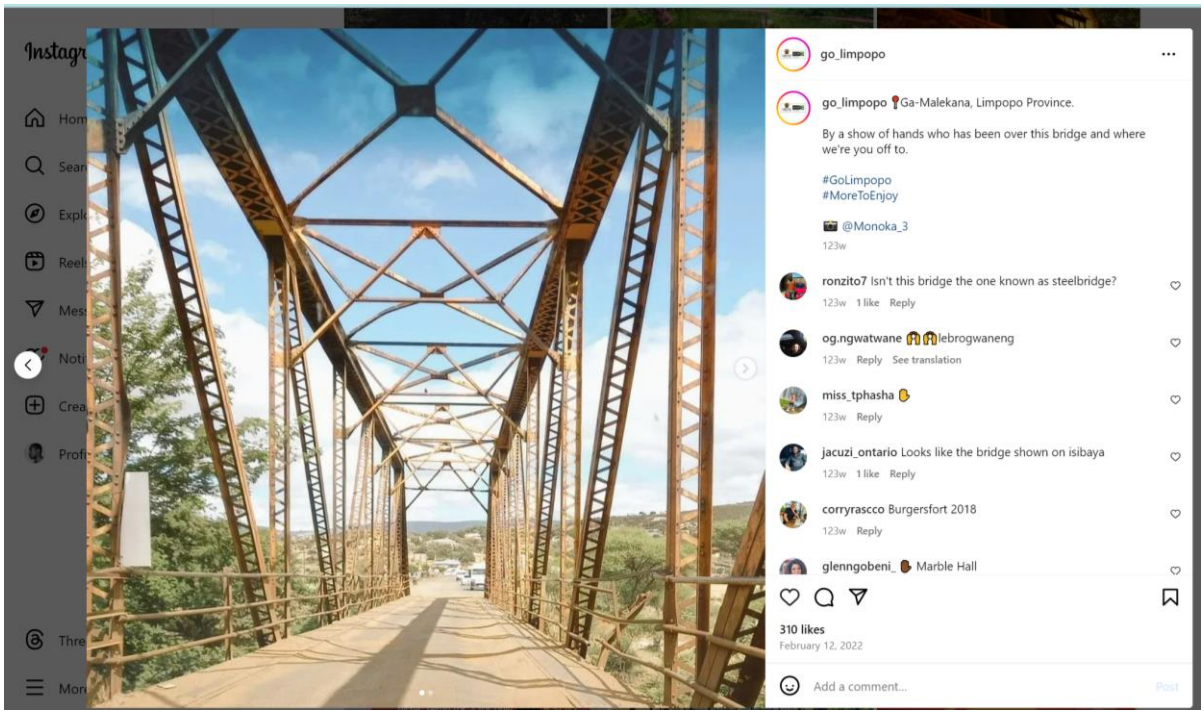
Positioning	Values	Product	Content format	Likes
Enjoy	excellence, accountability, learning	Culture, heritage	Photo, text	542

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Comments

One Instagram post achieved the highest user engagement across the metrics in terms of *likes* and *shares*. The post was composed of the elements attributable to the *vision* category's code, *leading destination*. The *mission* category reflected in the post included *experience* and *tourism development*. The post's *positioning* focused on the code *enjoy*. The post further highlights aspects related to the *value* category's *communication* code. In terms of the *product* category, the post showcased *heritage*. The post was conveyed using a combination of text and a photo (Table 89). The image in Figure 70 is the actual Instagram post, showing the text and image together with the post's engagement metrics.

Figure 70: Instagram post engagement



Source: https://www.instagram.com/p/CZ3pai6sezC/?img_index=1

Table 89: Most commented post: Instagram

Vision	Mission	Positioning	Values	Product	Content format	Comments
Leading destination	Experience	Enjoy	Communication	Heritage	Photo, text	43

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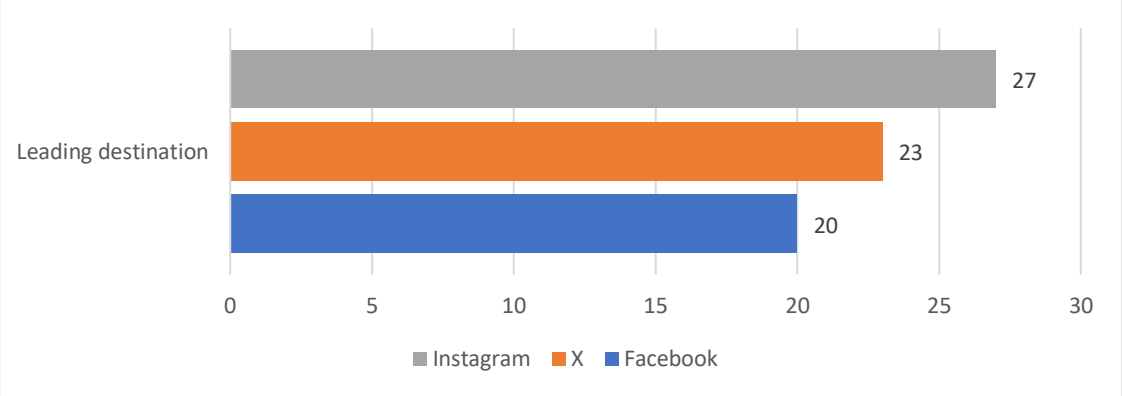
B. COMPARISON OF THE THEMES AND CODES ACROSS THE PLATFORMS

The following sections present the comparison of the frequencies at which codes occurred across Facebook, X, and Instagram.

Strategy (vision, mission, positioning)

Across all social media platforms, the code that occurred most frequently was the *vision* category's *leading destination* code. Instagram had the highest count relating to the posts containing elements attributable to the code *leading destination,* while the lowest count was seen on Facebook (Figure 71).

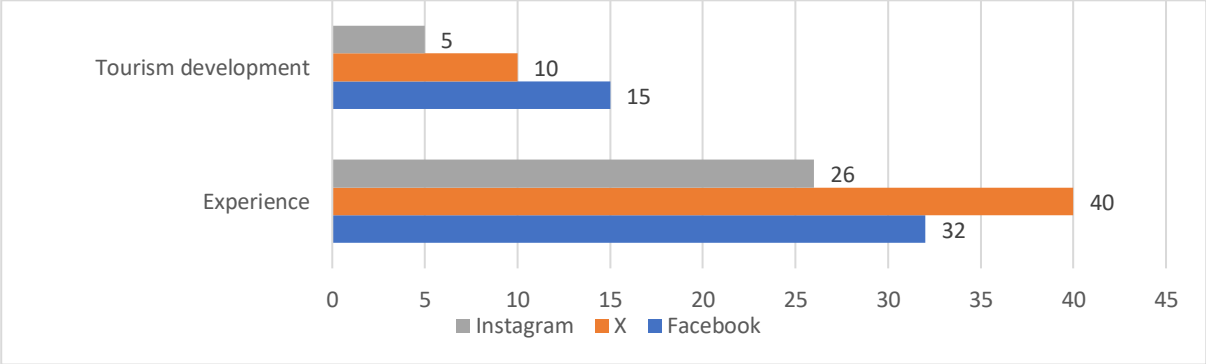
Figure 71: Posts across the platforms: Vision



The code that occurred most frequently in the posts across all social media platforms for the *mission* category was *experience*. It featured prominently on X and Facebook (n=40, n=32, respectively). On Instagram, the code *tourism development* was least featured (n=5) (Figure 72).

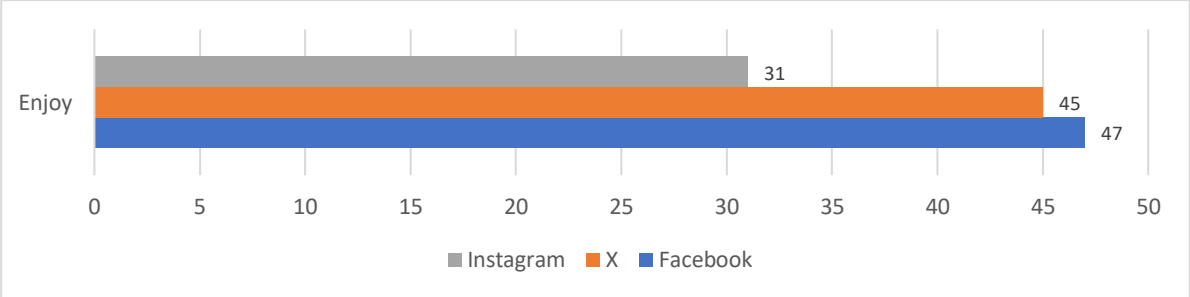
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Figure 72: Posts across the platforms: Mission



The code that occurred most frequently in the posts across all social media platforms for the *positioning* category was *enjoy*. It featured prominently on Facebook and X (n=47, n=45, respectively). On Instagram, the code was least featured (Figure 73).

Figure 73: Posts across the platforms: Positioning

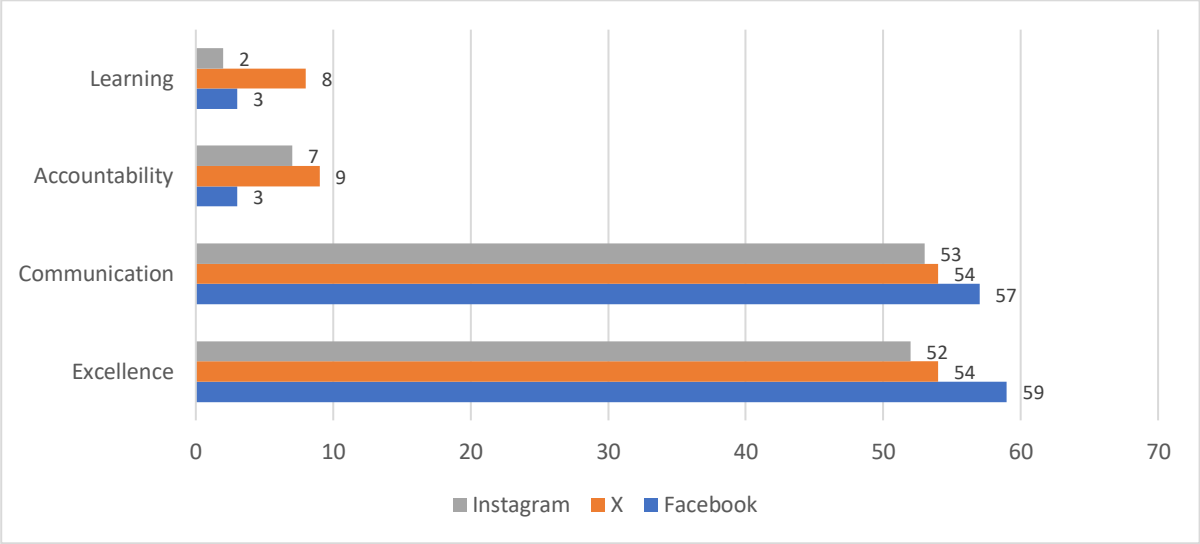


<u>Strategy (values, product)</u>

The codes that occurred most frequently in the posts across all social media platforms within the *value* category, *communication,* and *excellence*. This was consistent across all platforms, with each post displaying a nearly equal frequency of elements attributable to both codes, led by Facebook, followed by X, and lastly, Instagram. On the other hand, for Instagram, the code *learning* received the lowest count (n=2) *(*Figure 74).

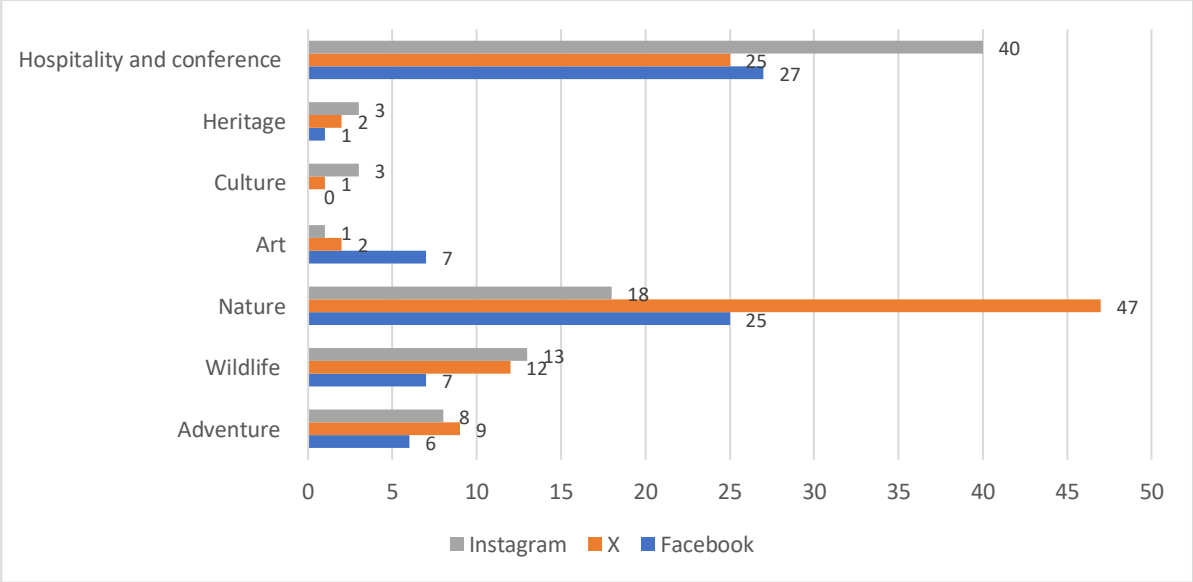
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Figure 74: Posts across the platforms: Product



Overall, as shown in Figure 75, the categories featured prominently in the posts across all social media platforms for the product category were *Hospitality and conference venues,* and *nature*. X had the highest count relating to the posts containing elements attributable to the code *nature* (n=47). Instagram had the highest count for the code *Hospitality and conference venues.* In contrast, the lowest count was seen on Facebook with a single post for the code (Figure 75).

Figure 75: Posts across the platforms: Product



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This section presented findings from Phase 1, 2, and 3 of the study, each addressing respective research objectives. In Phase 1 scholarly publication pertaining to destination branding and social media was described through an SQLR. This phase revealed trends regarding branding dimensions that draw scholarly attention, social media platforms that were incorporated in destination branding studies, the geographical base of the DMO case studies, methodologies and journals in which these studies have been published. In Phase 2, the strategic documents of DMOs were examined to gain understanding of how branding and social media were being articulated at a strategic level. In the final Phase 3 DMOs' social media content was analysed to to determine how DMOs articulated their brand identity in the social media posts and measured audience engagement.

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CHAPTER 7: DISCUSSION

7.1 Introduction

The purpose of this study was to investigate the strategic alignment between destination brand identity and the brand image projected social media platforms by DMOs. For this reason, the researcher also proposes a Framework based on Destination Branding Social Media Alignment (DBSMA). The findings of this study, highlighted as an outcome emerging from the application of the DBSMA framework, is the aspect of strategic alignment between brand identity and image. The concept of strategic alignment is a fundamental principle on which the whole study is anchored.

This chapter revisits the objectives and synthesises the main findings of the study. The main themes emerging in this section are subsequently discussed, namely, the current body of literature on destination branding and social media, the strategic documents of DMOs in order to examine the articulation of brand identity and evaluate the extent to which social media is integrated as a strategy, and the analysis of social media posts to assess the composition of content and determine whether it strategically aligns with the identity articulated in strategic documents, as well as to evaluate the resulting user engagement. The themes in the literature as well as the foundation on which the Framework is based, is discussed. Although the theoretical frameworks helped to guide this research, the empirical research process led to the gathering of primary data on which the findings were built.
The empirical research employed a mixed method approach. For the quantitative component, SQLR was conducted. For the qualitative component, thematic and content analysis were used to collect data regarding articulation of brand identity in DMO's strategic documents and the alignment of social media content with the identity stated in the documents.

The objectives which were addressed in the various chapters are as follows:
Objective 1: To examine the existing literature in destination branding and the integration of social media to establish the state of destination branding research. This objective was explored in the literature review presented in Chapters 3 and 4, with Chapter 3 examining aspects of destination branding and various dimensions of branding incorporating brand

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identity, brand image, brand loyalty, brand equity and others. This literature was discussed in the context of a review of foundational literature to establish links between brand image and brand identity within the tourism landscape. Methods were employed to build a sample of articles that met the SQLR criteria, allowing for an assessment of the existing literature. Chapter 4 reviewed literature focusing on the influence and role of social media in shaping destination branding efforts, shedding light on social media in terms of user engagement, content development and analytics. The literature was discussed in the context of a review of digital and social media literature and the methods used to evaluate social media and the extent to which social media is integrated into destination branding studies.

Objective 2: To conduct an analysis of DMO's strategic documents to examine the articulation of brand identity and to evaluate the extent to which social media was integrated as a strategy. The objective was explored in Chapter 2 through a comprehensive literature review of strategic destination management. The chapter further expanded destination competitiveness and destination management with a particular focus on destination planning, policy and strategic positioning. The documents of the DMOs were analysed in order to assess how destination brand identity was articulated and to what degree social media strategies are integrated into the overall strategy.

Objective 3: To conduct an analysis of the composition of social media content to determine whether content strategically aligned with the identity articulated in strategic documents and evaluate the resulting user engagement. The objective was addressed in Chapter 4, where social media literature in the context of destination branding was comprehensively reviewed, with particular attention given to social media platforms, content development, engagement and social media analytics.

Objective 4: To develop a comprehensive conceptual framework that aligns DMOs' social media practices with destination brand identity with the aim of guiding them in leveraging social media as a branding tool that constitutes a critical component of the overall branding strategy. This framework stresses the integration of continuous evaluation, agility, and data-oriented decision-making, while adapting to the dynamic nature of social media and user engagement. The framework is presented in Chapter 8. It has been established to improve

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DMOs' strategic alignment between social media activities and destination brand identity as articulated in the strategic documents.

7.2 Phase 1: Assessment of Existing Literature

This phase called for a comprehensive review of the extant research body to uncover understandings and identify prominent inclinations in destination branding. The deployment of SQLR methodology in this phase grounded the study in the principles of a literature review (Pickering *et al.*, 2015). This approach was critical for aligning the study with the established philosophies of rigour when conducting a literature review study through systematically collecting, analysing and synthesising data from published research articles.

Phase 1 of the study served a threefold function. Firstly, it provided foundational work for understanding contemporary existing literature in the field of destination branding that included the identification of journal publication types where destination branding literature was published, study perspective (demand-side or supply-side), and research methods applied. This was crucial in terms of framing the context of the current study to determine the most valuable contribution to the literature and was beneficial for deciding on the nature of the study such as to whether the study should focus on qualitative or quantitative, data collection methods, GN or GS, national or regional DMO, number of DMO case studies. Secondly, this phase helped identify key branding dimensions studied in the literature such as brand identity, brand image, brand perception and others. Gaining a comprehensive grasp of the destination branding dimensions were important for the development of themes explored in Phases 2 and 3 of the study.

Thirdly, Phase 1 was instrumental for identifying and understanding which social media platforms are being studied in conjunction with destination branding and their unique characteristics that make them suitable for destination branding studies. The identification and analysis of social media platforms was crucial for the development of the themes used to analyse social media usage and strategies, allowing the study to determine strategies that DMOs applied on social media, and evaluate effectiveness.

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Collectively, this phase framed the study in the context of the existing body of knowledge. This was key for establishing a premise for Phases 2 and 3, informing decisions regarding which brand dimensions and social media platforms to focus on and how they fit together.

The content of a sample of 300 articles was subjected to a quantitative content analysis, where predetermined codes were used to quantify trends within the publications. The aim was to describe the depth and breadth of research on the topic within the sampled articles. Various descriptors were used, including the publication outlet (journal types), research locations and contexts (regional location of studies and geographical catchment of the DMOs), the methods employed, dimensions of branding investigated, and the social media platforms studied. Firstly, descriptive statistics were used to describe the sample of articles used. Secondly, significant differences were calculated to identify patterns and highlight gaps in the existing research on branding and social media. Comparisons were made between methods used to study both branding and social media, as well as the dimensions of branding across social media platforms. Lastly, a cluster analysis was performed to provide a picture of the 'typical' types of articles within the field of destination brand and social media through identifying meaningful groups in the reviewed literature.

The subsequent discussion incorporates the findings of the respective analyses to present a succinct discussion of the findings. The discussion is framed around the cluster analysis as the depiction of articles within the field. The different aspects investigated in the SQLR are presented under sub-headings, with the discussions integrating the descriptive as well as inferential (chi-square) results.

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7.2.1 Typical types of journal articles

A foreseeable outcome of any cluster analysis is a number of clusters which are composed of characteristically similar studies within and distinct from one cluster to the other (Löster, 2016). The analysis classified the articles into two diverse clusters based on their brand dimensions, research methodologies, research perspectives, DMO type, and social media platforms uncovering prevailing practices and gaps in destination branding and social media studies.

The cluster analysis resulted in the division of the articles into two main clusters, as shown in Table 90 as Article Type 1 and Article Type 2. Article Type 1 (the largest cluster) represented dominant types of articles, while Article Type 2 consisted of articles that were comparatively less prevalent in the field. The distinct differences between the articles present research gaps within the body of knowledge.

Table 90 presents the content of the cluster analysis in three categories: methods, branding dimensions and social media platforms. Though the order of the factors under each category follows the order of most to least important for that category specifically, they do not depict the order of all the factors based on their predictor importance within the original cluster distribution (as depicted in Chapter 6, Table 90, pg. 243). For example, while loyalty appears only as the seventh factor in the overall list below, it was the fourth most important predictor in the original cluster distribution (following 'demand-supply perspective'). At the same time, it was also the most important branding dimension. Similarly, X appears as the 16th factor in the overall list below but was the seventh most important predictor in the original cluster distribution. At the same time, it was also the most important social media platform. The decision was made to present the results in this manner, making it easier to discuss the different factors within a category relative to each other. Please refer to the table footnote for an explanation of the different symbols used.

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Table 90: Typical types of journal articles

	ARTICLE TYPE 1 (74%)	ARTICLE TYPE 2 (26%)
Methods*	• Primary data • Quantitative • Demand-side perspective • No. of DMO cases🡻 • Regional/local level • Global North🡹	• Secondary data • Qualitative • Supply-side perspective • No. of DMO cases 🡹 • National level • Global North🡻
Branding dimensions**		
Loyalty	✓	×
Branding in general	✓🡻	✓🡹
Personality	✓	×
Quality	✓	×
Equity	✓🡹	✓🡻
Perceptions	✓⇔	✓⇔
Awareness	✓⇔	✓⇔
Image	✓⇔	✓⇔
Identity	✓⇔	✓⇔
Social media platforms**		
X	✓🡻	✓🡹
Facebook	✓🡻	✓🡹
Blogs	✓🡻	✓🡹
YouTube	✓⇔	✓⇔
Instagram	✓🡹	✓🡻

* All relationships are significantly different in the methods category. Indicates the majority for each factor. For the number of DMO case studies and regional perspective, distinction is made indicating more (🡹) or less (🡻) in comparison.

** The branding dimension and social media platform categories indicate whether the factor occurred (✓) or not (×). If it did occur, whether it this was significantly more (🡹), significantly less (🡻) or similar (⇔) (not statistically significant).

An integrated discussion of the findings will now be presented, starting with the six factors of the methods category (data type, research design, perspective, DMO case studies, DMO

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level and regional perspective). This is followed by an integrated discussion of the branding dimensions and social media platforms.

7.2.2 Research methodologies

7.2.2.1 Data type used

In the overall sample, articles mostly made use of primary data, followed by secondary and both. The articles classified under Article Type 1 mainly applied primary data collection In tourism research, this predominantly takes the form of surveys (Balińska, 2020; Echtner & Ritchie, 1991). In contrast, Article Type 2 used secondary data, involving the collection of existing research data such as reports and previously published research works (Belias, Malik, Rossidis & Mantas, 2021; Clarke & Braun, 2013). The dominant use of primary data point to destination branding researchers opting to collect new data over existing secondary data. Dependency on secondary data can hamper the discovery of new knowledge and negatively affect relevance of research findings, as conclusions are drawn from historical data that may not be generalisable or valid in the current context. The distinction between the two methods revealed methodological diversity and researchers' preference, with an inclination towards the use of primary data, as evidenced by its greater prevalence in Article Type 1. The increasing traction in primary data collection in tourism research indicates an academic intention to produce original data (Thomas & Ormerod, 2017). However, a declining response rate impacts the validity of survey research (Dolnicar, 2020).

The chi-square results indicated that the branding dimensions awareness, equity, loyalty, and branding in general, were significantly more likely to be studied using primary data type. The social media platforms Facebook, X, YouTube, and Blogs were significantly more likely to be studied using secondary data type.

7.2.2.2 Research design

Overall, various methodologies are used to study destination branding and social media. The application of quantitative methods was prominent in most of the articles, followed by qualitative methods. To a much lesser extent it was the mixed methods, a combination of both quantitative and qualitative approaches.

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Article Type 1 demonstrated that these types of articles are approached using quantitative methodology, while Article Type 2 utilised qualitative methodology. The two research paradigms, quantitative and qualitative, contribute to research studies in distinctive ways with each paradigm revealing diverse types of data and results (Pole, 2007). The findings of the study exposed proclivity in the clusters swinging towards quantitative paradigms. Echtner and Ritchie (1991) argued that deployment of both quantitative and qualitative methods provides opportunity for capturing comprehensive insights when studying constructs such as destination image.

The chi-square results indicated that the branding dimensions of loyalty and awareness were significantly more likely to have been studied from a quantitative perspective, while branding in general was significantly more likely to be studied using qualitative methods. Literature suggests that loyalty extends beyond repeat purchase of services, including emotional ties and commitments to a destination (Cossío-Silva, Revilla-Camacho & Vega-Vázquez, 2019). Qualitative research, with its ability to provide deeper insights into perceptions and motivations, is crucial and effective for understanding loyalty (Silverman, 2020). Article Type 2 showed that loyalty, personality, and quality were not yet examined from the perspective of qualitative approach. Awareness, as a concept, is usually studied through quantitative methods that involve surveys and statistical analyses to appropriately measure the degree of knowledge or brand recognition (Zia, Younus & Mirza, 2021). Quantitative methods are effective in providing clear, measurable data on awareness levels, which can be critical for assessing the reach and impact of branding efforts. Branding, in general, encompasses articles that study branding without focusing on a specific aspect. This study indicated a proclivity for significantly examining branding using qualitative research. This preference leverages on the qualities of qualitative research which allows for an immersive investigation into the nature of branding (Almeyda-Ibáñez & George, 2017a).

The chi-square results indicated that social media platforms Facebook, Instagram, YouTube, and Blogs were significantly more likely to be studied using secondary data. This phenomenon can be explained by the fact that these platforms produce a huge amount of textual, photographic, and videographic data formats that is readily available for analysis (Li & Xie, 2020; Moran, Muzellec & Johnson, 2019; Shahbaznezhad, Dolan & Rashidirad,

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2021). These platforms can be utilised as data repository making secondary data analysis efficient (Zhang *et al.*, 2022).

7.2.2.3 Perspectives used (supply/demand)

Overall, sampled articles included articles that addressed both the supply-side and demand-side perspectives of destination branding. However, articles that addressed supply-side were marginally higher that those focused on the demand-side.

Article Type 1 demonstrated that these types of articles are approached from the demand-side. On the other side, Article Type 2 approached destination branding research from the supply-side perspective. The findings of the study have revealed that research on destination branding can be approached from two main perspectives, namely, demand-side and supply-side (Kankhuni, 2020; Lesmana, Sugiarto, Yosevina & Widjojo, 2022). The demand-side of tourism research studies examines tourists' perspectives, focusing on behaviours, preferences, and experiences (Lesmana *et al.*, 2022; Xue & Fang, 2018). Over-exploration of this perspective means that DMOs' operational and strategic matters are under-examined, while supply-side studies concentrate on tourism providers or enterprises. These studies' aim is on the exploration and gaining deep understanding of tourism providers' operations, strategies, opportunities and challenges that they encounter (Lesmana *et al.*, 2022; Xue & Fang, 2018). Balanced emphasis of both perspectives is essential for generating holistic understanding on destination branding research.

The chi-square results indicated that the branding dimensions equity, loyalty, and perception were significantly more likely to have been studied using the demand-side perspective. The brand dimensions equity, loyalty, and perception are all customer-centric constructs which are extensively premised on consumer experiences, behaviour and motivations (van Riel, Andreassen, Lervik-Olsen, Zhang, Mithas & Heinonen, 2021), which explains why research has examined them from the demand-side. In contrast, research focused on branding in general was studied from the supply-side perspective. Such research studies examine branding from the supply-side perspective with the aim to investigate brand management, development and positioning (Kavaratzis & Hatch, 2021; Lesmana *et al.*, 2022).

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The social media platform Facebook was significantly more likely to be studied using the demand-side perspective. This could be because it is a rich repository of consumer preferences, motivations and engagement; it is therefore an effective medium for immersive understanding of consumers (Zimbatu & Whyte, 2024).

7.2.2.4 DMO case studies

Overall, the number of DMO case study destinations varied significantly between one and 195. The majority of the articles examined a single DMO case study, with the remaining articles studying more than one case study. Studying more destinations allows researchers to amalgamate diverse DMO practices, policy implementation and strategies (Gowreesunkar, Séraphin & Morrison, 2018; Trunfio & Della Lucia, 2019).

The articles within Article Type 2 indicated a primary focus on national scale DMOs, while no effect was observed in the Article Type 1 cluster regarding the regional and local DMOs. In general, the national-scale of DMOs have more resources and budgets (Bieger, Beritelli & Laesser, 2009; Mariani *et al.*, 2016), and assume a major role in setting and influencing tourism policies, making them ideal cases for a research study (Albrecht, Haid, Finkler & Heimerl, 2021). Conversely, regional and local DMOs, mostly encounter financial and resource constraints and, as such, these types of DMOs do not attract much scholarly research interest (Zach & Racherla, 2011).

Within Article Type 1, the number of destination case studies did not significantly influence the cluster, whereas the number of destination case studies was a significant factor in the Article Type 2. For instance, the study by Avraham and Ketter (2017) studied 15 destinations, while Zhang, Zhang, Gursoy and Fu (2018) examined only one destination case study.

The chi-square results indicated that the branding dimensions image, loyalty, equity, and personality were significantly more likely to have been studied using one DMO case study. The social media platforms Facebook, X, and Blogs were also significantly more likely to be studied using one DMO case study.

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7.2.2.5 Regional perspective

Overall, studies centred in the GN perspective were more prevalent, followed by GS, and lastly, studies that included both perspectives in one study. Destination branding as a concept, is inherently linked to a geographic location serving as a contextual backdrop of tourism destinations being studied (Ruiz-Real, Uribe-Toril & Gázquez-Abad, 2020). The current study distinguished between two geographical polar opposites in destination bases: GN and GS.

The findings were consistent with the results of the study by Tran and Rudolf (2022) which elucidated that destination branding research tends to align with continents that play significant roles in tourism. These continents are located in the GN, specifically in Europe and North America. This bias proves lack of research emphasis and interest from researchers on the destinations based in the GS, especially when studying brand loyalty and Instagram. Such a shift in research attention will provide a balanced destination branding research perspective and reveal opportunities and challenges in both geographical regions. The disparities noted perpetuates imbalances in the destination branding research narrative leaving out inherent dynamics in the GS (Makumbi & du Preez, 2024), and thus, restricting the applicability and generalisability of the findings in a global context.

The chi-square results indicated that the branding dimensions image, loyalty, equity and personality was significantly more likely to have been studied using the GN perspective. The GN represents most advanced economies in the world (Hurrell & Sengupta, 2012). The tourism institutions or destinations in the GN are sophisticated and better resourced and adequately funded (Uşaklı *et al.*, 2017). The tourism institutions or destinations in the GN play a significant role in tourism, consequently becoming attractive research focal points for conducting in-depth academic investigation (Tran & Rudolf, 2022).

All of the social media platforms under investigation were significantly more likely to be studied from the GN perspective. GN tourism organisations characteristically display advanced technology adoption patterns and widespread penetration of social media (Anguelovski *et al.*, 2016; Odeh, 2010).

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The well-entrenched marketing and branding research practices in the GN, combined with the availability of many marketing publishing journals in GN, propels academic research in these regions (Kamola, 2019; Leung *et al.*, 2019). This research environment results in a high concentration of publications emanating from the GN regions' perspective (Leung *et al.*, 2019). The soaring scholarly output in the GN has been instrumental in providing a framework and directing the tourism branding and social media discourse (Hays *et al.*, 2013; Uşaklı *et al.*, 2017). However, this phenomenon has created a significant gap in the studies that concentrates on GS practices in destination branding and social media research (Brett, 2019; Ezeuduji & Mlambo, 2019; Kimbu, 2011)

7.2.3 Branding dimensions and social media platforms

This section provides a discussion of the branding dimensions and social media platforms respectively, followed by a summary of the overlap between the two, with specific reference to those that presented significant differences in the chi-square results. By doing so, the gaps in research are highlighted.

7.2.3.1 Branding dimensions studied

An all-rounded research attention, which encompasses both specific and general branding dimensions, will constitute a holistic understanding of destination branding. Overall, a significant number of research articles had their attention on image. Loyalty also garnered notable research attention. To a lesser extent, other dimensions were subjects of investigation. Equity, personality, general branding, awareness, quality, perception, and satisfaction are relatively less explored. This differential research attention points to potential areas for further research.

Loyalty, quality and personality were prevalent in the articles in Article Type 1. The least studied dimensions in the cluster include identity, image and awareness, and are predominantly studied utilising quantitative primary research. These dimensions were mainly with Instagram, followed by X, Facebook, Blogs, and YouTube platforms. In Article Type 2, loyalty, quality and personality were absent. Instead, this cluster focused on dimensions branding in general, equity and perceptions, with the least studied dimensions

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being identity, awareness and image. These dimensions are typically studied utilising qualitative secondary data.

The quality of a destination plays a pivotal role in shaping the perceptions of tourists, subsequently influencing their intent to return (Dedeoğlu *et al.*, 2020; Kim *et al.*, 2018b). Tourists' perceptions of quality hinge largely on its offerings, which encompass both aesthetics and hygiene. This is posited to be instrumental in determining tourist contentment and propelling their tendency to return to the locale (Sangpikul, 2017). Another dimension was destination personality. The concept of destination personality is gaining increasing attention from scholars as foundational in developing destination brands and establishing a distinctive identity (Ekinci & Hosany, 2006). This dimension is important for discerning tourists' perceptions and underlining a destination's unique identity and attributes (Hultman, Strandberg, Oghazi & Mostaghel, 2017; Souiden, Ladhari & Chiadmi, 2017). This perspective suggests that, in a similar manner to how people possess different personality traits, tourist destinations can also embody specific attributes that personify their core identity (Yen *et al.*, 2020).

Another dimension in the clusters which was a significant factor in Article Type 1 but not in Article Type 2, was brand equity. Its prevalence and influence was observed in Article Type 1. This aligns with literature which asserted that destination brand equity has attracted scholars' attention in recent years (Chi, Huang & Nguyen, 2020). Researchers have studied brand equity from different perspectives, examining its impact on other dimensions such as loyalty, and overall satisfaction (Huang, Yen, Liu & Chang, 2014; Nam *et al.*, 2011; Wu *et al.*, 2017).

7.2.3.2 Social media platforms studied

Overall, data exhibited a tendency for researchers to study destination branding, significantly focusing on Facebook, followed by X, while moderate representation was observed on Blogs, and YouTube, and Instagram being studied the least.

The cluster analysis revealed different concentration of social media usage in the studies between the two clusters. The articles in Article Type 1 tended to use X, Facebook and

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Blogs, albeit less frequently. In Article Type 1 it occurred significantly more that these articles employed social media platforms X, Facebook and Blogs more frequently. For both clusters, Instagram was found to be significant, but less of an influential factor. Facebook, X, and Instagram are among the most popular social media platforms in tourism studies (Arefieva *et al.*, 2021; Sahin & Sengün, 2015; Zeng & Gerritsen, 2014) . Similarly, Facebook, X, and Instagram rank among the most popular social media platforms studied in destination branding articles in this study. These findings were consistent with a study by Tran and Rudolf (2022) and Hays *et al.* (2013) which also found that Facebook, X, and Instagram were popular social media platforms that have garnered research attention. Furthermore, this research is primarily conducted from a supplier perspective, as noted by Leung *et al.* (2013), as well as by Leung, Sun and Bai (2017). The three social media platforms were prevalent in the studies based in the GN. There is a possibility that destination branding researchers prefer to study developed countries in order to gain exemplary practices and benchmarks (Tran & Rudolf, 2022).

7.2.3.3 The study of branding dimensions across different social media platforms

Brand equity was studied on YouTube, followed by X. It was significantly less likely to be studied on Facebook. YouTube has the ability to facilitate audiovisual content dissemination (Huertas, Míguez-González & Lozano-Monterrubio, 2017; Tiago *et al.*, 2019). Essentially, this feature makes YouTube an ideal platform for enhancing brand equity by fostering compelling brand storytelling, promiting brand recognition and brand recall and further forging emotional connections with customers (Aaker, 1992). This aligns with YouTube's capabilities and strengths. Brand equity is not likely to be studied using Facebook, because of the nature of Facebook content format, which is heavily text-based, with the inclusion of photos and short videos (Park *et al.*, 2016; Rosenthal & Brito, 2017). These formats are not as useful as YouTube content format for fostering customer connections. Furthermore, a drawback about Facebook is that the algorithm typically prioritises content from friends over brands (Barsaiyan & Sijoria, 2022), making it less appropriate for fostering compelling brand storytelling, promoting brand recognition and brand recall. The studies encompassing brand equity has also explored the influence of social media platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, and YouTube on brand equity as they assume a crucial function role in disseminating influential content (Huerta-Álvarez *et al.*, 2020; Seo *et al.*, 2020; Stojanovic,

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Andreu & Curras-Perez, 2018). The study by Tran and Rudolf (2022) noted that social media is important for enhancing destination brand equity through user engagement.

Brand awareness was studied on X. It was significantly less likely to be studied on Facebook. The preference for using X is largely based on its features, chief amongst them being its immediacy (Singh, Pandey & Singh, 2024). X is known for its real-time content feed which makes it an appropriate platform for driving and building brand awareness in real time through its short-text format, photos and short videos (Firrone, 2023). Brands are able to disseminate key messages tied to trending topics and reach a broader audience. In contrast, Facebook is less likely to be studied due to the algorithmic shortcomings mentioned above.

Brand image was studied on Facebook. It was significantly more likely to be studied on Facebook. Facebook is particularly appropriate for studying brand image owing to its varied distinguishable features, primarily, the ability to disseminate content in multiple formats (Abouelezz, 2022). Brands are able to craft convey media rich, image-themed content that presents compelling narratives in textual, photographic, and videograpic content formats (Chandrasekaran *et al.*, 2023). Additionally, brands are able to build communities in the form of Facebook pages and groups (Janis & Ramli, 2022). In this manner, brands are accessible to customers and able to share information and engagement with a customer, thereby facilitating a positive brand image. A positive image of a destination can help identify, differentiate, and emotionally connect tourists to its destination using branding techniques (Lin *et al.*, 2011). Branding has become a powerful tool due to its ability to distinguish the destination by creating a positive image that ties tourists to the destination on a personal level (Almeyda-Ibáñez & George, 2017a; Hemmonsbey & Tichaawa, 2018; Kim *et al.*, 2018a). DMOs rely on a variety of sources to create a destination image, among them tourism marketing (Day, 2011; Echtner & Ritchie, 1991; Wacker & Groth, 2020). A brand is an identity resource that can be used to create meaningful interactions and experiences with consumers (Yen *et al.*, 2020). Brand image not only possesses intrinsic influence but also intertwines intimately with the concept of brand identity (Wassler *et al.*, 2019), suggesting that the perception of a brand is closely linked to how it is defined and conveyed (Ezeuduji & Mlambo, 2019) .

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Brand personality was studied on Facebook, and X. There was no specific platform on which it featured more prominently. The versatility of Facebook content format that allows various aspects of brand personality to be expressed from a multi-content type standpoint, makes Facebook an ideal platform for studying brand personality. Meanwhile, X enables real-time, quick snapshot of certain facets of the brand personality (Singh *et al.*, 2024), often linking to trending topics by crafting short and punchy text that expresses brand narratives concisely.

Brand loyalty was studied on Facebook. Meaningful consistent engagements are essential in bulding brand trust and loyalty online (Zheng, Cheung, Lee & Liang, 2015). While Facebook has engagement metrics, likes, comments, and shares that can be used to evaluate and gauge user interaction with content (Abuljadail & Ha, 2019), these metrics are superficial to derive any meaningful insights or for inferring engagement metrics to brand loyalty. Although comments and shares hold more signifance than likes (Abuljadail & Ha, 2019; Aldous, An & Jansen, 2019), they do not encapsulate enough engagement insights to determine a strong brand loyalty presence.

Brand perceptions was studied on YouTube. It was significantly less likely to be studied on Facebook. YouTube's features discussed in the preceeding sections makes it a suitable platform shaping brand percetions through immersive demostration and emotional brand appeal cues. Additionally, Facebook's limitations renders it an inappropriate platform to facilitate brand perception. The findings of the study further point out that social media platforms such as YouTube and blogs were deemed more effective for examining brand perception than Facebook, X, or Instagram. This was suggested to be due to their features, which allow for comprehensive and immersive content that facilitates in-depth storytelling and engagement (Chang, 2022; Silaban, Chen, Nababan, Eunike & Silalahi, 2022).

Branding in general was studied on Facebook, followed by Instagram, and X. There was no specific platform on which it featured more prominently. Facebook's features relating to content format permits for in-depth investigation into different elements of branding.

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7.2.3.4 Concluding remarks

This study described the existing body of knowledge and further showed the profiles of typical articles within destination branding and social media literature through the two-step cluster analysis. The cluster analysis served as foundation for the discussion on the significant differences in the elements of extant literature, and how articles approached destination branding and social media. Additionally, this presented a view into prevalent themes in destination branding research and apparent gaps in literature.
Overall, the cluster analysis demonstrated the dichotomy in methodological approaches when studying destination branding, particularly among quantitative studies using primary data and qualitative studies utilising secondary data. This finding implies the necessity for a holistic research approach to attain a well-rounded understanding of the subject. Thus, this suggests the application of mixed methods in future research endeavours to capitalise on the capabilities of both research methods. The analysis further underscored the importance of assessing both the research perspectives, namely, the demand-side and the supply-side, which encompass examining the vantage point of tourists and DMOs'.

Lastly, the analysis focused on social media platforms highlighting the key characteristic of the digital marketing communication landscape which is denoted by its ever-evolving nature. This dynamic nature presents the opportunity to examine the impact of the emerging social media platforms, and how DMOs can leverage their potential and capabilities within destination branding research, such as on YouTube.

7.3 Phases 2 and 3: Document Analysis and Social Media Analyses

This section presents an integrated discussion of Phase 2 and Phase 3, to present the strategies utilised by the DMOs from a holistic perspective. Each DMO's document analysis will be presented along with the corresponding social media content, seeing that the themes and codes applied in the strategic document analysis were used to conduct the social media content analysis.

The purpose of Phase 2 was to review selected DMOs' strategic documents, to gain full understanding of how DMOs articulate and apply their branding strategies. The review

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included presentations, brochures, annual reports, maps, visitor guides, brand guidelines, and strategic plans. The research followed a deductive research approach with thematic analysis, employing structured, pre-defined themes developed based on the literature review on destination branding and social media conducted in Phase1. This ensured that the process followed in Phases 2 and 3 was anchored in established theoretical base, and that the themes contained robust theoretical grounding.

The process sought to partially adhere to the branding categorising system of branding established during Phase 1 of the study to allow discovery of new categories and codes. These themes were identified from a literature review conducted in Phase 1. Documents were analysed deductively to identify codes that conveyed the meanings of the respective themes in each case study context. This ensured that there was an accurate representation of the three main themes, namely, strategy, brand identity and social media in the strategic documents. The importance of this process lay in identifying and quantifying the occurrence of the most dominant themes, and gaining a comprehensive understanding of how dominant themes were referred to through extracting quotes attributable to them.

Phase 3 of the study involved conducting a systematic assessment of social media content on platforms, Facebook, X, and Instagram. The main objective of Phase 3 was to apply themes, and categories along with their related DMO-specific codes identified in Phase 2 to conduct a content analysis of the posts on the social media platforms of the case study DMOs. The goal was to determine whether there was alignment between the stated strategies and brand identity elements within the strategic documents and the content posted by the DMOs in their respective social media pages. This included, firstly, the evaluation of the overall social media engagement of the DMOs in Facebook, X, and Instagram. Secondly, the characteristics of the posts that garnered the highest user engagement in terms of likes, comments, and shares on each platform. Lastly, the comparison of how themes, categories, and codes as identified in Phase 2 were reflected in the individual posts across different social media platforms. This sought to uncover any consistencies and misalignments in how they communicated their strategy and brand identity.

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The discussion on Phase 3 touches on three key aspects of social media usage by DMOs (1) social media content composition, (2) content format and (3) user engagement. The analysis addressed the purpose of Phase 3 through providing an evaluation of how DMOs utilise social media to communicate their strategic brand identity online.

For social media content composition, the aim was to categorise social media posts according to the thematic concepts developed in Phase 2 (strategy and brand identity). For content format, the purpose was to examine social media content formats used, which occur in three forms: textual, photographic, and videography (Gough *et al.*, 2017; Tuten, 2023). Only two content formats, namely, textual and photographic, were considered. Video content fell under exclusionary criteria as mentioned in the methodology chapter. Interaction with posts, based on engagement metrics such as, likes, comments and shares, were assessed to determine user engagement with the content and to identify which themes and formats garnered the highest engagement.

The results are discussed in similar order to that of Chapter 6, beginning with a description of the overall use of social media by the case study DMOs. This is followed by a discussion of each DMO starting with SAT.

7.3.1 Social media profile of the selected case study DMOs

7.3.1.1 Membership dates of selected DMOs for social media platforms

This section provides the discussion of the DMOs' membership dates, which is useful for comparing the timing of a DMO's specific social media platform adoption. The earliest overall adopter was SAT. By 2016 all the DMOs had started their social media (Facebook, X, and Instagram) membership, albeit at different times. SAT was the earliest adopter of Facebook in June 2009. Facebook was started in 2004, gaining widespread adoption and notoriety between 2007 and 2008 (Carter & Levy, 2011). The late adopter on Facebook was WESGRO, which only became a member in 2014. For X (then Twitter), there were multiple early adopters in 2009, each joining the platform in different months. SAT and GTA were the earliest adopters, both joining in April of that year, which was also the same year SAT joined Facebook. Instagram had the lowest adoption amongst all the DMOs, with SAT only joining

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three years later, in 2013. Instagram was created in 2010 and gained notoriety in 2011 (McNely, 2012). The late adopter on Instagram was LTA. Although LTA was among the early adopters of X in 2009, it took three years to join Facebook and seven years to adopt Instagram, making it the slowest adopter of all DMOs. It is worth noting that there is a four-year time gap for ECPTA between joining Facebook in 2011 and Instagram in 2015.

There have been DMOs that joined these social media platforms soon after their introduction without a clear strategy, resulting in periods of inactivity for a long time (Leung *et al.*, 2013). Early adoption of the platforms does not necessarily indicate the presence of a well-defined social media strategy or effectiveness of a DMO's social media approach (Mariani *et al.*, 2016).

7.3.1.2 The audience size

The analysis of DMOs' profiles on Facebook, X, and Instagram reflected differences in their audience sizes (number of followers). SAT had the largest audience size across each of the three platforms. MTPA had amassed a substantial following on Facebook, while GTA had a considerable audience size on X. WESGRO had a good following in Instagram, again coming behind SAT. ECPTA was the last DMO to register a profile on X. However, it is worth noting that despite joining X in 2013 and the time that has elapsed since to the time of this analysis, ECPTA did not manage to attract a significant number of profile followers; it had the lowest audience numbers across all the platforms. Similarly, the case of ECPTA is mirrored by WESGRO, which was the last to join Facebook (in 2014) and also had the lowest follower count. In contrast, LTA, which was a late adopter of Instagram (joining only in 2016), managed to garner a decent audience size.

Audience size is a critical feature of online presence for DMOs, as it is a key criterion for assessing the potential audience reach for the content disseminated on the platform (Ben Gibson *et al.*, 2023; Wies *et al.*, 2023). Attaining significant audience size is a factor of user popularity, content resonance, and content posting frequency (Jungselius *et al.*, 2014; Sciara *et al.*, 2021).

It is, therefore, crucial to identify influential users in a network in order to gain assistance with respect to viral marketing (Romero *et al.*, 2011). Furthermore, Kilgour *et al.* (2015) add

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that doing so is seen as organic and reliable when received via eWOM, which assists to minimise purchase risk. Therefore, influencing the influencers may aid in achieving strategic goals where they have expansive networks within the community, implying that their content has a probability of generating more impressions. In this manner, it has been proposed that social media can be utilised as an indirect product distribution channel that invigorates demand and encourages the immediate distribution of products (Mirza, 2022; Wang & Zhuang, 2017).

The results revealed a tri-sided discovery. Firstly, SAT and GTA were amongst the earliest adopters of the three platforms. It appears that joining social media platforms shortly after their launch offers first-mover advantages. However, the availability of an effective social media strategy and its effective implementation are of critical importance. Secondly, the case of LTA demonstrates that late adoption of a social media platform does not imply that the user will not possess the ability to gain a substantial audience size. Thirdly, in contrast, late adoption presents potential advantages, allowing for the opportunity to first investigate and understand how the platforms work and devise a well-informed strategy. The case with ECPTA, a late adopter with lowest audience size, indicates that joining the platform later does not present any advantages unless there is a clearly defined strategy in place. An over-arching caveat is the adequate social media resource allocation which has been a hurdle for many DMOs across the globe (Leung *et al.*, 2013; Pike, 2016; Uşaklı *et al.*, 2017). Audience size is highly predicated by the implementation of an effective strategy and active platform participation in the form of posting and engagement, this plays a significant role in attracting new audience and leveraging on the platform's reach (Kolo & Haumer, 2018).

7.3.1.3 Social media content format and engagement metrics

The format used for presenting social media content significantly influences its effectiveness in reaching audience engagement (Shahbaznezhad *et al.*, 2021). DMOs employ a combination of content formats, including images, videos, infographics, and written posts, in alignment with the platform's structure in order to enhance the appeal of their posts to the target audience (Díaz-Pacheco, Guerrero-Rodríguez, Álvarez-Carmona, Rodríguez-González & Aranda, 2024; Shahbaznezhad *et al.*, 2021). Visual content, including high-quality images and videos (although videos are not the subject of this study), plays an essential role in destination branding for DMOs, allowing them to showcase their unique

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experiences in an impactful manner (Dhanesh *et al.*, 2022; Stepchenkova & Zhan, 2013). Textual content is primarily used for detailed storytelling to provide information on attractions, events, or even travel tips (Lund *et al.*, 2018; Lund, Scarles & Cohen, 2020). This section discusses the types of content formats employed by DMOs in their social media posts, analysing their effectiveness in conveying messages and engaging users.

There is a relatively balanced distribution of content formats in the two formats examined, namely images and text. The majority of the posts were composed of textual content; this is exemplified in the case of WESGRO, which displayed a heavy reliance on text and used the lowest number of photographic content. TKZN demonstrated a strong emphasis on visual content, featuring the highest amount of photographic material.

The most efficient way to determine social media post engagement is through the total number of likes, comments and shares (Peruta & Shields, 2018). Social media content influences user engagement (Lam, Cheung & Lo, 2021). Kwok and Yu (2013) suggested that photographic content receives more engagement. Specifically, Facebook users are drawn to posts that contain both textual and photographic content (Peruta & Shields, 2018), and if they are conversational in nature they will garner more likes, comments and shares (Kwok, Mao & Huang, 2019). Long textual content is the post drive perception that the DMO or profile owner invested more intent and effort in crafting the message, particularly on Facebook, which is primarily a long-text-based platform (Chae, 2020), while photographic content is most likely to gain significant engagement (Peruta & Shields, 2018).

7.3.1.4 Strategic alignment

The analysis of the thematic composition provides invaluable insights into how DMOs employ social media to disseminate destination brand identity-themed content. By analysing the thematic structure of the themes in the documents and on social media posts, insights relating to DMOs' strategic priorities are gleaned and also emphasis on how they align themes to destinations' identity. The following section discusses each theme, category and code for each DMO.

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7.3.2 Content format used to express themes

The study of strategic alignment has highlighted the link that exist between business strategies and information system strategies (Henderson & Venkatraman, 1999). Organisations' inability to create linkages between business and information system strategies presents a lack of strategic alignment (Hassan Zadeh & Jeyaraj, 2018). Henderson and Venkatraman (1999) proposed that strategic alignment is based on two components, being strategic fit and functional integration. They expanded on the idea that strategic fit consists of two domains: external and internal. The external domain alludes to how the organisation projects itself into the market, while the internal domain focuses on the capabilities within the organisation that assist it to reach its goals and objectives (Henderson & Venkatraman, 1999). The alignment between the external and the internal domain has been highlighted as the significant aspects for effective organisational performance (Henderson & Venkatraman, 1999).

We adopted this perspective in the current study to argue that achieving strategic alignment requires the internal positioning of the DMO and the external positioning of the destination to be aligned. The destination brand identity outlined in the strategic documents must be aligned with the destination brand image projected on social media. When such alignment is achieved, the study argues the presence of strategic alignment implies that DMOs are strategically utilising social media (Baker, Jones, Cao & Song, 2011). The view adopted in this study is advocated by various research studies that suggest alignment is favourable, whereas misalignment is detrimental to organisations (Baker *et al.*, 2011; Chen, Mocker, Preston & Teubner, 2010). However, while the current study supports this stance, it is critical to note that the concept of strategic alignment is not without its critics. Some suggested that the concept of strategic alignment is only relevant in the period of stability and may not hold true in the dynamic business domain that is intensified by the advent of social media with its dynamic trends (Chen *et al.*, 2010). To address this dilemma, the concept of dynamic strategic alignment has been introduced, recognising the necessity of adaptation in a constantly evolving organisational operating environment (Chen *et al.*, 2010).

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7.3.3 Portraying 'Strategy' on social media

The strategy theme included vision, mission, and positioning. The following section presents an integrated discussion of Phase 2 and Phase 3. It begins by discussing themes and categories, then incorporates the DMOs' codes into the discussion. In each section, the social media platforms used for related codes across all the DMOs are also discussed.

7.3.3.1 Vision

Across the 10 analysed strategic documents, SAT prominently highlighted the code *experience* (n=63) under the vison category, followed by *quality* (n=44), and *unique* (n=16). SAT effectively utilised social media to embed the code in all analysed posts (n=60), prominently featuring it in photographic content format on Instagram. However, it was Facebook that was most frequently mentioned in the strategic documents, yet it was not used to communicate the code. There is alignment between the code mentions in documents and its articulation in the social media content. This consistency was observed not only on Instagram, but also on Facebook and X, although it was less pronounced compared to Instagram.

WESGRO featured the code *economic growth* in its nine strategic documents, where it appeared 61 times. WESGRO utilised Facebook to communicate the code *economic growth* in 17 of the 60 analysed posts. *Facebook* was mentioned more frequently in the documents than other platforms and it served as the primary platform for communicating the code *economic growth*. Consistency is observed in the documents and what was depicted on social media.

ECPTA had two codes: *sustainability* and, similar to WESGRO, *economic growth*. It was the code *sustainability* that had more mentions in the documents (n=40), while *economic growth* was (n=6) ECPTA omitted the mention of any social media platforms in its six strategic documents. However, *X* was utilised to communicate the code *economic growth*. It is noteworthy that the strategic documents prominently highlighted the code *sustainability*, while the code *economic growth* was featured more frequently (n=14 on X) than

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sustainability in the social media content posts. There is an observable inconsistency in the articulation of the ECPTA vision between strategic documents and social media.

Although TKZN had the highest number of analysed documents (n=16), the only vision code, *leading destination*, amassed only four mentions. Despite minimal mentions in the documents, the code was featured on *Instagram* (n=35), albeit that the documents mention the use of Facebook more than Instagram with a marginal difference (n=10 and n=9 respectively). There is consistency in the articulation of the vision in both the documents and social media content, which effectively mirror each other.

The seven strategic documents highlighted MTPA's two codes, namely *wildlife* (n=47), and *world-class* (n=12). While the code *wildlife* was the leading code in the documents, it was not on social media, where the focus was *world-class* (n=44). The MTPA did not mention any social media platforms in its documents or any elements that suggest their utilisation of social media, even though MTPA has been a member of the three social media platforms Facebook, X, and Instagram for a long time prior to the production of the documents analysed. Inconsistency is noted in the articulation of vision where wildlife was mentioned in the documents, while social media highlighted the code in *world-class.*

In the nine analysed strategic documents belonging to the GTA, there was one code under the vision category, *experience* (n=126). This code was similarly highlighted in SAT documents as the prominent code. GTA featured this code in the posts made on Facebook (n=27). The notable difference with SAT is that the code *experience* was primarily communicated using Instagram. However, the use of Facebook is consistent with what is mentioned in the documents where it was emphasised.

The LTA had the least number of strategic documents analysed (n=4), yet the only code, *leading destination,* had (n=21) mentions. This frequency is more than TKZN's *leading destination* which had (n=16) documents. Despite LTA having elements in the documents that suggested the use of social media, no mention of any social media platform was made. However, the code *leading destination* was communicated using Instagram, (n=27). The inconsistency is noted in the omission of mentioning social media platforms, specifically Instagram, which was used to communicate vision but not mentioned in the documents.

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All three platforms, Facebook, X, and Instagram were used to communicate vision but to varying degrees. Instagram was the preferred platform for communicating vision, used by SAT, TKZN, and LTA, followed by Facebook, which was used by WESGRO and GTA, while X was the least preferred, used by ECPTA. The nature of Instagram and its visual-centric features renders it an appealing medium for communicating brand vision (Filieri *et al.*, 2021). The platform has transformed from being simply about sharing photographs to enabling advertising, promotion and the distribution of ideas and services (Fatanti & Suyadnya, 2015). This has created an empowering space for DMOs to present themselves (Filieri *et al.*, 2021). In this way, Instagram becomes an effective platform for DMOs to communicate their vision.

WESGRO and GTA opted to utilise Facebook, which is influenced by the multipurpose nature of its features, allowing them to deliver vision communication messages in textual and visual-rich content formats (Munar, 2012). X is not a preferred platform for communicating vision due to its text character limitations and its primarily text-based format, which focuses on the recency of content (Antoniadis *et al.*, 2018). Effective vision communication on social media necessitates audience connection and immersive interactions (Ståhl & Kaihovirta, 2019). X is not suitable, as posts are short-lived interactions due to the algorithm prioritisation framework, which promotes recent updates that audiences are engaging with (Huszár, Ktena, O'Brien, Belli, Schlaikjer & Hardt, 2022).

Overall, the vision communication by the DMOs was effectively conducted and clearly defined in the documents with specific codes. These codes are reflected in their social media platforms, demonstrating efficient strategic communication. All the DMOs showed alignment between their documents and social media, except for the ECPTA, which demonstrated a lack of congruency. In their documents, the code *sustainability* was present, while *economic growth* was highlighted on social media. This misalignment points to message inconsistency and suggests compromised strategic messaging in effectively translating key messages from the documents to social media. SAT and GTA consistently emphasised the same code *experience*, while TKZN and LTA focused on the code *leading destination*. The alignment indicates a cohesive communication approach and effective strategic utilisation of social media to project a DMO's vision.

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7.3.3.2 Mission

SAT had one code, *economic growth*, under the mission category. This code was highlighted (n=40) times across the 10 analysed documents. Concernedly, SAT did not mention the social media platform X (even with its former name Twitter) in any way in their strategic documents. It was used to communicate the code *economic growth* (n=13).

WESGRO highlighted only one code, *destination of choice*, in its nine strategic documents. The code was not emphatically emphasised in the documents as it only appeared (n=5) times. The mission code required more mention across all the documents to clearly emphasise its mission in the nine documents. The code was effectively disseminated using Facebook, which is the preferred platform according to WESGRO's document (n=4). This aligns with the documents where Facebook is the most mentioned social media platform.

ECPTA highlighted the code *responsible tourism* (n=4) in its six strategic documents. More emphasis on the DMO's mission could have been placed across all the documents. ECPTA omitted any mention of social media platforms in its documents, despite including elements that allude to their use. They utilised X to communicate the mission, appearing on (n=13) posts.

The Mission category for TKZN comprised two codes found across 16 strategic documents, namely, strategic tourism marketing and demand-driven tourism development, which appeared n=11 and n=8, respectively. In comparison to the number of documents reviewed, the codes were not sufficiently highlighted. The code *strategic tourism marketing* was more integrated in the Facebook posts (n=40), as was the case in the strategic documents. This aligns with the documents where Facebook is the most mentioned social media platform.

MTPA, in its mission, had the code *sustainable tourism growth,* which was mentioned in the seven documents (n=31). The code was incorporated into the social media content in the post updated on Facebook, despite the omission of any mention of social media or elements that allude to its utilisation in the documents.

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GTA had two codes under its mission category, namely, world-class and tourism growth. The codes appeared in the nine documents, with (n=54) and (n=22), respectively. GTA's social media posts highlighted the code *world-class*, (n=47), on Facebook. This aligns with the documents where Facebook was emphasised as the primary social media platform.

LTA's mission comprised two codes. Both codes appeared in the four analysed documents with frequencies (n=24) *experience*, and (n=20) for *tourism development*. The code that was most embedded in the social media posts was *experience* appearing (n= 40) on X. Although LTA showed elements of social media utilisation in its documents, there was no mention of social media platforms.

Overall, there is an observable alignment between the codes mentioned in the strategic documents and social media posts composition. Facebook was the most preferred platform for communicating the mission, being utilised by five DMOs, namely, WESGRO, TKZN, MTPA, and GTA. The remaining DMOs, SAT, ECPTA, and LTA, utilised X. The use of X by SAT was not consistent with the strategic documents, which highlighted Facebook. DMOs did not show an inclination to use Instagram to communicate the mission. By incorporating the mission category's codes highlighted in the strategic documents into their social media content strategies, DMOs effectively utilise social media with strategic intent to create a compelling destination brand narrative.

7.3.3.3 Positioning

Under the positioning category, SAT had the code *inspire* appearing 19 times across the ten documents. This code was primarily integrated into the posts updated on Facebook (n=55). This is their preferred platform, as also highlighted in the strategic documents.

Similar to SAT, WESGRO used inspire (n=5, across five analysed documents). The code was prominently featured in the posts updated on Facebook (n=48). The use of Facebook to communicate positioning aligns with the examined document, in which it is highlighted.

ECPTA highlighted the code *explore* in the documents, which appeared with a frequency of (n=60). Instagram was utilised by ECPTA to communicate positioning and was

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communicated in (n=50) posts. As mentioned before, ECPTA didn't mention or refer to any social media platforms in the documents.
TKZN had three codes mentioned in the documents: first it was *exceptional*, (n=808), followed by *culture*, (n=556), and lastly, *heritage*, (n=50). Consistent with examined documents, the code *exceptional* was primarily featured on Facebook posts, (n=39). *Exceptional* was also prominently featured in the posts on Instagram and X. The dominant use of Facebook aligns with the documents, where it was mentioned more frequently than other platforms.

Regarding MTPA, the code *nature* was mentioned in the documents with a frequency of (n=137) across the seven examined documents. On social media platforms, the code was prominently communicated using Instagram (n=37). There was no mention of social media platforms in the documents.

GTA had one code, *starts here*, underlined in the nine investigated documents (n=14). GTA prominently utilised Instagram to communicate the code, *starts here*, (n=30). The use of Instagram as a preferred platform to carry positioning, steers away from the documents which mentioned Facebook more frequently.

There was one code under LTA's positioning category mentioned in the documents. The code *enjoy* had a frequency of (n=7) from four available examined documents. The code was mainly contained in the content posted on Facebook with frequency (n=47). LTA documents did not specifically mention social media platforms.

Overall, DMOs demonstrate consistency in communication. It is observable on the alignment between positioning codes from the strategic documents and social media content strategies. Both SAT and WESGRO used the same positioning code, *inspire*, although it can be defined and interpreted in different ways based on a destination's characteristics. SAT, WESGRO, TKZN, and LTA utilised Facebook to communicate their positioning, while ECPTA, MTPA, and GTA employed Instagram. However, the use of Instagram was not consistent with the platforms mentioned in the documents, as GTA, ECPTA and MTPA did not specify any platforms in the documents. In conclusion, the alignment between

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positioning category's codes in the documents and social media reflects effective social media strategic utilisation.

7.3.3.4 Summary: communicating strategy

The strategy theme in this study comprised the categories vision, mission, and positioning, which are significant elements for developing and curating a DMO's strategy. The three categories aid as a guiding framework for contextualising brand marketing and communication, thus providing a substratum upon which to build marketing campaigns. Strategy is a method that involves conceptualising, short-term and long-term planning, and positioning (Češnovar, 2006; Mišanková & Kočišová, 2014; Ritchie, 1993; Sołoducho-Pelc, 2015).

Organisations that have a vision, mission and core values are likely to succeed in the business operations (Fitzsimmons, Qin & Heffron, 2022). Kouzes and Posner (2006) characterise vision as a concept that reveals the long-term future state of an organisation, highlighting its unique attributes based on excellence. The primary function of a vision is inspiration (Liu, 2006), and alignment with future aspirations of the organisation (Ani Marlia, Fahmy, Lukito, Prima Lita & Rahim, 2020). Harvey (2021) cited Habakkuk 2:2 (New International Version of the Bible, 2011), stating that a vision should be clearly articulated in the documents and made easy to understand so that it can be readily referred to for direction. This suggests that a clear vision can be easily conveyed in the DMO's documents. In this regard, a vision sets the tone and direction for the DMO's strategic efforts. For instance, SAT's vision is *"to position South Africa as an exceptional tourist and business events destination that offers a value-for-money, quality tourist experience that is diverse and unique" (SAT, 2019:23).* SAT's vision emphasised the tourist experience. Stam, Lord, Knippenberg and Wisse (2014) prescribed that communicating a vision motivates audiences, particularly when it involves the use of images. This vision was effectively integrated into social media content, demonstrating strategic utilisation and consistency between documents and social media use. Social media forms a component of an organisation's strategy for knowledge management and its utilisation necessitates modifications to align with organisations' vision, and mission (Harlow, 2015).

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All the DMOs outlined their mission statements in the strategic documents. The presence of a mission statement marks the foundation of strategic management (Olusola, Oluseye, Udoh, Iember & Ayomiposi, 2022; Powers, 2012). The mission statement is a strategic implement that captures the primary purpose of the organisation, highlighting its uniqueness and identity (Alegre, Berbegal-Mirabent, Guerrero & Mas-Machuca, 2018; Klemm, Sanderson & Luffman, 1991). Mission statements are crucial for effectively establishing and implementing marketing strategy, serving as a basis for aligning an organisation's marketing activities (David, David & David, 2014). Customer engagement improves when marketing efforts are tied to the organisation's mission (Amato & Amato, 2002). This is confirmed, for instance, by the mission of the GTA, which focuses on Gauteng as a world-class destination. The code *world-class* was featured in the posts with the highest engagement on Facebook and Instagram. In this way, the mission statement provided guidance for marketing efforts aimed at promoting the GTA's premier attractions and experiences.

The process of strategic planning in an organisation proceeds from vision and mission statements to positioning (Nadube & Didia, 2018). Positioning serves as a competitive marketing implement for distinguishing a brand from competing brands (Camgöz Akdag & Zineldin, 2011). Positioning occurs in the mind of a consumer facilitating the organisation's brand visibility and top of mind brand recognition (Cristea, 2014; Nadube & Didia, 2018). The primary function of positioning is brand differentiation (Cristea, 2014). Establishing positions that resonate with consumers is a significant aspect of the marketing communications plan (Cristea, 2014). Positioning is a strategy that helps determine the allocation of marketing resources among customer segments (Adıgüzel, 2020; Hassan & Craft, 2005). There are complications that accompany positioning destinations due to their multi-attribute character comprising a plethora of features ranging from business attractions to natural attractions (Pike, 2004). Therefore, DMOs should determine an appropriate positioning theme which effectively represents the destination (Kotsi & Pike, 2021). This incorporates crafting short positioning statements with complementary imagery that embodies the identity of the destination (Pike & Mason, 2011). For instance, the positioning of SAT and WESGRO were both based on the code *inspire*, which was prominently featured in both the strategic documents and social media.

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Penetration and adoption of social media by organisations has brought about benefits involving audience engagement and brand communication reach (Chung, Andreev, Benyoucef, Duane & O'Reilly, 2017). Studies by Chung *et al.* (2017) and Parveen (2012) emphasised the increasing significance of social media as a strategic tool. However, there is dearth of understanding regarding how social media can be strategically employed. Some organisations have embraced social media at business strategy level and developed best practice examples, while others are grappling with its integration and alignment with the business strategy and objectives (Harlow, 2015; Hays *et al.*, 2013). For instance, despite their maturity in adopting social media, the MTPA, ECPTA, and LTA did not integrate and articulate social media into their strategic documents, even though they are actively using Facebook, X, and Instagram. The misalignment points to the gap that exists between strategic communication planning and implementation. This integration failure leads to informal and unplanned social media usage, resulting in haphazard posting (Aral *et al.*, 2013). The effective use and application of social media in an organisation requires a strategic intent (McCann & Barlow, 2015). Social media's influence stretches beyond product marketing. Full leverage of its value to an organisation requires leadership's endorsement (Harlow, 2015; Munar, 2012).

Despite the well-known benefits of social media, research has pointed to a decline in funding for marketing and brand communication activities among DMOs (Hays *et al.*, 2013; Pike & Page, 2014; Uşaklı *et al.*, 2017). This challenge is further augmented by the uncertainty that exists in many organisations regarding how social media functions should be funded and governed (Aral *et al.*, 2013).

The strategic methods applied by DMOs, as seen in their vision, mission, and positioning, are instrumental in creating destination appeal on social media. At the hand of the findings, it is demonstrated that DMOs have embraced social media as a significant platform for communicating the strategy categories. However, there is variation noted in the integration of social media strategies in their documents. Best practice instances are noted with SAT, WESGRO, TKZN, and GTA.

Positioning was the most effectively communicated category by the DMOs, followed to a lesser extent by vision and mission. Across all the DMOs there was consistency in that the

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codes mentioned in the documents were reflected in social media platforms. Positioning, a crucial category, is the basis for differentiating destinations from competitors. This is often achieved by highlighting unique attributes and offerings of each destination. For the vision and mission there was no general alignment between documents and social media, for example, there was no congruence in vision category for ECPTA and MTPA, and for the mission there was inconsistency observed with TKZN. Due to these examples, neither the vision nor the mission was effectively communicated. On average, the strategy theme is best communicated through Facebook. Specifically, vision is most effectively communicated using Instagram, for the mission it is through Facebook, and lastly for positioning it is mainly through Facebook. These are based on the platform that was most prevalent in each category.

7.3.4 Portraying 'Brand Identity' on social media

The brand identity theme included two categories: values and positioning. The following section presents the discussion of integration Phase 2 and Phase 3. It begins by discussing DMOs' codes, their frequencies and then brings in social media.

7.3.4.1 Values

Across the 10 analysed strategic documents for SAT, the most prominently highlighted was the code *responsibility* (n=63), followed by *respect* (n=37), *integrity* (n=14), *authentic and caring* (n=10), and *excellence* (n=6). Even though, Facebook had the most mentions in the strategic documents, Instagram was used to communicate the two integrated codes, *excellence* and *authentic and caring*, appearing in (n=60) posts. These codes appeared in all examined posts. There is misalignment between the code mentions in documents and social media. The code *responsibility* was the most prevalent code in the documents, while in social media posts, *excellence*, and *authentic and caring* were the most prevalent, despite the fact that the two codes were least mentioned in the documents.

For WESGRO five codes were identified, namely, *efficient* (n=21), *accountability* (n=16), *innovation* (n=15) were observed, while *enabling* and *excellence* (n=7) appeared with lower frequency. Similar to SAT, the code that was the most common in the social media post was *excellence*, (n=56), communicated primarily through Instagram. It is noteworthy that the

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code *excellence* was least mentioned in the strategic documents yet prominently mentioned in social media. Despite the documents highlighting Facebook, Instagram was utilised to communicate the values, indicating a discrepancy.

ECPTA had two codes under values, namely, *respect* (n=14), and *integrity* (n=2). The code respect featured mainly on both Facebook and X on (n=20) posts. There were no social media platforms that were specifically mentioned in the documents. In terms of the application of codes between documents and social media, there is consistency.

There were seven codes identified in TKZN's strategic documents, namely, *transformation* (n=52), *respect* (n=21), *warm* (n=14), *collaboration* (n=10), *accountability* (n=6), *integrity* (n=5), and *welcoming* (n=2). However, a difference was observed in social media where the code *welcoming* was featured in all analysed posts for Facebook and X, (n=60), despite the strategic documents primarily mentioning Facebook, which was followed by X.

MTPA had three codes that appeared in the documents, namely, *quality* (n=23), *integrity* (n=7), and *teamwork* (n=4). Consistent with the documents, the code *quality* was communicated more frequently on social media using Instagram, appearing in (n=53 posts). There was no mention of social media posts in the documents, yet MTPA used Instagram.

For GTA five codes were identified in the strategic documents, namely, *transformation and sustainability* (n=64), *corporate governance* (n=27), *integrity* (n=25), and *passion* (n=3). Conversely, on social media, the code *passion*, which was least highlighted in the documents, was predominantly featured in the analysed posts for Facebook, (n=58). Facebook utilisation is in line with its mentions in the documents.

LTA had four codes highlighted in the documents, namely, *communication*, mentioned most frequently (n=63), followed by *accountability* (n=33), *excellence* (n=12), and *learning* (n=8). On the contrary, with social media, the code *excellence* was least highlighted in the documents, but featured predominantly in the analysed posts for Facebook (n=59). There was no mention of social media posts in the documents, even though Facebook was used.

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Overall, the DMOs SAT, ECPTA, TKZN, MTPA, and GTA appeared to be emphasising values in their strategic documents, with value code *integrity* being most prevalent. This makes *integrity* the most common code in the values of the DMOs (n=5). This indicates the significance of the code *integrity* as one of the core values in the management of DMOs. Integrity is a key principle that is at the centre of ethical management and leadership (Azuka, 2009; Enwereuzor, Onyishi, Albi-Oparaocha & Amaeshi, 2020). The concept of integrity refers to alignment with moral principles that encapsulate the ethical values of an organisation (Noelliste, 2013; Zahari, Said & Arshad, 2021). Integrity encompasses the reconciliation of an organisation's actions and values (Ogunyemi & Ogunyemi, 2020).

The emphasis of *integrity* across the DMOs is followed by the code *excellence*, which appeared in DMO documents of SAT, WESGRO, GTA, and LTA. The inclusion of *excellence* as a core value signifies determination to uphold high standards in the demand-side operations. The excellence in tourism represents goal and dedication to operational efficiency, which result in a superior tourist experience (Engeset, Hull & Velvin, 2016; Hsieh & Chuang, 2020). Tourist experience is a crucial concept in tourism, which involves personal subjective attitudes and opinions about tourism activities (Armbrecht, 2021). Creating memorable and distinguished experiences is important for attracting new and repeat visitors (Aho, 2001; Sugathan & Ranjan, 2019). Dedication to excellence in the competitive global tourism arena serve as a differentiating factor (Adamo, Ferrari & Gilli, 2019).

The code *accountability* was also found in the documents of WESGRO, TKZN and LTA, which is indictive of DMOs' emphasis towards transparency and ethical business practices. Accountability is a key element in building relationships with stakeholders and tourists (Font & Lynes, 2018). The effectiveness of a DMO is predicated on the alignment between the strategic goals and the actual communication outputs (Negruşa & Coroş, 2016). This alignment affects accountability and DMOs' legitimacy (Morrison, 2013).

The most preferred social media platform to communicate value is Instagram, which was utilised by SAT, WESGRO, and MTPA. It was followed by Facebook, which was used by GTA and LTA. It is also recognised that both ECPTA and TKZN utilised X and Facebook with equal code frequencies on each platform. It is important to highlight that while all DMOs

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reported Facebook as the preferred platform in the documents, they did not predominantly use it to communicate their values.

Despite being among the most prevalent codes in the DMOs' documents, *integrity* did not receive the highest mention in either the documents or social media. Across all the DMOs that listed *excellence* as a value in their strategic documents did so utilising Instagram, as seen with SAT and WEGSRO, while LTA utilised Facebook. It was only GTA that had *excellence* in the values and not predominantly communicated in social media. Additionally, none of the DMOs that had *excellence* as the leading code in social media demonstrated alignment with the documents since it was not the leading code.

The alignment between strategic business documents and social media is important, particularly the synergy achieved between the business strategies and social media strategies (Hassan Zadeh & Jeyaraj, 2018). The value-based management approach highlights the significance of aligning social media efforts to business goals (Kleindienst, Pfleger & Schoch, 2015).

7.3.4.2 Product

SAT, in terms of product offering, had eight codes identified from their strategic documents, namely, *adventure* (n=22), arts (n=7), *coastal and maritime* (n=13), *culture* (n=38), *heritage* (n=5), *hospitality and conferences* (n=8), *nature* (n=35), and *wildlife* (n=20). The most prevalent code in SAT's documents was *culture*, which contrasts the picture presented in social media, where the most featured product code was *nature*, appearing in (n=57) posts on Instagram. The use of Instagram is despite the prevalent mentions of Facebook in the strategic documents.

The product codes gathered from WESGRO's strategic documents highlighted eight codes, namely, *adventure* (n=26), *arts* (n=103), *coastal and maritime* (n=39), *culture* (n=28), *heritage* (n=38), *hospitality and conferences* (n=31), *nature* (n=58), and *wildlife* (n=16). Although WESGRO emphasised the code *arts* in the documents, this code was not contained in the majority of the social media posts. Instead, it was the code *nature* that was

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featured in all analysed posts (n=60) on Instagram. The use of Instagram is despite the prevalence of Facebook mentions in the strategic documents.

ECPTA's documents highlighted the seven codes, namely, *adventure* (n=11), *arts* (n=11), *coastal and maritime* (n=27), *culture* (n=4), *heritage* (n=30), *nature* (n=66), *wildlife* (n=39). The most mentions in the documents were seen with the code *nature*, consistent with social media activities, where *nature* was composed in the majority of the posts (n=60) updated on Instagram. There was no specific mention of social media platforms in ECPTA's documents.

The nine codes highlighted on TKZN's strategic documents were *adventure* (n=14), *arts* (n=15), *coastal and maritime* (n=84), *culture* (n=24), *heritage* (n=50), *hospitality and conferences* (n=46), *nature* (n=28), *shopping, wellness and sports* (n=46), and *wildlife* (n=29). The documents emphasised its coastal features, with the coastal and maritime gaining more mentions. Inconsistent with the documents, TKZN composed posts on social media containing elements attributable to the *code hospitality and conferences* (n=32) utilising Facebook. The utilisation of Facebook is aligned to the documents where Facebook was emphasised.

MTPA highlighted six product codes, namely, *adventure* (n=7), *culture* (n=10), *heritage* (68), *hospitality and conference* (n=68), *nature* (n=136), and *wildlife* (n=47). The code with the highest frequency was *nature*, consistent with the documents, the same codes was contained in n=41 Instagram posts. There was no specific mention of social media platforms in MTPA's documents.

There were seven product codes contained in GTA's strategic documents, namely, *adventure* (n=21), *arts* (n=21), *culture* (n=47), *heritage* (n=45), *hospitality and conference* (n=125), *nature* (n=49), and *wildlife* (n=12). The highest frequency on mention was in *hospitality and conferences*. Consistent with social media posts, GTA predominantly included the code *hospitality and conferences* in the content posted on X. The misalignment between social media and documents is evident in the use of X, as it was the second most mentioned platform after Facebook.

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LTA's strategic documents contained seven product codes, namely, *adventure* (n=6), *arts* (n=9), *culture* (n=56), *heritage* (n=47), *hospitality and conference* (n=25), *nature* (n=44), and *wildlife* (n=33). The most highlighted code in the documents was *culture*. This is inconsistent with social media, where the code *nature* was prominently integrated into the content posted in X. There was no specific mention of social media platforms in LTA's documents.

7.3.4.3 Summary: communicating brand identity

On social media, two codes were prominently communicated by the DMOs, *nature*, and *hospitality and conferences*. Across all DMOs', strategic documents demonstrate that the code *nature* was present. On social media, nature was the most prevalent code appearing in five DMOs, namely, SAT, WESGRO, ECPTA, MTPA, and LTA. On the other hand, TKZN and GTA highlighted the code *hospitality and conference* on social media. The most utilised social media platform was Instagram. It was primarily used to communicate the code nature except for LTA which used X. GTA also utilised X to communicate *hospitality and conference*, while TKZN used Facebook to communicate this code.

Destination branding involves creating an enduring mental image of the destination in the minds of tourists by emphasising distinguishing attributes that attract visitors (Nixon, 2023). It is likely that coastal DMOs, WESGRO, ECPTA, and SAT (national DMOs which include coastal destinations), communicate nature to highlight their diverse product offerings besides the obvious coastal attractions. Coastal destinations in South Africa possess expansive open spaces encompassing marine and terrestrial environments (Priskin, 2001). Among the three inland DMOs, MTPA, GTA, and LTA, only GTA did not have *nature* as the leading code in the social media posts. This implies that nature-based attractions are synonymous with inland destinations. The south African nature-based tourism offering is heavily dependent on game viewing that involves large mammals (Scriven & Eloff, 2003). It is unsurprising that coastal destinations are tapping in on the nature-based tourism economy, as it constitutes a major attraction factor for diverse tourist experiences (Rogerson & Rogerson, 2014).

Social media has been recognised as a crucial source of information for nature-based tourism (Da Mota & Pickering, 2020; Fisher, Wood, White, Blahna, Lange, Weinberg, Tomco

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& Lia, 2018). DMOs have increasingly shown a move towards representing destination brands online through visual content rather than textual content leveraging platforms such as Instagram (Nixon, 2023). Instagram is a beneficial platform for examining and monitoring visitations to natural spaces, reliably providing results in single platform analyses (Da Mota & Pickering, 2020; Tenkanen, Di Minin, Heikinheimo, Hausmann, Herbst, Kajala & Toivonen, 2017). In the present study, DMOs used the Instagram platform to promote nature-based tourism attractions. This aligns with the study findings of Tenkanen *et al.* (2017) which concluded that Instagram was an effective platform for examining park popularity, and posting about daily activities. Travellers are likely to document and share their travel photographs using Instagram to their audience via hashtags (Filieri *et al.*, 2021; Sheldon & Bryant, 2016). The utilisation of hashtags integrates the hyperlinked key words that indicates the subject categorisation of the post, connecting to the other Instagram posts on the same topic (Filieri *et al.*, 2021).

The code *hospitality and conferences* featured across all DMO's strategic documents except for ECPTA. The code reflected a focus on the business travel sector. In the tourism industry, business travel is referred to as MICE, an acronym for Meetings, Incentives, Conference/Conventions and Exhibitions/Events (Jamgade, 2018). Essentially, the promotion of hospitality and conferences has spin-offs that augment pride and economy of the host destination (Mxunyelwa, 2017).

Global conferences and meetings, as the prominently growing sector in the tourism arena, has experienced dynamic changes and garnered increasing interest from emerging destinations (Kim, Kim, Milne & O'Neill, 2020; Pavluković & Cimbaljević, 2020), rendering it essential for DMOs to remain well invested in the developments that are taking place (Kim *et al.*, 2020). Fully understanding the choice factors that influence organisers and potential delegates to choose a meeting destination remains key to attracting them (Kim *et al.*, 2020). Studies have suggested that two major drawcards for delegates are professional objectives, such as expanding business networks, and personal development. It is, therefore, incumbent hosting DMOs to design product packages that effectively deliver on the key motivations (Jago & Deery, 2005; Oppermann & Chon, 1997; Pavluković & Cimbaljević, 2020), since the universal goal for conference organisers and host DMOs is to increase the number of potential delegates (Pavluković & Cimbaljević, 2020). In this regard, the study by

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Jamgade (2018) adds that MICE tourists tend to spend more on tourists activities. Another benefit, according to Mxunyelwa (2017) is through showcasing product offering, which can attract tourism investment to the host destination.

On the side of social media, the code *hospitality and conferences* was prevalent for DMOs TKZN, which was communicated using Facebook, and GTA utilised X. Although *coastal and maritime* was the leading code in TKZN's documents, the code *hospitality and conferences* was prominent on social media. This communication strategy seeks to highlight other product offerings through attracting business travel tourist who might also enjoy the coastal activities during their stay. On the other hand, GTA, in the documents, emphasised the hospitality and conferences as well as on social media using X. Advancement in social media has unlocked engagement opportunities between visitors and hospitality and travel organisations (Chu, Deng & Cheng, 2020). Social media activities propel and boost destination brand image (Chu *et al.*, 2020; Mxunyelwa, 2017). Social media has been shown to have influence on decision-making regarding reservation and potential delegates' conference attendance (Aydin, 2020; Pavluković & Cimbaljević, 2020). Social media, in particular Facebook, is shown as a crucial element in planning for upcoming travel (Aydin, 2020), which aligns with GTA's use of Facebook to promote the code *hospitality and conferences.*

Our perspective is that promoting (by DMOs) nature-based attractions demonstrates efforts to diversify product offering and motivate tourists to visit the coastal destination for other offerings more than just costal and marine activities. This strategy is crucial for mitigating effects of seasonality. Through this strategy coastal destinations can effectively compete with destinations that focus mainly on nature-based attractions, such as MTPA and LTA, as indicated in their documents.

Overall, the analysis of a DMO's strategic document and social media content unearthed varying degrees of application communication when displaying vision, mission, positioning, values, and product offering. While some DMOs maintained consistency in aligning social media content to strategic documents, some DMOs showed gaps and misalignment. This denotes the gap that exists between brand identity and the image projected on social media. This is critical for the reason that the intersection highlights the importance of synchronised

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and integrated communication through maintaining consistency and alignment between the image and the identity of the brand (Saraniemi, 2011). Brand identity is a pivotal dimension in creating a destination image in tourists' minds (Qu *et al.*, 2011; Rodrigues *et al.*, 2020). Research suggest that strong brand identity often reflects a compelling brand image (Florek & Janiszewska, 2013; Linsner *et al.*, 2021). For instance, as found in the study, the majority of the DMOs had developed strong brand identities that aligned with their overall strategy as expressed in their vision, mission and positioning. Because of this, they had specific messages that went out consistently across social media platforms, reinforcing their brand identity as stated in the strategic documents.

7.3.5 Social media analysis and profiling

The following section discusses how DMOs emphasised social media codes in strategic documents and utilised social media platforms to communicate the five categories (vision, mission, positioning, values, and product) as discussed in the preceding paragraphs. For this purpose, each DMO is discussed separately to provide a cohesive picture of this key component of the analysis. These discussions are concluded with a classification of the respective DMOs according to Chung *et al.* (2017) Social Media Business Profile (SMBP).

7.3.5.1 South African Tourism

The SAT predominantly utilised Instagram to communicate its codes in the five categories, Instagram was used (n=3) times on vision, values, and product, while mission and positioning used X, and Facebook, respectively. The use of X is inconsistent with the documents, as it was not mentioned. Destinations are distinguishable when they possess a comprehensive communication strategy that primarily focuses attention on social media (Kiráľová & Pavlíčeka, 2015). Across all the DMOs, SAT is prominent for its comprehensive strategic utilisation of social media. This is evidenced by the presence of the categories and accompanying codes in the documents, which suggest a thorough understanding of social media as a strategic tool. The categories and codes identified are content strategy, with codes *content creation* (n=31), *content teaser* (n=1), *influencer* (n=1), *engagement* (n=1), promotions with the code *campaigns* (n=1), and monitoring and analytics with the code *sentiment analysis* (n=2). The prevalence of these categories and codes prove SAT has a

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structured plan to social media utilisation. This is crystalised by the quote, "*South African Tourism focused on driving awareness and positivity about South Africa as a tourist destination through a global media campaign, content development, continued social media (SAT, 2019:42)".*

Tourism content disseminated by users on social media platforms has become a crucial source of data that plays an influential role on the reputation and performance of a destination brand (Alaei, Becken & Stantic, 2019). The presence and frequency of the code *content creation* indicates that SAT prioritises consistent content output to project the destination's image and to foster engagement with audiences. Organisations view content creation as more valuable than merely liking content (Nikolinakou & Phua, 2020). In the same vein, SAT implemented the use of the influencers to create content about the organisation. Influencers generate content such as written articles, images or audio to share with audiences (Ferdinandus & Alvin, 2023). Through adopting this approach, SAT aims to influence their perception of the destination brand by portraying favourable attributes of the destination and projecting a positive image of the destination (Ferdinandus & Alvin, 2023).

Baum *et al.* (2019) argue that social media serves as a highly effective tool for launching marketing campaigns, fundamentally due to its wide reach within a relatively short time frame, while reducing costs typically associated with traditional national or global media campaigns (Argyris, Nelson, Wiseley, Shen & Roscizewski, 2023). This understanding aligns with SAT's integration of campaigns in the centre of its social media strategy which permits for the use for multi-content formats such as text, images, and videos to disseminate key campaign messages.

The nature of social media has transformed web users from being passive consumers of information to becoming active participants by way of engagement on social media platforms (Ketter & Avraham, 2012). As part of its strategy, SAT places user engagement amidst its key priorities, which aligns with the notion that social media facilitates a two-way conversation (Falco & Kleinhans, 2018; Maben & Gearhart, 2018). Audience engagement is achieved through the use of engagement metrics such as a like, comment, and/or a share (Kim & Kim, 2020).

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The voluminous nature of data on social media platforms necessitates the contemporary analytic approach to aggregate the nature of conversations (Alaei et al., 2019). As a sub-section of machine learning that focuses on data mining, language processing, and computational linguistics, it extends to include components of psychology (Yue, Chen, Li, Zuo & Yin, 2019). Sentiment analysis is a crucial aspect of social media for opinion mining (Păvăloaia, Teodor, Fotache & Danileţ, 2019). The utilisation of social media in a strategic manner is reinforced by SAT's focus on social media monitoring and analytics with the presence of the code *sentiment analysis*. This demonstrates the reliance on data-driven strategy and approach utilisation of social media to evaluate online reputations and image portrayed. According to Drus and Khalid (2019) social media monitoring is an effective approach for tracking customer loyalty towards a brand. Yue *et al.* (2019) adds that social media sentiments provide the most recent online opinions and perceptions. The review of the analysis allows the DMOs to compare the identity of the destination vs the image projected as revealed by the sentiment analysis.

7.3.5.2 WESGRO

WESGRO used both Facebook and Instagram to communicate their categories. The most frequently used social media platform was Facebook, (n=3), which was utilised to convey vision, mission, and positioning, while Instagram was utilised to communicate values and products. The use of Facebook is consistent with the mentions in the strategic documents where it was prominently highlighted. This is crystalised in the quote contained in WESGRO's documents, which alluded to the critical nature of strategic alignment; *"Governance Programme is responsible for the implementation of an integrated approach, which considers results-based implementation and direct alignment to Wesgro's strategic direction, monitoring and evaluation… (WESGRO, 2022a:91 – 93)".* Additionally, WESGRO's documents mentioned the usage of three major social media platforms, namely, Facebook, X, and Instagram, showing the employment of multi-platform approach in social media communication.

WESGRO demonstrated an element of strategic utilisation of social media, evidenced by the presence of the categories and accompanying codes in the documents, namely, category content creation, with codes *content* creation (n=30), promotions with the code

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campaigns (n=8), and monitoring and analytics with code *online listening* (n=2). The concept of online listening refers to actively monitoring and paying attention to social media conversations to draw understanding of opinions and sentiments toward the brand (Crawford, 2009). Furthermore, online listening is a continuous timely monitoring of social media conversations (Di Martino, 2020). Through utilising social media data firms are able to analyse content posted and underlying sentiment towards the destination brand (Schweidel & Moe, 2014). At this point, the study argues that sentiment analysis and online listening are essentially the same concept, where both concepts involve opinion mining to assess inclinations and perceptions towards the brand. The presence of these categories and codes suggests a lower integration of social media in the DMO's overall strategy compared to SAT.

7.3.5.3 ECPTA

ECPTA predominantly employed X to communicate three categories, namely, vision, mission, and values (both X and Facebook were utilised in the same number of posts for values). Instagram was employed to positioning and product categories. It is worth mentioning that ECPTA showed major inconsistency in their strategic documents where there was no specific mention of social media platforms. What is known, is that ECPTA has social media accounts and has been conducting activities on Facebook, X, and Instagram. This misalignment suggests the absence of a clearly defined social media strategy. There are, however, some elements attributable to the strategic utilisation of social media. The presence of the categories and accompanying codes in the documents includes the category content creation, with the code *trends* (n=1), and monitoring and analytics with the code *evidence* (n=2).

This is the fundamental aspect in the ECPTA's strategy, in their anticipation of social media content trends. Kong, Mao, Chen and Zeng (2018) state that social media platforms enable users to display an interactive behaviour towards a certain type of content, which, in turn, drive such content to prominence. The notoriety of the content demonstrates the attention certain content topics, hashtags and formats are able to attract and captivate users (Zhang, Zhao & Xu, 2016). The diffusion of social media content is a dynamic phenomenon that displays fluctuating behaviour over time, rendering its predictability closely interwoven with

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the cyclical attributes of content popularity evolution (Lymperopoulos, 2016). These dynamic changes in content preferences experience bursts and decays, thus forming the basis of social media trends (Kong *et al.*, 2018; Yin, Cui, Chen, Hu & Zhou, 2015). The period of burst is denoted by collective participation of users during the diffusion of the relevant information, thus driving its popularity (Zhang *et al.*, 2016). While at the period of decay, new content trends emerge (Zhang *et al.*, 2016). The second code suggest that ECPTA implements an evidence-based social media strategy. This strategy is reliant on the data mining and analytics from social media to gauge users sentiments and study trends to guide planning and execution (McKibbon, 1998; Tafesse & Wien, 2018). An evidence-based social media strategy is essential for evaluating social media campaign performance and making refinements (Tafesse & Wien, 2018; Zhao, Harvey, Vandyk & Gifford, 2022). Evidence-based social media strategy leverages data-led insights by employing metrics including engagements metrics, such as likes, comments and shares, and others which include, reach and click through rates for links embedded in posts (Junco, 2014; Rahman, Suberamanian, Zanuddin, Moghavvemi & Nasir, 2016). Additionally, it employs the use of audiences' demographic information and behavioural patterns such as content preference and periods of peak engagement (Cartwright & Shaw, 2020; Junco, 2014). Lastly, evidence-based social media approach involves sentiment analysis and online listening to gain insights into user perceptions and preferences (Di Martino, 2020; Păvăloaia *et al.*, 2019).

7.3.5.4 TKZN

TKZN prominently employed the use of Facebook to convey the categories: mission, positioning, values (tied with X), and product. While Instagram was used to communicate vision, the extensive use of Facebook as the primary platform aligns with the strategic documents, where Facebook is predominantly emphasised. TKZN utilises social media strategically, as evidenced by the inclusion of the categories and accompanying codes in the documents, namely, category content creation, with codes *influencer* (n=4), promotions, with the code *campaigns* (n=16) and monitoring and analytics with the code *audience* (n=3). Although there is dearth of literature that demonstrates how DMOs select influencers (Bokunewicz & Shulman, 2017; Femenia-Serra & Gretzel, 2020), TKZN's collaboration with influencers showcase strategies to increase brand awareness, content reach and engagement through electronic word-of-mouth. Influencer marketing has widely reached

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into every industry, including tourism (Javits, 2019). It is a practice that leverages the notoriety of an individual with substantial online following that translates into influence. Influencer can shape consumer attitudes and purchase decision-making (Bakshy, Hofman, Mason & Watts, 2011; Femenia-Serra & Gretzel, 2020). Research has confirmed that DMOs are tapping into influencer marketing, leveraging on their reach to help attract visitors to the destination (Barbe, Neuburger & Pennington-Gray, 2020; Femenia-Serra & Gretzel, 2020; Neuburger, Barbe & Fedeli, 2024). Influencer marketing campaigns often include user-generated content, encompassing personal testimonials on expectations, and perceptions, and online familiarisation tours showing destinations' product offering (Joyce, 2024). Through this, influencers increase destination brand awareness by communicating authenticity of the destination experience to their hard-to-reach followers while also forging ties with potential visitors (Glenister, 2021; Vlahov & Vlahov, 2021). In the monitoring and analytics, documents allude to TKZN tracking profile growth in relation to the increase in the number of audiences following the account.

7.3.5.5 MTPA

MTPA strategic documents did not mention social media or any key terms which allude to strategic utilisation of social media. Nevertheless, MTPA has been active in the social media platforms. Instagram was prominently used to communicate four categories: mission, positioning, values, and product, while Facebook was used to communicate vision. The inconsistency could suggest lack of clearly defined social media strategy and approach. This has the potential to lead to watered-down social media efforts and effectiveness (Mohamed & Hewedi, 2022), resulting in misguided content posting that lacks focus and alignment to the destination brand identity leading to a weak online presence (Alizadegan & Liu, 2022). DMOs that do not devise policies and plans to manage social media lose a significant edge (Mohamed & Hewedi, 2022). A comprehensive social media strategy is essential for fostering linkages between a destination's identity and online image. Appropriate integration of social media into business strategy will aid and guide DMOs in reaching their strategic objectives (Ge *et al.*, 2013).

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7.3.5.6 GTA

The GTA mostly employed Facebook to communicate categories, vision, mission, and values while using Instagram to communicate positioning, and X for values. Remarkably, the heavy use of Facebook is despite the fact that GTA documents emphasised Instagram as a significant platform for selling the destination offerings (GTA, 2019/20). The prevalent use of Facebook is consistent with its emphasis in the strategic documents. GTA appears to be employing social media strategically, as evidenced by the inclusion of the categories and accompanying codes in the documents, namely, category content creation, with codes *user-generated content* (n=4), promotions, with the code *campaigns* (n=1) and monitoring and analytics with the code *tracking* (n=10). GTA has a strategy geared towards tapping into users' content to amplify its messages with users sharing their destination experiences across wide audiences. This is crucial since user-generated content is perceived as more credible and authentic than traditional mass media communication because it highlights user experience (García-Rapp, 2017). This type of content carries a degree of believability, making it prone to resonate with audiences (García-Rapp, 2017; Gilpin, Palazzolo & Brody, 2010). Authenticity in the context of social media relates to the knowledge and expertise of the user generating the content in regard to the destination (Gilpin *et al.*, 2010; Jiménez-Barreto *et al.*, 2020). Credibility judgements of information largely hinge on the trustworthiness and attractiveness of the content producer (Jenkins, Ilicic, Barklamb & McCaffrey, 2020). In this regard, clarity in communication of a destination's identity is crucial and integral in shaping perceptions of authenticity (Gilpin *et al.*, 2010). Brand authenticity assumes a significant role in connecting tourists' experiences and intention to visit, revisit or endorse it (Jiménez-Barreto *et al.*, 2020). GTA further incorporates social media tracking as a key aspect of the strategy, signalling dependence on the use of an evidence-based approach through data analytics. Social media tracking is described as a methodical phenomenon that involves monitoring, data analysis to attain insights into audience behaviours, and sentiment (Karafillakis, Martin, Simas, Olsson, Takacs, Dada & Larson, 2021; Stieglitz & Dang-Xuan, 2013). Social media tracking opens up opportunity for analysing communication patterns, trends and influential actors (Ghani, Hamid, Hashem & Ahmed, 2019). This method optimises campaign performance, enabling responsiveness and agility to adjust the campaign strategy to market and social media dynamics in real time (Stylos, Zwiegelaar & Buhalis, 2021).

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7.3.5.7 LTA

LTA has, in equal frequencies, utilised both Facebook and X. Facebook was used for conveying messages pertaining to positioning and values, while X was used for mission and products. Instagram communicated vision. LTA documents did not mention specific social media platforms. The documents contained codes that allude, to a certain extent, to a strategic utilisation of social media. This is denoted by the presence of the codes, influencer collaboration, social media campaigns, insights and analytic, and social media tactics. It is remarkable that LTA joined the social media platforms Facebook, X, and Instagram shortly after their worldwide notoriety but failed to mention this in the documents. Although not comprehensively articulated, LTA appears to be employing social media strategically, as evidenced by the inclusion of the categories and accompanying codes in the documents, namely, category content strategy, with codes *influencer* (n=1), promotions, with the code *campaigns* (n=1) and monitoring and analytics with the code *presence* (n=1). LTA monitors its online presence to monitor campaign performance and brand awareness, crystallised by the quotation *"… evidenced in the growth in social media presence…." (LTA, 2020:66).*

Social media presence refers to the active and strategic participation of organisations or individuals on social media platforms to engage with audiences, share content, and build an online identity. For businesses, particularly DMOs, maintaining a strong social media presence is essential for building brand awareness, fostering relationships, and promoting services or destinations (Hays *et al.*, 2013). A robust presence on platforms such as Instagram, Facebook, and Twitter, allows for consistent interaction with users through a mix of text, images, videos, and user-generated content. This presence not only increases visibility but also facilitates real-time communication and feedback, allowing organisations to directly interact with their target audience (Mariani *et al.*, 2016).

LTA is leveraging social media strategically to enhance its marketing efforts and reach. There is inconsistency in terms of integration of these platforms in the documents, suggesting a potential lack of crystalised social media strategy (Chen *et al.*, 2010).

Organisations must effectively manage the process of social media adoption and its strategic utilisation to harness its benefits (Chung *et al.*, 2017). Parveen (2012) stressed the

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increasing strategic importance of social media for organisations but also pointed out widespread lack of understanding on how to leverage social media's strategic full potential. Mismanagement of social media, according to Chung *et al*. (2017), can lead to unintended outcomes for both the organisation and its audiences. Several studies have isolated key challenges related to mismanagement of social media, including uncertainty concerning social media funding, management, organisational culture and the allocation of responsibilities for social media activities as some of the hindrances and hurdles encountered by DMOs (Aral *et al.*, 2013; Hays *et al.*, 2013; Mariani *et al.*, 2016; Uşaklı *et al.*, 2017). These factors present significant obstacles for DMOs to incorporate social media into their wider strategies.

7.3.6 Profiling the DMOs according to levels of social media strategy adoption

The study by Chung *et al*. (2017) proposed a Social Media Business Profile (SMBP) typology which categorises organisations according to five stages predicated on their potential to effectively utilise social media, namely, experimentation and learning, rapid growth, formalisation, consolidation and integration, and institutional absorption.

Experimentation and Learning

For organisations, social media utilisation at this phase is largely experimental (Chung *et al.*, 2017; Uşaklı *et al.*, 2017), with no clear strategic direction and planning (Hays et al., 2013). Hays et al. (2013) observed that most of the DMOs adopted social media, however, their strategy remained in infancy. DMOs initial focus is establishing presence through announcing the launch of the social media profile, sporadic content is posted, the content includes a number of comments, images and videos, and providing product offering information, this content is largely haphazard and uncoordinated (Chung *et al.*, 2017; Leung *et al.*, 2013). Other organisations may join the platform and remain in this initial stage for an extended period as they develop ways to effectively incorporate social media into their broader strategy (Leung et al., 2013). Mostert (2015) stated that primary inhibitory factors affecting social media utilisation included challenges with content development and dissemination. As noted in the study, certain DMOs, such as ECPTA, delayed in establishing a profile on Instagram, only to do so four years after it launched. This could point to a deliberate approach to assess the platform and determine ways to incorporate it into its

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strategy. However, contrary to this assumption, the analysis of ECPTA's strategic documents revealed that social media was not effectively incorporated into the overall strategy. Early social media platform adoption (soon after the platform's official launch) does not imply the presence of a clear social media strategy or effectiveness of DMOs' social media approach (Mariani *et al.*, 2016).

Rapid Growth

According Chung *et al.* (2017), at this phase social media is incorporated into the organisation's strategy and its implementation is assessed and monitored. At this stage the organisation sets a clear social media plan, goals and objectives that align with the overall strategy. During this phase, the organisation focuses on growing the audience by encouraging engagement and interactions through a like, comment, share, and encouraging users to follow the platform (Aydin, 2020; Shahbaznezhad *et al.*, 2021; Wies *et al.*, 2023). These basic engagement metrics are used to measure growth of the profile in the platform (Arora *et al.*, 2019). This is seen in the case of TKZN, where strategic documents reveal an extent of social media integration into the overall strategy. There is a demonstration of alignment between strategic documents and content shared on social media platforms. TKZN leverages influencers to disseminate content and garner user engagement, while their major metric to monitor and evaluate profile growth is audience numbers.

Formalisation

During this phase social media is formalised into organisational frameworks through planning with the intention of achieving full strategic alignment and consistency as emphasised by Chung *et a*l. (2017). The alignment and consistency are further reinforced in the organisation's brand identity and brand positioning (Alvarado-Karste & Guzmán, 2020; Boafo, Agyapong, Asare & Amponsah, 2020; De Chernatony, 1999). Additionally, social media is employed as an organisation-wide strategic tool for various campaigns (Kietzmann *et al.*, 2011). This is exemplified by GTA, which demonstrated alignment and consistency in the strategic documents regarding social media utilisation, particularly in terms of strategy, identity, and preferred platform, as stated in the documents: Facebook. At this level, organisations implement robust social tactics for carrying out campaigns and tracking insights generated through the platforms (Smith, Li, Pan, Witte & Doherty, 2015).

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Consolidation and Integration

Social media, at this phase is deeply intrenched within the wider strategy of the organisation (Chung *et al.*, 2017). This level of integration improves efficiency and necessitates coordination across various business functions (Lombardo, Mordonini & Tomaiuolo, 2021). At this stage, social media is a key component of an organisation's communication toolkit and crucial enabler for optimising outreach and message penetration (Chung *et al.*, 2017; Lund *et al.*, 2018). Of particular relevance to the study, is that this phase is characterised by the alignment of social media functions with stakeholders (Belasen & Belasen, 2019; Lehtinen & Aaltonen, 2022), and involvement in content co-creation leveraging the creativity of the online communities to enhance products offering (Chung *et al.*, 2017). This phase is typified by WESGRO, which showed that social media is deeply entrenched and integrated in the overall strategy across business functions. Since WESGRO does not only present the tourism facet but other facets such as trade and investment, this also revealed a great alignment between documents and social media. The employment of online listening implies that WESGRO is actively monitoring and paying attention to social media conversations to draw understanding of opinions and sentiments toward the brand (Crawford, 2009).

Institutional Absorption

At this phase social media is fully institutionalised and absorbed into the organisation's strategic framework extending to customer engagement and building lasting relationships (Chung *et al*., 2017). Social media is no longer seen as a separate aspect of communication but a significant application integral to the execution of key business functions (Chung *et al.*, 2017; Felix, Rauschnabel & Hinsch, 2017). During this phase the attention is on leveraging social media to develop new business models, such as employing it as a new sales channel or reconfiguring current models through the strategic implementation of social media (Agnihotri, Kothandaraman, Kashyap & Singh, 2012; Mention, Barlatier & Josserand, 2019). This phase is exemplified by SAT, demonstrating that social media is institutionalised across the entire organisation. The findings revealed strong alignment between documents and social media content. Document analysis indicated that SAT applies a blend of strategies to drive social media including the content creation, use of influencers, user engagement and for campaigns management. At this phase, organisations such as SAT utilise data to gain and extract social media insights to drive and inform strategic initiatives (Arora *et al.*, 2019; Hassan Zadeh & Jeyaraj, 2018). This is evident in the consistency of SAT's implementation

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of sentiment analysis, which indicates dependence on a data-driven strategy and the utilisation of social media. Drus and Khalid (2019) state that social media monitoring is an effective approach for tracking customer loyalty towards a brand. Yue *et al.* (2019) emphasise that social media sentiment analysis provides the most recent online opinions and perceptions.

7.4 Conclusion

The availability of the social media related categories and codes is seen as indicative of the presence of social media strategy and its strategic utilisation by the DMOs. Effing and Spil (2016) define social media strategy as an objective-focused planning process aimed at developing user-generated content, which is disseminated over different platforms to establish a unique and competitive position. Research studies investigating the influence of social media on organisations' performance demonstrated that social media usage leads to cost reduction, enhanced customer relationship, and increased information accessibility (Jucan, Jucan & Rotariu, 2013).

In this chapter, insight was provided on this strategic application of social media. It highlighted the similarities and discrepancies between diverse DMO case studies, proposing reasons for these variations, and highlighting the need to undertake a thorough evaluation of DMOs' strategic management of content across different formats and platforms.

Overall, there is evidence of alignment between DMOs' strategies and brand identities stated in their strategic documents and social media. For instance, this is shown in the case of SAT where the code *experience*, which was prominent in both documents and social media, particularly on Instagram, indicated deliberate strategic intent in social media utilisation. Instagram, followed by Facebook, emerged as the most popular social media platform amongst the DMOs' cases under the study, despite the prominent mention of Facebook in the strategic documents. The most emphasised code on Instagram was *nature*, which appeared to be the main product feature for the majority of DMOs. Elements attributable to advanced, strategy-driven social media utilisation, notably highlighting the codes *content creation*, and insights and analytics. However, ECPTA, MTPA, and LTA lacked clarity in stating their social media strategies and which could point to a gap in the integration of social media into organisational strategy. An emerging trend is observed with

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KZN and LTA in their collaboration with influencers to broaden their reach and attract more visitors.

The next chapter concludes the study by summarising key findings, presenting the revised framework of the study and makes recommendations for future research.

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CHAPTER 8: SUMMARY, RECOMMENDATIONS AND CONCLUSION

This chapter presents the study summary by recapturing the main concepts underpinning the study. It provides an overview of the previous chapters, briefly restates the study purpose, objectives for each phase, and methods applied in the respective phases. A brief summary of the key findings from each phase is provided. This is followed by a discussion of the revised conceptual framework that guided the study. The chapter ends with the contributions of the study, as well as limitations and recommendations for future research.

8.1 Introduction

The advent of social media has significantly affected many sectors (Li & Xie, 2020), consequently drawing increasing scholarly interest. It has brought challenges and opportunities for DMOs in how they go about their marketing activities (Munar & Jacobsen, 2014). Many DMOs worldwide have integrated social media into their destination management and marketing toolkit (Hays *et al.*, 2013). With social media as an enabler, establishing and maintaining competitiveness is essential for a destination's success (Dwyer & Kim, 2003; Pike & Mason, 2011; Vengesayi, 2003). However, it must be noted that social media alone is not capable of handling and facilitating business within the tourism arena. It must always be integrated into other elements of a promotional mix (Madondo, 2016).

The significance of destination management in the competitiveness of destinations is highlighted in many scholarly works (Altinay & Kozak, 2021; Khan *et al.*, 2021; Zhu *et al.*, 2021). Destination competitiveness models depict destination policy, planning, values, and branding as important components that contribute to destination competitiveness (Dwyer & Kim, 2003; Hassan, 2000; Pike & Mason, 2011; Ritchie & Crouch, 2003). Furthermore, tourism planning and policy have a notable influence on how tourism develops (Dredge & Jamal, 2015; Dredge & Jenkins, 2007), and the development of the destination is conceivable through rational action plans (Gržinić & Saftić, 2012). These plans intend to establish endeavours to be undertaken following predefined objectives and are of strategic

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value to the development of the destination's competitiveness (Tanrisevdi *et al.*, 2021; Vernon *et al.*, 2005).

One of the most basic aspects of destination management is the Destination Management Plan (DMP) which directs performance by outlining strategic goals (Coban & Yildiz, 2019; Hristov & Petrova, 2018). Key components of these plans are strategic vision, mission, objectives, and various long-term interventions to be set up (Hristov & Petrova, 2018; Pearce, 2016; Soulard *et al.*, 2018). These are developed and documented during the DMO's strategic planning and policy formulation, on which the outcomes drive destination marketing efforts (Sheehan *et al.*, 2016; Wagenseil, Wyss & Huck, 2022). This ensures that destination marketing strategies are consistent with the primary objectives of the destination (Baker *et al.*, 2011; Henderson & Venkatraman, 1999).

Destination marketing is one the most important functions of DMOs (Kumar & Mishra, 2019; Morrison, 2013), as they commit budgets and ascertain leverage through implementing suitable strategies in marketing mixes, especially in promotions aimed at establishing a brand position within the target market (Kantamaa, 2020; Wang & Pizam, 2011). Destination branding is a foundational element shaping the competitiveness of a destination (Andrades & Dimanche, 2017; Crouch, 2011; Dwyer & Kim, 2003; Pike & Mason, 2011). The substantial number of studies affirm that destination branding has increased significantly as a strategic marketing activity during the last quarter-century (Hankinson, 2015; Kavaratzis, 2005; Melewar & Dennis, 2014). This growth demonstrates the recognition of branding as an aspect central to destinations' ability to differentiate themselves from competitors with an effective and memorable identity.

Destination branding presents a means to communicate a destination's unique identity by distinguishing a destination from competitors (Morrison, 2013; Morrison & Anderson, 2002). Destination brand identity is regarded as the embodiment of a specific geographical location's attributes (Hanna & Rowley, 2011; Kim *et al.*, 2018a). It represents the aspirational self-image developed by the DMO (Ghodeswar, 2008; Linsner *et al.*, 2021; Pike *et al.*, 2010), and is the brand image expressed and disseminated to target markets (Kneesel *et al.*, 2010; Konecnik & Go, 2008). Destination branding efforts must project destination brand identity that represents all the attributes and activities that distinguish the destination (Aaker, 1996a;

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Saraniemi & Komppula, 2017). This brand identity encompasses distinguished traits, values, and product offerings (Ruzzier & De Chernatony, 2013).

Kapferer (2012) argued that brand identity precedes brand image, as brand identity carries the content of the message to be communicated, the culmination of which is the brand image, while Aaker (1997), on the other hand, argued that brand image is a significant source of information for developing brand identity. The current study supports the notion that brand identity precedes brand image. This conclusion is based on Govers and Go (2009) who argued that destination image should be based on destination identity. However, there are instances where brand identity is developed from existing brand image, with the process requiring continuous alignment. The relationship between brand identity and brand image are reciprocally reinforcing (Mao, Lai, Luo, Liu, Du, Zhou, Ma, Bonaiuto & Bonaiuto, 2020). This reciprocal relationship means that how a destination brand is perceived and interpreted by target markets is moulded by its brand identity, whilst the image the brand projects, in turn, reinforces its identity (Lin *et al.*, 2011; Nandan, 2005), making brand image crucial in the process of brand identity formation. (Cai, 2002; Essamri *et al.*, 2019).

Collectively, brand identity and brand image play a vital role in shaping tourists' preferences (Linsner *et al*., 2021; Pedeliento & Kavaratzis, 2019). Brand image formation in the consumer's mind is primarily a subjective, perceptual process that develops from the consumer's cognitive and emotional interpretation of brand stimuli (Bilgin, 2018; Dobni & Zinkhan, 1990). It is a combination of numerous brand associations, both tangible and intangible, that together shape impressions and perceptions of the brand (Faircloth *et al.*, 2001; Johnson & Zinkhan, 2015). The destination image must be consistently aligned with the key attributes and the inherent character of the destination (Go *et al.*, 2004; Van Wijk *et al.*, 2008; Wang *et al.*, 2020).

Many destinations are increasingly employing social media to strengthen traditional marketing efforts, gaining prominence as part of marketing practices (Hays *et al.*, 2013; Mariani *et al.*, 2016; Saravanakumar & SuganthaLakshmi, 2012). As such, destination ecosystems are significantly impacted by the new strategic challenges posed by the emergent social media trend (Munar, 2012; Munar & Jacobsen, 2014). The widespread prevalence of social media has resulted in a significant surge in its user adoption and

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utilisation across various demographics (Ali Qalati *et al.*, 2020). Its effect has turned out to be that social media platforms are the most fitting tools for tourism firms to communicate with tourists This change necessitates DMOs to employ social media platforms to remain connected in the day-to-day interactions of the virtual world (Hays *et al.*, 2013).

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Some DMOs have embraced social media technology at a faster pace, recognising its potential to enhance destination promotion, engage with travellers, and amplify their marketing efforts (Gretzel *et al.*, 2000; Li *et al.*, 2017). Nonetheless, the inherent advantages of social media for tourism firms, the adoption of social media platforms among DMOs, is not uniform (Uşaklı *et al.*, 2017).

This study thoroughly investigated the crucial links between brand identity, brand image, and social media. It measured the extent to which DMOs, at different levels of social media adoption, have managed to use it strategically to strengthen the reciprocal relationship between brand identity and brand image through effective social media content creation.

8.2 Overview of Previous Chapters

Chapter 1 focused on introducing the study's research problem, aims and objectives, explaining the significant role destination branding plays in tourism competitiveness, as well as highlighting challenges encountered by African destinations. The study was motivated by stressing the importance of brand identity-brand image alignment in the strategic utilisation of social media. While research on this topic prevails on a global scale, there's an evident void when it comes to branding African destinations. The chapter presented the conceptual framework to illustrate the proposed interplay between the concepts of brand identity and brand image. Additionally, the chapter outlined the three-phased mixed methods approach.

Chapter 2 provided literature on strategic management, with a focus on destination management from an African perspective before narrowing it down to the South African context as case study. The chapter then pivoted to the concept of destination competitiveness exploring different competitive models. Central to destination competitiveness models were the themes of destination management, policy, planning, and branding. The chapter's theory served as the starting point to identify the themes that formed the foundation for the inductive research in the empirical phase.

Chapter 3 highlighted the various constructs related to destination branding. This included identification and discussions of the various branding dimensions. The chapter's theory also

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contributed to the empirical research themes, as well as the codes utilised in the SQLR of phase 1.

Chapter 4 highlighted the dynamic world of social media and its role in destination branding as a marketing tool that facilitates global reach by transcending geographical boundaries. It reviewed related aspects including content development, customer engagement, and social media metrics and analytics. It also provided an overview of the attributes of the key social media platforms used for destination branding, namely, Facebook, Instagram, and X.

Chapter 5 outlined the mixed methods research adopted in the study. The investigation was carried out in three phases. Phase 1 focused on the review of research articles centred on destination branding and social media by applying a systematic quantitative literature review. Phases 2 and 3 adopted a case study approach focusing on the national, as well as six provincial DMOs in South Africa. Phase 2 used document analysis to identify the key themes, categories and codes. Phase 3 built on these themes, categories and codes to undertake a content analysis of the DMOs' social media accounts. Each phase had its own inclusion and exclusion criteria as predicated by the study objectives. The study rigour and ethical considerations were also addressed.

Chapter 6 conveyed the results of the respective three phases. Phase 1 employed descriptive statistics to identify patterns within existing destination branding and social media studies. Additionally, it utilised cluster analysis to categorise typical articles within the field to identify existing research gaps. The results of Phase 2's inductive thematic document analysis and Phase 3's content analysis were combined to present an overall view of the alignment between the strategic documents and social media accounts per case study DMO.

Chapter 7 presented a discussion of the findings from Phases 1, 2, and 3. The key elements of each phase were highlighted and integrated to provide overall conclusions on the practices across the DMOs. The discussion was supported by literature to provide context, support findings, or allude to contradictions found in the current study.

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Table 91 summarises the themes, categories, and leading codes arising from the analyses. Codes with the highest frequencies signified prevalence, emphasis, and preference within the strategic documents, indicating the respective DMOs' strategic priorities and social media approach.

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Table 91: Summary of themes, categories and the leading codes arising from the analyses

Category	SAT	WESGRO	ECPTA	TKZN	MTPA	GTA	LTA
Theme: Strategy							
Vision- Phase 2	Experience	Economic growth	Sustainability	Leading destination	Wildlife	Experience	Leading destination
Vision- Phase 3	Experience	Economic growth	Economic growth	Leading destination	World-class	Experience	Leading destination
Mission-Phase 2	Economic growth	Destination of choice	Responsible tourism	Strategic tourism marketing	Sustainable tourism growth	World-class	Experience
Mission-Phase3	Economic growth	Destination of choice	Responsible tourism	Strategic tourism marketing	Sustainable tourism growth	World-class	Experience
Positioning- Phase 2	Inspire	Inspire	Explore	Exceptional	Nature	Starts here	Enjoy
Positioning- Phase 3	Inspire	Inspire	Explore	Exceptional	Nature	Starts here	Enjoy
Theme: Brand identity							
Values- Phase 2	Responsibility	Efficient	Respect	Transformation	Quality	Transformation and sustainability	Communication
Values- Phase 3	Excellence,	Excellence	Respect	Welcoming	Quality	Passion	Excellence
Product - Phase 2	Culture	Arts	Nature	Coastal and maritime	Nature	Hospitality and conference venues	Heritage
Product - Phase 3	Nature	Nature	Nature	Hospitality and conference	Nature	Hospitality and conference	Nature
Theme: Social media							
Platforms- Phase 2	Facebook	Facebook	No mention	Facebook	No mention	Facebook	No mention
Content Strategy - Phase 2	Content creation	Content creation	Trends	Influencer	No mention	User generated content	Influencer collaboration, social media campaign, influencer
Promotions - Phase 2	Campaigns	Campaigns	No mention	Campaigns	No mention	Campaigns	Insights and analytics
Monitoring and Analytics - Phase 2	Sentiment analysis	Online listening	Evidence	Audience	No mention	Tracking	Presence

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8.3 Study Aims and Objectives

The study aim was to investigate how DMOs translate their destination's brand identity, as articulated in their strategic documents, into a brand image projected across various social media platforms.

The study was guided by three main objectives, built around a phased approach. Firstly, a comprehensive analysis of the existing body of literature pertaining to destination branding and the intersection with social media (Phase 1). Secondly, an analysis of DMOs' strategic documents (Phase 2). Thirdly, an examination of DMOs' social media content and user engagement (Phase 3).

Objective 1: Phase 1

To examine the existing literature on destination branding and the integration of social media to establish the state of destination branding research by identifying branding dimensions that have drawn scholarly attention.

Objective 1 was linked to the following sub-objectives:

- Describe the existing body of literature and provide a profile of destination branding and social media articles published between 2010 and 2020.
- Identify research methodologies utilised to study destination branding and social media.
- Identify destination branding dimensions and social media platforms studied.
- To gain a regional perspective on the destinations receiving research attention (Global North/Global South).

Objective 2: Phase 2

To analyse the strategic documents of seven case study DMOs to determine whether and how the key elements of destination strategy and brand identity feature, as well as to evaluate the extent to which social media is integrated as part of the strategy.

Objective 2 was linked to the following sub-objectives:

- Determine how strategy-related content is communicated in the strategic documents.

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- Determine how brand identity-related content is articulated in the strategic documents.
- Determine the extent to which social media features as a strategic priority as expressed in DMOs' strategic documents.

Objective 3: Phase 3

To conduct an analysis of the composition of social media content to determine whether content strategically aligned with the brand identity articulated in strategic documents and evaluate the resulting user engagement. Linked to objective 3, are the following sub-objectives:

- Analyse thematic composition of DMOs' social media content to determine the occurrence of the themes, categories and codes identified in the strategic documents.
- To analyse the content format utilised to disseminate social media content related to the different themes, categories and codes identified in the strategic documents.
- To analyse user engagement with social media content related to the different themes, categories and codes identified in the strategic documents.

Objective 4: Conceptual framework

To develop a conceptual framework depicting the alignment between DMOs' social media practices and destination brand identity with the aim to guide DMOs in leveraging social media as a critical branding tool that lies within the overall branding strategy.

8.4 Revised Conceptual Framework

The widespread prevalence of social media has resulted in an increase in its adoption and utilisation for tourists and DMOs (Ali Qalati *et al.*, 2020). Its emergence has revolutionised the tourism marketing communication arena (Uşaklı *et al.*, 2017). As a result, DMOs must strategically navigate social media to maximise its benefits through developing strategies that are consistent with the destination's identity (Effing & Spil, 2016). The previous sections of the study highlighted that achieving strategic alignment is critical for projecting a consistent image that represents destinations' identity. This requires an agile approach from the DMOs to adjust and attune to the dynamic nature and environment shaped by social media. Additionally, changes in the social media strategy should be integrated into the

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overall organisational strategy to ensure continuous adaptation and strategic alignment between a destination's identity and its projected image.

Informed by the literature, findings and discussion of the study, this has led to the revision of the proposed conceptual framework (Figure 1, page 36), the Destination Branding Social Media Alignment framework (DBSMA), shown in figure 76. The framework is premised on underlying principles incorporating strategic management, strategic planning, and social media, contextualised within destination branding. The aim of the DBSMA framework is to guide DMOs in leveraging social media as a branding tool that constitutes a critical component of the overall branding strategy. The framework emphasises continuous evaluation, agility, and data-oriented decision-making, while adapting to the dynamic nature of social media and user engagement.

The main sections within the framework are depicted in Figure 76. The DBSMA framework is categorised into two main sections, 1, and 2.

Section 1 presents events within DMO environment and focuses on a strategic planning process. At this stage, DMOs establish the basis for their destination branding and set the strategic direction. This section is composed of two subsections, A and B. Subsection A presents where DMOs crystallise the destination's brand identity based on its distinctive attributes and core product offerings. This is subsequently documented in the strategic documents, setting a blueprint for all branding activities. Subsection B focuses on the development of a social media strategy which involves, among others, the creation of the content strategy. This stage includes alignment of social media presence with the destination's brand identity to ensure consistency across all platforms.

Section 2 represents the social media environment where DMOs strategically make use of social media. This section is divided into subsections C, D, and E, Subsection C presenting transition between the DMO environment and the social media environment. At this stage, social media strategy is operationalised and implemented. Subsection D involves dissemination of content across social media platforms. This content presented translation of brand identity into project destination brand image. Subsection E involves monitoring and analysing user engagement with shared content. At this stage DMOs examine whether the

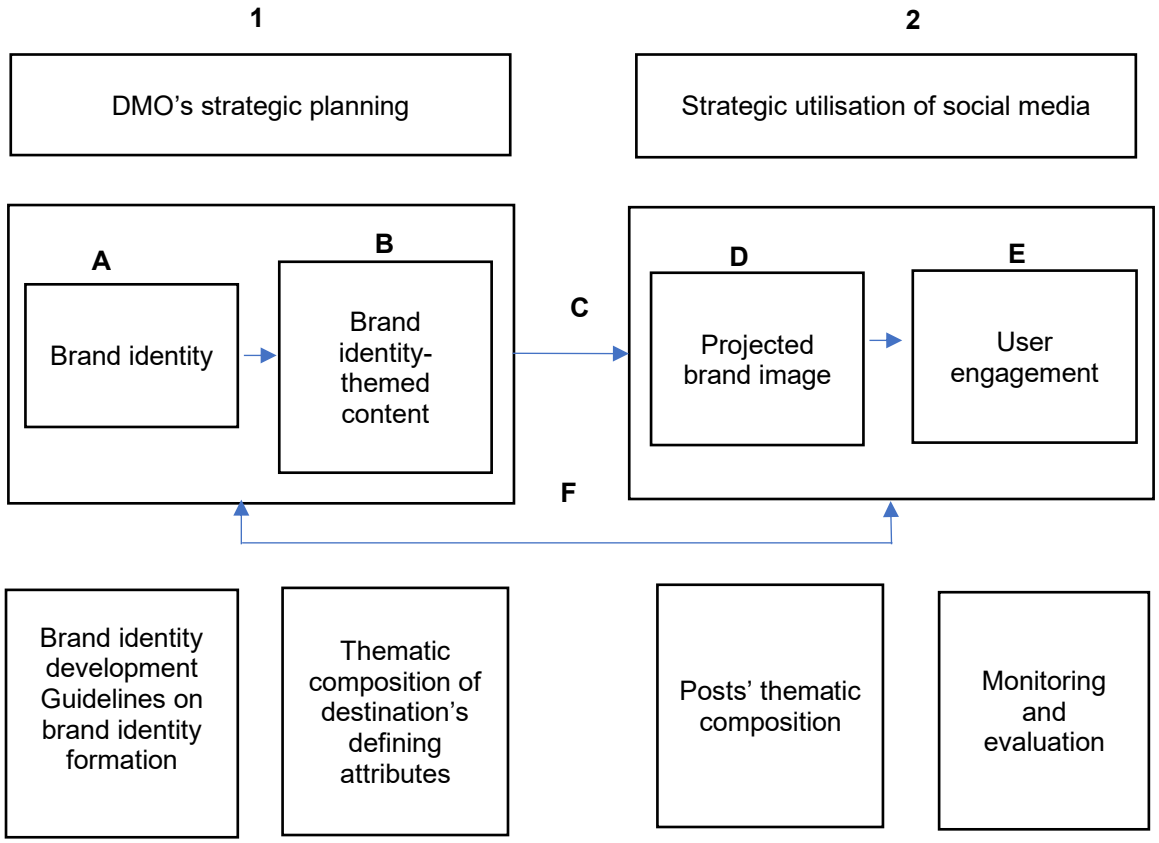
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projected brand image is consistent with the brand identity. Subsection F represents the critical feedback loop. Based on the monitoring and analysis in subsection E, the process shifts to Section 1, where DMOs adjust and realign content to achieve continuous consistency between the destination's brand identity and its projected image. This subsection represents the adaptive capability of the framework, which involves the ability to respond to dynamic changes in the social media arena.

These sections and subsections of the DBSMA framework support DMO's strategies and reinforce the alignment between the destination's brand identity and brand image presented to online audiences.

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Figure 76: Revised conceptual model: Destination Branding-Social Media Alignment Framework (DBSMA)



The underlying principles linking the subsections of the framework will now be explained.

Strategic Planning (Subsection A)

Tourist destinations are considered strategic entities due to their role destination management and marketing (Foris *et al.*, 2020). Destination management as a DMO's function and responsibility, includes executing strategic, organisational, and operational activities that are geared at defining and promoting tourism product offerings (Benvenuto *et al.*, 2020; Della Corte *et al.*, 2017). Morrison (2013) emphasises the critical role played by DMOs in leadership, planning, marketing and promotion. Furthermore, tourism planning and policy have a noteworthy addition to tourism promotion and marketing (Dredge & Jamal, 2015; Dredge & Jenkins, 2007). Gržinić and Saftić (2012) state that tourism planning and policy implementation are feasible through formulating realistic action plans. Destination action plans are predetermined objectives which are of strategic value to the destination

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(Tanrisevdi *et al*., 2021; Vernon *et al*., 2005). Theories in strategic planning emphasise the critical nature of an actionable plan that is consistent with and aligns with an organisation's overall objectives (Gilbert, 1990; Mintzberg, 1994; Soulard *et al*., 2018). This was evident in the current study, where the strategic documents on MTPA notably omitted any reference to social media or any terms related to its utilisation. This suggests the absence of a clear blueprint and action plan for social media integration into the overall strategy. The absence of reference to social media in the strategic documents does not imply that ECPTA does not utilise social media; rather, it demonstrates a lack of a comprehensive, integrated strategy and framework for its employment of social media.

Content Strategy and Storyline (Subsection B)

The framework, from a content perspective, is anchored in the transportation theory which holds that narratives have the ability to influence beliefs through immersion, involving the utilisation of images, emotional engagement and attentiveness (Green & Brock, 2000). Therefore, DMOs must curate content that involves storytelling to forge deeper brand emotional connection through utilisation of compelling brand stories and messages. As found, in this study, DMOs implemented the use of storylines effectively on Instagram. The platform's visual aspect allowed DMOs to showcase the attributes of the destinations, while also incorporating text to tell stories about them. Each post composition carried elements of both strategy and brand identity themes, and this content was consistently aligned with the strategic documents of each DMO. Additionally, Instagram emerged as the most preferred platform amongst the DMOs for relaying rich content— content that fosters audience interaction. The Phase 2 of the study found codes in the strategic documents relating to content strategy, including content creation, influencer collaboration, user-generated content, content teaser and content creation. The presence of these codes in the strategic documents emphasised the critical importance of an effective content strategy linked to the overall organisational strategy.

Brand Identity and Image Alignment (Subsection D)

Brand identity presents an amalgamation of associations that represent the visitor promise, including both core and extended identity, and reflects how the DMO envisages the destination to be (Ghodeswar, 2008; Linsner *et al*., 2021; Pike *et al*., 2010). Ghodeswar (2008) suggested that brand identity experiences a continual modification process as a

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result of brand experience and image created. Moreover, Balmer (2001) highlighted that the defining characteristic of brand identity is its dynamic nature, acknowledging that it changes over time in response to internal and external influences. This perspective indicates the necessity for incessant monitoring and modification of a destination's brand identity and image to ensure both stay relevant and aligned within the changing environment (Wang *et al.*, 2020). This became evident in the current study through SAT's strong alignment between the identity in strategic documents and the image projected on social media. For example, the *inspire* positioning code was consistently incorporated in both the documents and social media posts composition. SAT effectively maintained this alignment, ensuring that social media content remained aligned to strategy and identity themes as outlined in the documents.

Collectively, brand identity and brand image play a vital role in shaping consumer preferences (Schmitt & Simonson, 1997). The conception of brand image in the tourist's mind is primarily a subjective and perceptual procedure that stems from the visitor's cognitive and emotional interpretation of stimuli (Bilgin, 2018; Dobni & Zinkhan, 1990). The destination image must be consistently aligned with the key attributes and the inherent character of the destination (Go *et al.*, 2004; Van Wijk *et al.*, 2008; Wang *et al.*, 2020). This alignment was evident in the current study, as GTA, that highlighted *hospitality and conference venues* codes as its key attributes of the destination, effectively integrating these codes into social media posts.

The relationship between brand identity and brand image is seen as reciprocally reinforcing (Mao *et al.*, 2020). This reciprocal relationship means that the manner in which a destination brand is perceived and interpreted by target market is moulded by its brand identity, whilst the image that the brand projects reinforces its identity (Lin *et al.*, 2011; Nandan, 2005).

This study highlighted the consequences when brand alignment and consistent messaging were not implemented, resulting in a misalignment between brand identity and brand image. For instance, discrepancies between the brand identity presented in strategic documents and the image conveyed on social media led to misalignment and misrepresentation of the destination. This misalignment often stems from a lack of guiding strategic documents to efectively drive social medida activities. A case in point is the LTA, where the identity in the

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startegic documents places emphasis on the *heritage* code as the key attribute of the destination, while on social media, the *nature* code is highlighted. Therefore, the principle of brand identity and image alignment becomes an important consideration within the framework.

Customer Engagement (Subsection E)

Customer engagement is considered as a strategic tool for developing and maintaining competitive advantage (Dolan *et al.*, 2017; Sedley & Perks, 2008). As stated in the literature review, customer engagement forms a significant component of relationship marketing; it refers to the intensity of an individual's participation in connection with an organisation's product and service (Alvarez-Milán *et al.*, 2018; Vivek *et al.*, 2012). Much of customer engagement occurs online through social media platforms (Dolan *et al.*, 2017; Malthouse & Hofacker, 2010; Watkins, 2021). Effective communication is determined by the chosen medium's capability to relay rich messages that can be instruments that forge personal connections with the organisation or a brand (Suh, 1999; Sun & Cheng, 2007). This became evident in the current study, where, across all DMOs, Instagram had the highest engagement in terms of *likes.* This suggests that Instagram, with its image and text-based nature, is the most effective platform to share DMO content that resonates with audiences and permits active engagement. As such, Kaplan and Haenlein (2010) advocate for the selection of social media platforms based on a thorough comprehension of the platform's attributes and capabilities in relation to organisational communication objectives.

Data-Driven Decision-Making and Analytics (Subsection E)

The fast adoption and utilisation of social media has produced a large volume of data, with users exchanging and sharing their experiences and sentiments across platforms (Abeysinghe et al., 2018). This vast amount of social media data requires social media analytics tools to convert raw user-generated content into valuable insights that support strategic decision-making (Kohavi *et al.*, 2002; Muruganantham & Gandhi, 2020; Păvăloaia *et al.*, 2019). In Phase 2, the study found that the majority of the DMOs highlighted the integration of monitoring and analytics in how they utilise social media in their strategic documents This included codes such as sentiment analysis, online listening, audience tracking, and monitoring engagement metrics. The inclusion of these codes underscored the

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importance of monitoring and analytics, as well as DMOs' strategic intent of utilising social media. Phase 3's evaluation of monitoring and analytics focused on the engagement metrics, *likes*, *comments*, and *shares*. These metrics provide a basic understanding of how content is received by the audience and empowers DMOs to make data-driven decisions regarding content composition and optimising content for improved audience engagement. The framework prescribes data-driven decision-making through the application of social media analytics to derive insights.

Dynamic Capabilities (Subsection F)

As established in the literature, social media is not a static environment; it remains ever-changing, with technological advancements necessitating continuous adaptation. The literature further established that brand identity informs branding image; however, it also advocated that brand image can, in turn, also influence and redefine what the identity should be. This reciprocal relationship argument follows that destination identity may change based on destination image.

Therefore, the strategic planning process, denoted as Category 1, must manage the adaptation and evolution of identity and image. The loop indicated in section F denotes this effect, where Category 1 - which includes projected brand image and user engagement, based on analytics and monitoring - can trigger a feedback loop moving to the left. This feedback loop allows the DMO to adjust brand identity, develop new guidelines, or modify content strategy and post composition as necessary. It is from this conclusion that the dynamic capabilities of the framework were taken into account. These capabilities allow DMOs to respond adaptively to continuous changes in the social media environment.

The dynamic capabilities of the framework enable DMOs to adapt and respond efficiently to dynamic changes in the social media arena (Duarte Alonso *et al.*, 2023). This adaptability permits organisations to reconfigure their strategic approaches to ensure consistency between strategy and social media efforts, leading to an effective strategic utilisation of social media (Quesenberry, 2020). Social media analytics and dynamic capabilities indicate an organisation's ability to anticipate and attune to market and social media trends and modify strategies to achieve desired performance and user engagement (Elsharnouby & Elbanna, 2021; Vu, 2020).

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Conclusively, the theoretical considerations of the framework present a combination of key concepts from branding, strategic planning, audience engagement, content creation, data analytics, and adaptability. These create a basis for DMOs to effectively navigate the intricacies of destination branding and social media, ensuring that strategies are both theoretically comprehensive and applicable in the world of social media.

8.5 Contribution of the Study

Drawing from the findings of Phase 1, Phase 2, and Phase 3, this section presents the contribution of the study in terms of theoretical contribution and practical implications.

8.5.1 Theoretical Contribution

Phase 1 laid foundational work, offering important theoretical contributions into the understanding of the destination branding arena. This phase systematically distinguished trends in destination branding, thematic gaps, scholars' methodological inclinations, geographical context of the studies, perspectives in which destination branding is studied, and identified social media platforms included in the study of destination branding. Through mapping the landscape of extant literature, Phase 1 presents foundational comprehension of how destination branding, and social media intersect. The study contributes into methodological trends, particularly highlighting prominence of quantitative research methods applied in the studies. This demonstrates under-representation of qualitative studies in destination branding. Through signalling the needed scholarly attention to address this gap, the study opens new avenues for future research that can employ qualitative approaches to explore the degrees of branding. Additionally, the study prominently pointed out the prevailing geographic bias and disparities in destination branding research, where a large number of the research studies concentrated on the GN with limited focus on the GS, particularly in Africa. The finding highlights the need for a balanced research approach. Another significant contribution is the identification of geographic disparities in destination branding research. This indicates the need for balanced research that explores diverse cultural and geographic contexts, thus ensuring that certain destination branding theories are universally relevant and inclusive. The study further provides a significant contribution

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to the discourse by outlining branding dimensions that are studied more and those that may require further scholarly attention. The study highlights the growing increase in social media studies in conjunction with destination branding, particularly examining different dimensions of branding across various platforms. Finally, the study's contribution lies in the demonstration of the interrelationship that exists between branding dimensions and social media. The study demonstrated how social media platforms align with brand dimensions. For instance, the study found that Facebook was a preferred platform for studying brand image due to its multi-format functionality, thus uncovering how social media can direct and strengthen different dimensions of a destination's brand.

Phase 2

Building on insights gained from Phase 1, Phase 2 of the study made several contributions to the destination branding discourse through the examination of DMOs' strategic documents. This phase indicated how DMOs articulate brand identity by examining strategic documents to reveal thematic concepts and the integration of social media strategy. Furthermore, the study highlights instances of alignment and inconsistencies between documents and social media practices. This evaluation revealed the degree to which DMOs utilise social media, clarifying whether it is viewed as an additional element of marketing or as a strategic component destination branding tool. Additionally, the findings underscored the vital nature of social media in DMOs' strategic planning and policy development. In doing so, the study made a theoretical contribution by outlining avenues for DMOs to traverse and integrate the growing importance of digital marketing into their overall brand strategy. Lastly, the findings from document analysis revealed inconsistencies in the integration of social media into DMO strategies as outlined in the strategic documents. In this manner the study identified where the potential of social media is understated. This highlights the necessity for improved consistency in connection with social media practices and the brand identity as outlined in DMOs' strategic documents.

Phase 3

In Phase 3 of the study, a social media content analysis was conducted providing theoretical contributions to understanding the thematic composition of social media posts. Through the examination of DMOs' social media activities, this section expanded on the comprehension of maintaining social media thematic content alignment across social media platforms with

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brand identity articulated in the strategic documents. Each social media platform has its characterising content format, which includes text, images, and videos; these formats assume a critical role in influencing user engagement (Shahbaznezhad *et al.*, 2021). Therefore, DMOs must create content appropriate to the platform's unique attributes. The study's findings contribute to the discourse by highlighting the crucial role of content format-specific strategies in increasing user engagement. The analysis further highlighted the significant function of UGC in influencing destination brands. This finding underlines the importance of integrating UGC into branding strategy as a tool for high impact content creation. Lastly, the study showed the significance of data-driven social media strategies and decision-making for DMOs. By employing real-time monitoring and analytics, DMOs can adjust content in a bid to enhance user engagement. This finding suggests adding a layer of strategic optimisation and improvement through ongoing tracking and monitoring of user engagement metrics to maintain relevance in the ever-changing social media landscape.

Framework contribution

The DBSMA framework proposed contributes to the theoretical understanding of strategic social media application in destination branding. The framework provides a structured approach for incorporating social media into the broader organisational strategy by focusing on the alignment of the destination's vision, mission, positioning, values, and product. This approach aligns with the view of Mintzberg (1977), who explained that strategy development includes the interaction between the dynamic environment and organisation procedures, while having change-continuity cycles. As stated by Effing and Spil (2016), organisations are grappling with the emergence and application of social media. The framework's application brings solutions to challenges faced by DMOs in terms of social media utilisation. Social media usage must be goal-driven (Effing & Spil, 2016), highlighting the significance of objective-oriented content and platform utilisation to reinforce brand identity. Another key contribution of the DBSMA framework is the emphasis on the crucial strategic role social media plays in destination branding. The framework underscores the need for alignment between destination's brand identity conveyed in the strategic documents and its articulation on social media platforms' projected image. The framework advocates that destination brand identity must be in tandem with the brand image projected across social media platforms. This theoretical insight contributes to the understanding of how DMOs can maintain brand consistency across social media platforms while fostering engagement with audiences. The

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DBSMA framework contributes to the theory by highlighting the significance of strategic agility for DMOs. The framework promotes continuous evaluation, adaptation, and refinement of social media strategies to reflect the changes in a destination's brand identity. Remaining agile is crucial in the social media landscape which is shaped by dynamic changes. Essentially, the framework suggests an agile organisational structure with responsive capabilities to quickly respond to change and to adapt. The DBSMA framework underscores the significance of the data-oriented decision-making process. By advocating for the implementation and utilisation of social media monitoring and analytics, the framework encourages DMOs to optimise social media brand communication based on monitoring engagement metrics and analysing sentiments and trend observation, in order to shape new strategies. This enables DMOs to continuously adjust their branding efforts. Lastly, the framework provides a holistic understanding of social media as a core component in strategic planning, creating an avenue for systemic research on how DMOs can maximise social media utilisation to remain competitive in the dynamic tourism landscape.

8.5.2 Practical Contributions

Phase 1

This phase focused on providing an understanding of the existing literature in the field of destination branding and its intersection with social media, offering practical contributions to DMOs for structuring and directing the focus of their research activities. The findings revealed a predominance of the application of quantitative research methodology. For DMOs, this suggests the need to consider commissioning research that incorporates the qualitative method. Exploring qualitative research dimensions such as focus groups and interviews can provide a deeper understanding of destination branding both from supply and demand perspectives, thus setting the scene for evidence-backed strategy development. The study also highlighted geographical imbalances in the research that emanate from GN and GS, with GN destinations represented more frequently in the research than GS. This indicates a need for the DMOs in the GS to actively engage in research to showcase their strategies pertaining to cultural uniqueness and geographical contexts. This will help GS destinations gain an understanding of tourists' motivations and experience-driven insights to create regionally relevant campaigns that appeal to different audiences. The study revealed a growing prominence of social media integration in destination brand research.

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Specifically, the findings indicated that Facebook is often studied in relation to brand image. For DMOs, this finding indicates the importance of utilising social media as a strategic branding tool to promote and reinforce destination brand image. Destination practitioners must proactively incorporate social media into their marketing strategies rather than as an optional tool of marketing (Madondo, 2016).

Phase 2

Phase 2 of the study focused on evaluating the articulation of brand identity in the strategic documents of the DMOs and the degree to which social media is integrated into the documents and how it is utilised. The findings suggest that DMOs must clearly articulate their brand identity in the documents and integrate social media as a crucial component of their destination branding strategy. Practically, for DMOs, this means they must view social media as an integral component of their branding strategy and integrate digital marketing strategies into their policy development and strategic planning processes. Social media strategies must be a component of the operational plans; this could include objectives related to content creation, user engagement, and audience reach. The study revealed misalignment and inconsistencies in the translations of brand identity articulated in the documents and the image projected on social media platforms. To address this, DMOs should conduct social media content audits to establish alignment with the strategic documents. Through proactively developing social media content based on the brand identity, DMOs can create a unified and impactful brand presence. A clearly articulated social media strategy will guide the implementation of the strategy and content creation (Nikolinakou & Phua, 2020).

Phase 3

In Phase 3 of the study, social media content analysis was carried out to evaluate DMOs' social media activities with the aim of presenting actionable insights for effective social media utilisation and practices. The findings highlighted the significance of creating content that is customised to each platform’s attributes. For DMOs, this highlights the importance of prioritising the development of platform-specific content to leverage the platform’s capabilities and key attributes. By aligning content format with platform capabilities, DMOs can optimise user engagement and widen content reach. The analysis revealed a significant role of user-generated content in destination branding. DMOs can benefit from UGC by

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encouraging visitors to share their experiences. In this manner, UGC generates positive online-word-of-mouth and increased brand trust (Marine-Roig & Clavé, 2016). Consequently, UGC emerges as an influential tool for reinforcing destination branding efforts (Badenes-Rocha, Ruiz-Mafé & Bigné, 2019). Lastly, findings further underlined the crucial nature of social media monitoring and analytics as tools for the creation of social media strategies and their refinement. This is carried out by using engagement metrics and sentiment analysis on an ongoing basis. In this manner, the finding encourages DMOs to implement data-oriented social media decision-making strategy; as a result,, DMOs can be more proactive, responsive and agile to continuously adapt to the dynamics of social media and remain relevant.

Framework contribution

The framework's contribution lies in the strategic application of social media, by presenting a structured approach for DMOs to incorporate social media in overall organisation strategies. The framework stressed the importance of strategic alignment between the destination's strategy and social media practices. This practical contribution for DMOs presents a plan for integrating social media into the strategic planning process. In this manner social media content composition will reflect the identity of the destination, resulting in a coherent brand presence across the platforms. Another key contribution of the framework was its focus on agility and adaptability. It advocates for DMOs' continuous examination of their social media strategies and the making of appropriate adjustments to keep up with the changes in the social media space. DMOs will be able to achieve this by adopting a flexible and responsive organisational structure that facilitates modifications of social media tactics in response to emerging trends. Lastly, the framework emphasised the significance of data-oriented decision-making in social media management. This practical contribution suggests that DMOs should implement robust monitoring and analytics tools to inform their strategies and ensure seamless strategic agility. In this manner, DMOs will optimise social media performance and ensure aligned and coherent branding practices while being attuned to tourists' expectations.

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8.6 Limitation and recommendations for future research

This section provides limitations of the study and recommendations for future research. While the findings of the study provided significant insights into the intersection of destination branding and social media, these findings are not without limitations. Acknowledgement and comprehension of these limitations are crucial for framing the context and the applicability of the findings. The limitations range from the Systematic Quantitative Literature Review in Phase 1 to the Document Analysis in Phase 2, and the Social Media Content Analysis in Phase 3.

For Phase 1 of the study, which included SQLR, this method's weakness on its over-dependence on redefined search criteria may result in the exclusion of valuable contributions (Mahmoudi *et al.*, 2019; Mollah, Cuskelly & Hill, 2021). The timeframe of the literature under consideration presented a major limitation as the literature review focused on publications spanning from 2010 to mid-2020. This means that the literature review did not account for more recent developments driven by the rapid digital transformations that took place during and after the COVID-19 pandemic. These developments have facilitated a substantial paradigm shift in destination branding and social media, meaning the findings of the current study may not fully capture or reflect the prevailing state. The study's focus on case study-based destination branding research narrows the scope of consideration, thereby restricting the breadth and depth of insights. This emphasis may overlook the contributions of the studies that examine destination branding more generally, without concentrating on a specific case study destination.

Phase 2 was concerned with document analysis, with a focus on the review of strategic documents from DMOs. There were several notable limitations which affected the overall findings. Access to DMOs' strategic documents presented a major challenge, as there were not sufficient documents from certain DMOs. This challenge led to a reliance on publicly available documents, thus impeding access to available unpublished material that could have provided a thorough understanding of DMO strategies. The quality and comprehensiveness of the documents varied, with some being detailed while others provided only high-level, abbreviated versions of the original unpublished documents. Additionally, the unavailability of certain information in the document analysis may not

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necessarily mean unavailability of such information but could be attributed to the fact that it was either unpublished or withheld due to bureaucratic protocols, as some DMOs were either unable or unwilling to share the documents. The timeframe and the retrospective nature of the study restricted the ability to examine current strategies as the consideration was on documents published between 2010 and 2020. As a result, the documents could not capture new strategies developed during and after the COVID-19 pandemic. Consequently, the findings may not fully capture or reflect the dynamic strategies adopted during this period. Furthermore, the study's methodological approach did not incorporate engagement with DMO stakeholders through interviews. This limited the ability to uncover motivations behind certain strategic approaches and decisions. It is possible that some strategies are based on the operational environment or changes which are not outlined in the documents.

Phase 3 of the study implemented the social media content analysis, similar to the first two phases of the study, but it was also subjected to several limitations. These limitations are crucial for framing context and interpretation of the results. The analysis was confined only to three social media platforms, Facebook, Instagram, and X, because of their wide use by DMOs. The focus on the three platforms excluded emerging platforms such as TikTok and Snapchat, which possess unique features that could be beneficial for DMOs to leverage. Moreover, the analysis only focussed on textual and photographic content format, discounting videographic content, which is effective for storytelling and is able to convey multiple attributes of the DMO. This further restricted the study from focusing on video-based platforms, including YouTube and TikTok, which are characteristically reliant on video content. The content analysis was quantitative in nature, rather than focusing on the qualitative aspects in relation to user engagement, particularly the nature of comments. Social media content was analysed in a reflective manner to examine content conveyed at a given time. Due to the dynamic nature of social media, the strategies implemented at the time may not be effective in the current environment, underscoring the necessity of continuous adaptation of strategies.

The proposed DBSMA framework of the study also comes with its limitations, which are crucial to consider when employing the framework. While the framework underscores the significance of brand identity content consistency across platforms, it does not focus on the primary characteristics of different platforms. This omission could potentially hinder the

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framework's effectiveness since different platforms need varied strategies to look at the content format and user engagement patterns. Consequently, the framework may not be agile enough to acclimatise to the demands of each platform. The framework may not be universally relevant, particularly to small and emerging DMOs that do not have sufficient resources. This is because the framework suggests DMOs should conduct extensive strategic planning to include integration of social media and the implementation thereof. The framework further advocates for continuous monitoring and data analytics, and ongoing strategic adaptation. However, as stated by Hays *et al.* (2013), DMOs are facing austerity measures because of reduced government funding. This financial strain makes it difficult for under-resourced DMOs to apply a complex approach like this framework.

Future research could widen the SQLR scope of the current study to include recent publications released during and after theCOVID-19 period. This would reflect recent digital transformation and its impact on destination branding and uncover the latest research trends and areas of increasing scholarly interest. Additionally, integrating qualitative research methods into document analysis, such as interviews, to augment document analysis, would provide an understanding of the motivations that drive DMOs' strategic decision-making which may not be reflected in the strategic documents.

In terms of social media content analysis, future research should incorporate emerging social media platforms such as TikTok, which is characterised by video-centric content format. Through an extended focus on new platforms, scholars could uncover new insights into how video-centric format differs from traditional platforms such as Facebook, Instagram and X. Furthermore, studying a platform such as TikTok may reveal user engagement patterns that could be harnessed to augment DMO's social media strategies and stretch audience reach. Future research could incorporate qualitative social media content analysis that focuses on examining the nature of user engagement, specifically with respect to the nature of the actual comments to conduct sentiment analysis. The method would provide a deeper understanding of the type of content that resonates with users and gauge effectiveness. Social media evolution occurs at a rapid pace, and effective strategies implemented successfully may not be appropriate and relevant in the future. As such, future research should consider integrating longitudinal investigation to track DMOs' agility and adaptability of their strategies over time. This would ensure that research findings are a

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reflection of the continuous evolution of social media, user engagement and strategic adaptation by DMOs. By addressing these aspects in future research, it would contribute considerably to the evolving landscape of destination branding and social media.

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8.7 Conclusion

The overall purpose of the study was to investigate the strategic utilisation of social media to ensure consistent alignment between destination brand identity and the brand image projected on social media platforms by DMOs. This study derives its relevance and significance from the increasing infiltration of information technology in tourism, where social media has posed substantial challenges for many DMOs in terms of strategic navigation of social media platforms to create leverage of their benefits (Effing & Spil, 2016). For many organisations the use of social media remains fragmented and siloed, with social media efforts being uncoordinated and failing to extract the full value of social media (Spier, 2017). The DBSMA framework, which stands as the culmination of the study's three phases, presents a compressive blueprint to assist DMOs in maneuvering the dynamic social media and destination branding terrain. This terrain is most notably characterised by changing consumer preference trends regarding content consumption and engagement patterns. The framework highlights the need for agility to align to these trends while remaining rooted and aligned to the core brand identity in content development. One of the major findings and key recommendations of this study, as an outcome emerging from the application of the DBSMA framework, is the aspect of strategic alignment between brand identity and image. The concept of strategic alignment is a fundamental principle on which the whole study is anchored. Having considered the findings and discussions of the study, strategic alignment in the context refers to the consistent coherence between the destination's brand identity, as articulated in overall organisational strategy, and social media content composition, which projects the brand image. This alignment is not static but rather a dynamic process with both brand identity and image continually reinforcing each other. This dynamic process is achieved through perpetual monitoring and analytics, allowing DMOs to stay abreast of the changes in the social media landscape and remain aligned with the core brand identity. Ultimately, this dynamic phenomenon fosters destination competitiveness on social media platforms, while augmenting brand visibility and far-reaching audience appeal. In the mind of the potential visitor, this strategic approach positions the destination as an ideal place for visitation, adding to the overall success of the tourism industry.

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LIST OF APPENDICES

APPENDIX A



Data Collection sheet SQLR.xlsx

Data collection for Phase 1: SQLR

APPENDIX B



Research Report Socila Media Data coll

Data collection for Phase 3: Social media content analysis

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APPENDIX C

The document analysis code sheet

Theme	Category	Code
STRATEGY	Vision	
	Mission	
	Positioning	
BRAND IDENTITY	Values	
	Product	Adventure Arts Coastal and maritime Culture Heritage Hospitality and conference venues Nature Shopping, wellness, and sports Wildlife
SOCIAL MEDIA	Platforms	
	Content strategy	
	Promotions	
	Monitoring and analytics	

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APPENDIX D

METHODOLOGIES USED TO STUDY BRANDING

Equity

Table 92: Cross tabulation of methodologies used in brand equity studies

Variable	Categories	Count (Categories)			Test statistic	φ
		Did not study equity	Studied equity	Total		
Perspective	Supply	136_a	7_b	143	7.421*	.158
	% within Perspective	95.1%	4.9%	100.0%		
	% within Equity	50.7%	24.1%	48.1%		
	Demand	132_a	22_b	154		
	% within Perspective	85.7%	14.3%	100.0%		
	% within Equity	49.3%	75.9%	51.9%		
	Total	268	29	297		
	% within Perspective	90.2%	9.8%	100.0%		
	% within Equity	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%		
DMO catchment	Not known	24_a	2_a	26	[.612]	.045
	% within DMO catchment	92.3%	7.7%	100.0%		
	% within Equity	8.9%	6.9%	8.7%		
	National	118_a	11_a	129		
	% within DMO catchment	91.5%	8.5%	100.0%		
	% within Equity	43.5%	37.9%	43.0%		
	Regional and local	129_a	16_a	145		
	% within DMO catchment	89.0%	11.0%	100.0%		
	% within Equity	47.6%	55.2%	48.3%		
	Total	271	29	300		
	% within DMO catchment	90.3%	9.7%	100.0%		
	% within Equity	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%		
Region	Global North	154_a	18_a	172	.013	-.007
	% within Region	89.5%	10.5%	100.0%		
	% within Equity	68.1%	69.2%	68.3%		
	Global South	72_a	8_a	80		
	% within Region	90.0%	10.0%	100.0%		
	% within Equity	31.9%	30.8%	31.7%		
	Total	226	26	252		
	% within Region	89.7%	10.3%	100.0%		
	% within Equity	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%		
Methods	Qualitative	96_a	6_a	102	2.927	.101
	% within Methods	94.1%	5.9%	100.0%		

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	% within Equity	37.1%	21.4%	35.5%		
	Quantitative	111_a	16_a	127		
	% within Methods	87.4%	12.6%	100.0%		
	% within Equity	42.9%	57.1%	44.3%		
	Mixed	52_a	6_a	58		
	% within Methods	89.7%	10.3%	100.0%		
	% within Equity	20.1%	21.4%	20.2%		
	Total	259	28	287		
	% within Methods	90.2%	9.8%	100.0%		
	% within Equity	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%		
Data type	Primary	148_a	24_b	172	[9.208**]	.179
	% within Data type	86.0%	14.0%	100.0%		
	% within Equity	57.1%	85.7%	59.9%		
	Secondary	86_a	2_b	88		
	% within Data type	97.7%	2.3%	100.0%		
	% within Equity	33.2%	7.1%	30.7%		
	Both	25_a	2_a	27		
	% within Data type	92.6%	7.4%	100.0%		
	% within Equity	9.7%	7.1%	9.4%		
	Total	259	28	287		
	% within Data type	90.2%	9.8%	100.0%		
	% within Equity	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%		
Data collection	Online	Count	42_a	5_a	[.591]	.046
	% within Data collection	89.4%	10.6%	100.0%		
	% within Equity	16.6%	18.5%	16.8%		
	Offline	70_a	9_a	79		
	% within Data collection	88.6%	11.4%	100.0%		
	% within Equity	27.7%	33.3%	28.2%		
	Both	12_a	1_a	13		
	% within Data collection	92.3%	7.7%	100.0%		
	% within Equity	4.7%	3.7%	4.6%		
	Not known	129_a	12_a	141		
	% within Data collection	91.5%	8.5%	100.0%		
	% within Equity	51.0%	44.4%	50.4%		
	Total	253	27	280		
	% within Data collection	90.4%	9.6%	100.0%		
	% within Equity	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%		
Journal category	Tourism	207_a	20_a	227	[11.041*]	.206
	% within Journal category	91.2%	8.8%	100.0%		
	% within Equity	77.2%	69.0%	76.4%		
	Marketing	13_a	6_b	19		
	% within Journal category	68.4%	31.6%	100.0%		
	% within Equity	4.9%	20.7%	6.4%		

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	Economics & Business	19_a	0_a	19		
	% within Journal category	100.0%	0.0%	100.0%		
	% within Equity	7.1%	0.0%	6.4%		
	Other	29_a	3_a	32		
	% within Journal category	90.6%	9.4%	100.0%		
	% within Equity	10.8%	10.3%	10.8%		
	Total	268	29	297		
	% within Journal category	90.2%	9.8%	100.0%		
	% within Equity	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%		

* p < 0.01 ** p< 0.05 *** p<0.1

Note: Test statistics χ^2 accept where [ ] indicates Likelihood Ratio or [Fisher's exact] for 2x2 tables (the latter does not have a test statistic, only a p-value).

Awareness

Table 93: Cross tabulation of methodologies used in brand awareness studies

Variable	Categories	Count (Categories)			Test statistic	φ
		Did not study Awareness	Studied Awareness	Total		
Perspective	Supply	134_a	9_a	143	.085	.017
	% within Perspective	93.7%	6.3%	100.0%		
	% within Awareness	48.4%	45.0%	48.1%		
	Demand	143_a	11_a	154		
	% within Perspective	92.9%	7.1%	100.0%		
	% within Awareness	51.6%	55.0%	51.9%		
	Total	277	20	297		
	% within Perspective	93.3%	6.7%	100.0%		
	% within Awareness	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%		
DMO catchment	Not known	23a	3a	26	[1.177]	.066
	% within DMO catchment	88.5%	11.5%	100.0%		
	% within Awareness	8.2%	15.0%	8.7%		
	National	122a	7a	129		
	% within DMO catchment	94.6%	5.4%	100.0%		
	% within Awareness	43.6%	35.0%	43.0%		
	Regional and local	135a	10a	145		
	% within DMO catchment	93.1%	6.9%	100.0%		
	% within Awareness	48.2%	50.0%	48.3%		
	Total	280	20	300		
	% within DMO catchment	93.3%	6.7%	100.0%		
	% within Awareness	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%		
Region	Global North	158a	14a	172		-.081
	% within Region	91.9%	8.1%	100.0%		

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	% within Awareness	67.2%	82.4%	68.3%		
	Global South	77a	3a	80		
	% within Region	96.3%	3.8%	100.0%	[p=.282]	
	% within Awareness	32.8%	17.6%	31.7%	*Fisher*	
	Total	235	17	252	*Exact*	
	% within Region	93.3%	6.7%	100.0%		
	% within Awareness	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%		
Methods	Qualitative	97_a	5_a	102	1.694	.077
	% within Methods	95.1%	4.9%	100.0%		
	% within Awareness	36.3%	25.0%	35.5%		
	Quantitative	118_a	9_a	127		
	% within Methods	92.9%	7.1%	100.0%		
	% within Awareness	44.2%	45.0%	44.3%		
	Mixed	52_a	6_a	58		
	% within Methods	89.7%	10.3%	100.0%		
	% within Awareness	19.5%	30.0%	20.2%		
	Total	267	20	287		
	% within Methods	93.0%	7.0%	100.0%		
	% within Awareness	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%		
Data type	Primary	155_a	17_b	172	[6.531***]	.141
	% within Data type	90.1%	9.9%	100.0%		
	% within Awareness	58.1%	85.0%	59.9%		
	Secondary	86_a	2_b	88		
	% within Data type	97.7%	2.3%	100.0%		
	% within Awareness	32.2%	10.0%	30.7%		
	Both	26_a	1_a	27		
	% within Data type	96.3%	3.7%	100.0%		
	% within Awareness	9.7%	5.0%	9.4%		
	Total	267	20	287		
	% within Data type	93.0%	7.0%	100.0%		
	% within Awareness	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%		
Data collection	Online	44_a	3_a	47	[2.083]	.064
	% within Data collection	93.6%	6.4%	100.0%		
	% within Awareness	16.9%	15.0%	16.8%		
	Offline	73_a	6_a	79		
	% within Data collection	92.4%	7.6%	100.0%		
	% within Awareness	28.1%	30.0%	28.2%		
	Both	13_a	0_a	13		
	% within Data collection	100.0%	0.0%	100.0%		
	% within Awareness	5.0%	0.0%	4.6%		
	Not known	130_a	11_a	141		
	% within Data collection	92.2%	7.8%	100.0%		
	% within Awareness	50.0%	55.0%	50.4%		

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	Total	260	20	280		
	% within Data collection	92.9%	7.1%	100.0%		
	% within Awareness	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%		
Journal category	Tourism	214_a	13_a	227	[10.078**]	.212
	% within Journal category	94.3%	5.7%	100.0%		
	% within Awareness	77.3%	65.0%	76.4%		
	Marketing	14_a	5_b	19		
	% within Journal category	73.7%	26.3%	100.0%		
	% within Awareness	5.1%	25.0%	6.4%		
	Economics & Business	19_a	0_a	19		
	% within Journal category	100.0%	0.0%	100.0%		
	% within Awareness	6.9%	0.0%	6.4%		
	Other	30_a	2_a	32		
	% within Journal category	93.8%	6.3%	100.0%		
	% within Awareness	10.8%	10.0%	10.8%		
	Total	277	20	297		
	% within Journal category	93.3%	6.7%	100.0%		
	% within Awareness	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%		

* p < 0.01 ** p< 0.05 *** p<0.1

Note: Test statistics χ^2 accept where [ ] indicates Likelihood Ratio or [Fisher's exact] for 2x2 tables (the latter does not have a test statistic, only a p-value).

Image

Table 94: Cross tabulation of methodologies used in brand image studies

Variable	Categories	Count (Categories)			Test statistic	φ
		Did not study image	Studied image	Total		
Perspective	Supply	78a	65a	143	1.014	.058
	% within Perspective	54.5%	45.5%	100.0%		
	% within Image	51.0%	45.1%	48.1%		
	Demand	75a	79a	154		
	% within Perspective	48.7%	51.3%	100.0%		
	% within Image	49.0%	54.9%	51.9%		
	Total	153	144	297		
	% within Perspective	51.5%	48.5%	100.0%		
	% within Image	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%		
DMO catchment	Not known	12a	14a	26	1.427	.069
	% within DMO catchment	46.2%	53.8%	100.0%		
	% within Image	7.7%	9.7%	8.7%		
	National	72a	57a	129		

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	% within DMO catchment	55.8%	44.2%	100.0%		
	% within Image	46.2%	39.6%	43.0%		
	Regional and local	72a	73a	145		
	% within DMO catchment	49.7%	50.3%	100.0%		
	% within Image	46.2%	50.7%	48.3%		
	Total	156	144	300		
	% within DMO catchment	52.0%	48.0%	100.0%		
	% within Image	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%		
Region	Global North	83a	89a	172	.393	-.040
	% within Region	48.3%	51.7%	100.0%		
	% within Image	66.4%	70.1%	68.3%		
	Global South	42a	38a	80		
	% within Region	52.5%	47.5%	100.0%		
	% within Image	33.6%	29.9%	31.7%		
	Total	125	127	252		
	% within Region	49.6%	50.4%	100.0%		
	% within Image	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%		
Methods	Qualitative	58a	44a	102	2.947	.101
	% within Methods	56.9%	43.1%	100.0%		
	% within Image	39.7%	31.2%	35.5%		
	Quantitative	63a	64a	127		
	% within Methods	49.6%	50.4%	100.0%		
	% within Image	43.2%	45.4%	44.3%		
	Mixed	25a	33a	58		
	% within Methods	43.1%	56.9%	100.0%		
	% within Image	17.1%	23.4%	20.2%		
	Total	146	141	287		
	% within Methods	50.9%	49.1%	100.0%		
	% within Image	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%		
Data type	Primary	86a	86a	172	.188	.026
	% within Data type	50.0%	50.0%	100.0%		
	% within Image	59.3%	60.6%	59.9%		
	Secondary	46a	42a	88		
	% within Data type	52.3%	47.7%	100.0%		
	% within Image	31.7%	29.6%	30.7%		
	Both	13a	14a	27		
	% within Data type	48.1%	51.9%	100.0%		
	% within Image	9.0%	9.9%	9.4%		
	Total	145	142	287		
	% within Data type	50.5%	49.5%	100.0%		
	% within Image	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%		
Data collection	Online	30a	17b	47	8.386**	.173
	% within Data collection	63.8%	36.2%	100.0%		

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	% within Image	21.1%	12.3%	16.8%		
	Offline	44a	35a	79		
	% within Data collection	55.7%	44.3%	100.0%		
	% within Image	31.0%	25.4%	28.2%		
	Both	8a	5a	13		
	% within Data collection	61.5%	38.5%	100.0%		
	% within Image	5.6%	3.6%	4.6%		
	Not known	60a	81b	141		
	% within Data collection	42.6%	57.4%	100.0%		
	% within Image	42.3%	58.7%	50.4%		
	Total	142	138	280		
	% within Data collection	50.7%	49.3%	100.0%		
	% within Image	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%		
Journal category	Tourism	119a	108a	227	1.709	.076
	% within Journal category	52.4%	47.6%	100.0%		
	% within Image	77.8%	75.0%	76.4%		
	Marketing	8a	11a	19		
	% within Journal category	42.1%	57.9%	100.0%		
	% within Image	5.2%	7.6%	6.4%		
	Economics & Business	8a	11a	19		
	% within Journal category	42.1%	57.9%	100.0%		
	% within Image	5.2%	7.6%	6.4%		
	Other	18a	14a	32		
	% within Journal category	56.3%	43.8%	100.0%		
	% within Image	11.8%	9.7%	10.8%		
	Total	153	144	297		
	% within Journal category	51.5%	48.5%	100.0%		
	% within Image	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%		

* p < 0.01 ** p< 0.05 *** p<0.1

Note: Test statistics χ^2 accept where [ ] indicates Likelihood Ratio or [Fisher's exact] for 2x2 tables (the latter does not have a test statistic, only a p-value).

Personality

Table 95: Cross tabulation of methodologies used in personality studies

Variable	Categories	Count (Categories)			Test statistic	φ
		Did not study personality	Studied personality	Total		
Perspective	Supply	130a	13a	143	.379	-.036
	% within Perspective	90.9%	9.1%	100.0%		

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	% within Personality	47.6%	54.2%	48.1%		
	Demand	143a	11a	154		
	% within Perspective	92.9%	7.1%	100.0%		
	% within Personality	52.4%	45.8%	51.9%		
	Total	273	24	297		
	% within Perspective	91.9%	8.1%	100.0%		
	% within Personality	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%		
DMO catchment	Not known	23a	3a	26	[1.468]	.069
	% within DMO catchment	88.5%	11.5%	100.0%		
	% within Personality	8.4%	12.0%	8.7%		
	National	121a	8a	129		
	% within DMO catchment	93.8%	6.2%	100.0%		
	% within Personality	44.0%	32.0%	43.0%		
	Regional and local	131a	14a	145		
	% within DMO catchment	90.3%	9.7%	100.0%		
	% within Personality	47.6%	56.0%	48.3%		
	Total	275	25	300		
	% within DMO catchment	91.7%	8.3%	100.0%		
	% within Personality	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%		
Region	Global North	157a	15a	172	.456	-.043
	% within Region	91.3%	8.7%	100.0%		
	% within Personality	67.7%	75.0%	68.3%		
	Global South	75a	5a	80		
	% within Region	93.8%	6.3%	100.0%		
	% within Personality	32.3%	25.0%	31.7%		
	Total	232	20	252		
	% within Region	92.1%	7.9%	100.0%		
	% within Personality	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%		
Methods	Qualitative	97a	5a	102	5.508***	.139
	% within Methods	95.1%	4.9%	100.0%		
	% within Personality	36.9%	20.8%	35.5%		
	Quantitative	117a	10a	127		
	% within Methods	92.1%	7.9%	100.0%		
	% within Personality	44.5%	41.7%	44.3%		
	Mixed	49a	9b	58		
	% within Methods	84.5%	15.5%	100.0%		
	% within Personality	18.6%	37.5%	20.2%		
	Total	263	24	287		
	% within Methods	91.6%	8.4%	100.0%		
	% within Personality	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%		
Data type	Primary	158a	14a	172	[4.367]	.124
	% within Data type	91.9%	8.1%	100.0%		

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	% within Personality	59.4%	66.7%	59.9%		
	Secondary	85a	3a	88		
	% within Data type	96.6%	3.4%	100.0%		
	% within Personality	32.0%	14.3%	30.7%		
	Both	23a	4a	27		
	% within Data type	85.2%	14.8%	100.0%		
	% within Personality	8.6%	19.0%	9.4%		
	Total	266	21	287		
	% within Data type	92.7%	7.3%	100.0%		
	% within Personality	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%		
Data collection	Online	45a	2a	47	5.226	.137
	% within Data collection	95.7%	4.3%	100.0%		
	% within Personality	17.4%	9.1%	16.8%		
	Offline	72a	7a	79		
	% within Data collection	91.1%	8.9%	100.0%		
	% within Personality	27.9%	31.8%	28.2%		
	Both	10a	3b	13		
	% within Data collection	76.9%	23.1%	100.0%		
	% within Personality	3.9%	13.6%	4.6%		
	Not known	131a	10a	141		
	% within Data collection	92.9%	7.1%	100.0%		
	% within Personality	50.8%	45.5%	50.4%		
	Total	258	22	280		
	% within Data collection	92.1%	7.9%	100.0%		
	% within Personality	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%		
Journal category	Tourism	206a	21a	227	[3.988]	.091
	% within Journal category	90.7%	9.3%	100.0%		
	% within Personality	75.5%	87.5%	76.4%		
	Marketing	18a	1a	19		
	% within Journal category	94.7%	5.3%	100.0%		
	% within Personality	6.6%	4.2%	6.4%		
	Economics & Business	19a	0a	19		
	% within Journal category	100.0%	0.0%	100.0%		
	% within Personality	7.0%	0.0%	6.4%		
	Other	30a	2a	32		
	% within Journal category	93.8%	6.3%	100.0%		
	% within Personality	11.0%	8.3%	10.8%		
	Total	273	24	297		
	% within Journal category	91.9%	8.1%	100.0%		
	% within Personality	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%		

* p < 0.01 ** p< 0.05 *** p<0.1

Note: Test statistics χ^2 accept where [ ] indicates Likelihood Ratio or [Fisher's exact] for 2x2 tables (the latter does not have a test statistic, only a p-value).

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Loyalty

Table 96: Cross tabulation of methodologies used in loyalty studies

Variable	Categories	Count (Categories)			Text statistic	φ
		Did not study loyalty	Studied loyalty	Total		
Perspective	Supply	129a	14b	143	15.719*	.230
	% within Perspective	90.2%	9.8%	100.0%		
	% within Loyalty	53.8%	24.6%	48.1%		
	Demand	111a	43b	154		
	% within Perspective	72.1%	27.9%	100.0%		
	% within Loyalty	46.3%	75.4%	51.9%		
	Total	240	57	297		
	% within Perspective	80.8%	19.2%	100.0%		
	% within Loyalty	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%		
DMO catchment	Not known	23a	3a	26	1.589	.073
	% within DMO catchment	88.5%	11.5%	100.0%		
	% within Loyalty	9.5%	5.3%	8.7%		
	National	106a	23a	129		
	% within DMO catchment	82.2%	17.8%	100.0%		
	% within Loyalty	43.6%	40.4%	43.0%		
	Regional and local	114a	31a	145		
	% within DMO catchment	78.6%	21.4%	100.0%		
	% within Loyalty	46.9%	54.4%	48.3%		
	Total	243	57	300		
	% within DMO catchment	81.0%	19.0%	100.0%		
	% within Loyalty	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%		
Region	Global North	137a	35a	172	.027	.010
	% within Region	79.7%	20.3%	100.0%		
	% within Loyalty	68.5%	67.3%	68.3%		
	Global South	63a	17a	80		
	% within Region	78.8%	21.3%	100.0%		
	% within Loyalty	31.5%	32.7%	31.7%		
	Total	200	52	252		
	% within Region	79.4%	20.6%	100.0%		
	% within Loyalty	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%		
Methods	Qualitative	94a	8b	102	15.239*	.230
	% within Methods	92.2%	7.8%	100.0%		
	% within Loyalty	40.9%	14.0%	35.5%		
	Quantitative	91a	36b	127		
	% within Methods	71.7%	28.3%	100.0%		

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	% within Loyalty	39.6%	63.2%	44.3%		
	Mixed	45a	13a	58		
	% within Methods	77.6%	22.4%	100.0%		
	% within Loyalty	19.6%	22.8%	20.2%		
	Total	230	57	287		
	% within Methods	80.1%	19.9%	100.0%		
	% within Loyalty	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%		
Data type	Primary	119a	53b	172	33.648*	.342
	% within Data type	69.2%	30.8%	100.0%		
	% within Loyalty	51.7%	93.0%	59.9%		
	Secondary	87a	1b	88		
	% within Data type	98.9%	1.1%	100.0%		
	% within Loyalty	37.8%	1.8%	30.7%		
	Both	24a	3a	27		
	% within Data type	88.9%	11.1%	100.0%		
	% within Loyalty	10.4%	5.3%	9.4%		
	Total	230	57	287		
	% within Data type	80.1%	19.9%	100.0%		
	% within Loyalty	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%		
Data collection	Online	36a	11a	47	1.985	.084
	% within Data collection	76.6%	23.4%	100.0%		
	% within Loyalty	15.7%	21.6%	16.8%		
	Offline	66a	13a	79		
	% within Data collection	83.5%	16.5%	100.0%		
	% within Loyalty	28.8%	25.5%	28.2%		
	Both	12a	1a	13		
	% within Data collection	92.3%	7.7%	100.0%		
	% within Loyalty	5.2%	2.0%	4.6%		
	Not known	115a	26a	141		
	% within Data collection	81.6%	18.4%	100.0%		
	% within Loyalty	50.2%	51.0%	50.4%		
	Total	229	51	280		
	% within Data collection	81.8%	18.2%	100.0%		
	% within Loyalty	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%		
Journal category	Tourism	187a	40a	227	4.224	.119
	% within Journal category	82.4%	17.6%	100.0%		
	% within Loyalty	77.9%	70.2%	76.4%		
	Marketing	12a	7b	19		
	% within Journal category	63.2%	36.8%	100.0%		
	% within Loyalty	5.0%	12.3%	6.4%		
	Economics & Business	15a	4a	19		
	% within Journal category	78.9%	21.1%	100.0%		
	% within Loyalty	6.3%	7.0%	6.4%		

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	Other	26a	6a	32		
	% within Journal category	81.3%	18.8%	100.0%		
	% within Loyalty	10.8%	10.5%	10.8%		
	Total	240	57	297		
	% within Journal category	80.8%	19.2%	100.0%		
	% within Loyalty	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%		

* p < 0.01 ** p< 0.05 *** p<0.1

Note: Test statistics χ^2 accept where [ ] indicates Likelihood Ratio or [Fisher's exact] for 2x2 tables (the latter does not have a test statistic, only a p-value).

Perception

Table 97: Cross tabulation of methodologies used in perception studies

Variable	Categories	Count (Categories)			Test statistic	φ
		Did not study perception	Studied perception	Total		
Perspective	Supply	140_a	3_b	143	[p=.019]** *Fisher Exact*	.140
	% within Perspective	97.9%	2.1%	100.0%		
	% within Perception	49.8%	18.8%	48.1%		
	Demand	141_a	13_b	154		
	% within Perspective	91.6%	8.4%	100.0%		
	% within Perception	50.2%	81.3%	51.9%		
	Total	281	16	297		
	% within Perspective	94.6%	5.4%	100.0%		
	% within Perception	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%		
DMO catchment	Not known	25_a	1_a	26	[.137]	.020
	% within DMO catchment	96.2%	3.8%	100.0%		
	% within Perception	8.8%	6.3%	8.7%		
	National	122_a	7_a	129		
	% within DMO catchment	94.6%	5.4%	100.0%		
	% within Perception	43.0%	43.8%	43.0%		
	Regional and local	137_a	8_a	145		
	% within DMO catchment	94.5%	5.5%	100.0%		
	% within Perception	48.2%	50.0%	48.3%		
	Total	284	16	300		
	% within DMO catchment	94.7%	5.3%	100.0%		
	% within Perception	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%		
Region	Global North	163_a	9_a	172	.501	.045
	% within Region	94.8%	5.2%	100.0%		
	% within Perception	68.8%	60.0%	68.3%		
	Global South	74_a	6_a	80		

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	% within Region	92.5%	7.5%	100.0%		
	% within Perception	31.2%	40.0%	31.7%		
	Total	237	15	252		
	% within Region	94.0%	6.0%	100.0%		
	% within Perception	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%		
Methods	Qualitative	97_a	5_a	102	[.232]	.028
	% within Methods	95.1%	4.9%	100.0%		
	% within Perception	35.8%	31.3%	35.5%		
	Quantitative	119_a	8_a	127		
	% within Methods	93.7%	6.3%	100.0%		
	% within Perception	43.9%	50.0%	44.3%		
	Mixed	55_a	3_a	58		
	% within Methods	94.8%	5.2%	100.0%		
	% within Perception	20.3%	18.8%	20.2%		
	Total	271	16	287		
	% within Methods	94.4%	5.6%	100.0%		
	% within Perception	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%		
Data type	Primary	160_a	12_a	172	[3.055]	.098
	% within Data type	93.0%	7.0%	100.0%		
	% within Perception	58.8%	80.0%	59.9%		
	Secondary	86_a	2_a	88		
	% within Data type	97.7%	2.3%	100.0%		
	% within Perception	31.6%	13.3%	30.7%		
	Both	26_a	1_a	27		
	% within Data type	96.3%	3.7%	100.0%		
	% within Perception	9.6%	6.7%	9.4%		
	Total	272	15	287		
	% within Data type	94.8%	5.2%	100.0%		
	% within Perception	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%		
Data collection	Online	45_a	2_a	47	[.941]	.057
	% within Data collection	95.7%	4.3%	100.0%		
	% within Perception	17.0%	13.3%	16.8%		
	Offline	76_a	3_a	79		
	% within Data collection	96.2%	3.8%	100.0%		
	% within Perception	28.7%	20.0%	28.2%		
	Both	12_a	1_a	13		
	% within Data collection	92.3%	7.7%	100.0%		
	% within Perception	4.5%	6.7%	4.6%		
	Not known	132_a	9_a	141		
	% within Data collection	93.6%	6.4%	100.0%		
	% within Perception	49.8%	60.0%	50.4%		
	Total	265	15	280		
	% within Data collection	94.6%	5.4%	100.0%		

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	% within Perception	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%		
Journal category	Tourism	215_a	12_a	227	[2.934]	.084
	% within Journal category	94.7%	5.3%	100.0%		
	% within Perception	76.5%	75.0%	76.4%		
	Marketing	17_a	2_a	19		
	% within Journal category	89.5%	10.5%	100.0%		
	% within Perception	6.0%	12.5%	6.4%		
	Economics & Business	19_a	0_a	19		
	% within Journal category	100.0%	0.0%	100.0%		
	% within Perception	6.8%	0.0%	6.4%		
	Other	30_a	2_a	32		
	% within Journal category	93.8%	6.3%	100.0%		
	% within Perception	10.7%	12.5%	10.8%		
	Total	281	16	297		
	% within Journal category	94.6%	5.4%	100.0%		
	% within Perception	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%		

* p < 0.01 ** p< 0.05 *** p<0.1

Note: Test statistics χ^2 accept where [ ] indicates Likelihood Ratio or [Fisher's exact] for 2x2 tables (the latter does not have a test statistic, only a p-value).

Branding in general

Table 98: Cross tabulation of methodologies used in branding in general studies

Variable	Categories	Count (Categories)			Test statistic	φ
		Did not study Branding in general	Studied Branding in general	Total		
Perspective	Supply	129_a	14_a	143	3.104***	-.102
	% within Perspective	90.2%	9.8%	100.0%		
	% within General	46.7%	66.7%	48.1%		
	Demand	147_a	7_a	154		
	% within Perspective	95.5%	4.5%	100.0%		
	% within General	53.3%	33.3%	51.9%		
	Total	276	21	297		
	% within Perspective	92.9%	7.1%	100.0%		
	% within General	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%		
DMO catchment	Not known	24_a	2_a	26	[3.538]	.108
	% within DMO catchment	92.3%	7.7%	100.0%		
	% within General	8.7%	8.7%	8.7%		
	National	115_a	14_a	129		

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	% within DMO catchment	89.1%	10.9%	100.0%		
	% within General	41.5%	60.9%	43.0%		
	Regional and local	138_a	7_a	145		
	% within DMO catchment	95.2%	4.8%	100.0%		
	% within General	49.8%	30.4%	48.3%		
	Total	277	23	300		
	% within DMO catchment	92.3%	7.7%	100.0%		
	% within General	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%		
Region	Global North	161_a	11_a	172	1.018	.064
	% within Region	93.6%	6.4%	100.0%		
	% within General	69.1%	57.9%	68.3%		
	Global South	72_a	8_a	80		
	% within Region	90.0%	10.0%	100.0%		
	% within General	30.9%	42.1%	31.7%		
	Total	233	19	252		
	% within Region	92.5%	7.5%	100.0%		
	% within General	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%		
Methods	Qualitative	84_a	18_b	102	[31.576*]	.304
	% within Methods	82.4%	17.6%	100.0%		
	% within General	31.6%	85.7%	35.5%		
	Quantitative	127_a	0_b	127		
	% within Methods	100.0%	0.0%	100.0%		
	% within General	47.7%	0.0%	44.3%		
	Mixed	55_a	3_a	58		
	% within Methods	94.8%	5.2%	100.0%		
	% within General	20.7%	14.3%	20.2%		
	Total	266	21	287		
	% within Methods	92.7%	7.3%	100.0%		
	% within General	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%		
Data type	Primary	165_a	7_b	172	[9.466*]	.190
	% within Data type	95.9%	4.1%	100.0%		
	% within General	62.0%	33.3%	59.9%		
	Secondary	75_a	13_b	88		
	% within Data type	85.2%	14.8%	100.0%		
	% within General	28.2%	61.9%	30.7%		
	Both	26_a	1_a	27		
	% within Data type	96.3%	3.7%	100.0%		
	% within General	9.8%	4.8%	9.4%		
	Total	266	21	287		
	% within Data type	92.7%	7.3%	100.0%		
	% within General	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%		

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Data collection	Online	45_a	2_a	47	[4.124]	.106
	% within Data collection	95.7%	4.3%	100.0%		
	% within General	17.4%	9.5%	16.8%		
	Offline	74_a	5_a	79		
	% within Data collection	93.7%	6.3%	100.0%		
	% within General	28.6%	23.8%	28.2%		
	Both	13_a	0_a	13		
	% within Data collection	100.0%	0.0%	100.0%		
	% within General	5.0%	0.0%	4.6%		
	Not known	127_a	14_a	141		
	% within Data collection	90.1%	9.9%	100.0%		
	% within General	49.0%	66.7%	50.4%		
	Total	259	21	280		
	% within Data collection	92.5%	7.5%	100.0%		
	% within General	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%		
Journal category	Tourism	213_a	14_a	227	[3.364]	.117
	% within Journal category	93.8%	6.2%	100.0%		
	% within General	77.5%	63.6%	76.4%		
	Marketing	17_a	2_a	19		
	% within Journal category	89.5%	10.5%	100.0%		
	% within General	6.2%	9.1%	6.4%		
	Economics & Business	18_a	1_a	19		
	% within Journal category	94.7%	5.3%	100.0%		
	% within General	6.5%	4.5%	6.4%		
	Other	27_a	5_a	32		
	% within Journal category	84.4%	15.6%	100.0%		
	% within General	9.8%	22.7%	10.8%		
	Total	275	22	297		
	% within Journal category	92.6%	7.4%	100.0%		
	% within General	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%		

* p < 0.01 ** p< 0.05 *** p<0.1

Note: Test statistics χ^2 accept where [ ] indicates Likelihood Ratio or [Fisher's exact] for 2x2 tables (the latter does not have a test statistic, only a p-value).

Table 99: Methodologies employed in social media research

Facebook

`	Categories	Count (Categories)			Test statistic	φ
		Did not study Facebook	Studied Facebook	Total		
Perspective	Supply	116_a	27_b	143	7.993*	-.164
	% within Perspective	81.1%	18.9%	100.0%		

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	% within Facebook	45.0%	69.2%	48.1%		
	Demand	142_a	12_b	154		
	% within Perspective	92.2%	7.8%	100.0%		
	% within Facebook	55.0%	30.8%	51.9%		
	Total	258	39	297		
	% within Perspective	86.9%	13.1%	100.0%		
	% within Facebook	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%		
DMO catchment	Not known	22_a	4_a	26	[3.382]	.105
	% within DMO catchment	84.6%	15.4%	100.0%		
	% within Facebook	8.5%	10.0%	8.7%		
	National	107_a	22_a	129		
	% within DMO catchment	82.9%	17.1%	100.0%		
	% within Facebook	41.2%	55.0%	43.0%		
	Regional and local	131_a	14_a	145		
	% within DMO catchment	90.3%	9.7%	100.0%		
	% within Facebook	50.4%	35.0%	48.3%		
	Total	260	40	300		
	% within DMO catchment	86.7%	13.3%	100.0%		
	% within Facebook	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%		
Region	Global North	147a	25b	172	[p=.033]** *Fisher's exact*	-.139
	% within Region	85.5%	14.5%	100.0%		
	% within Facebook	65.9%	86.2%	68.3%		
	Global South	76a	4b	80		
	% within Region	95.0%	5.0%	100.0%		
	% within Facebook	34.1%	13.8%	31.7%		
	Total	223	29	252		
	% within Region	88.5%	11.5%	100.0%		
	% within Facebook	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%		
Methods	Qualitative	84_a	18_a	102	1.984	.083
	% within Methods	82.4%	17.6%	100.0%		
	% within Facebook	34.0%	45.0%	35.5%		
	Quantitative	111_a	16_a	127		
	% within Methods	87.4%	12.6%	100.0%		
	% within Facebook	44.9%	40.0%	44.3%		
	Mixed	52_a	6_a	58		
	% within Methods	89.7%	10.3%	100.0%		
	% within Facebook	21.1%	15.0%	20.2%		
	Total	247	40	287		
	% within Methods	86.1%	13.9%	100.0%		
	% within Facebook	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%		
Data type	Primary	160_a	12_b	172	18.159*	.252
	% within Data type	93.0%	7.0%	100.0%		
	% within Facebook	64.8%	30.0%	59.9%		

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	Secondary	68_a	20_b	88		
	% within Data type	77.3%	22.7%	100.0%		
	% within Facebook	27.5%	50.0%	30.7%		
	Both	19_a	8_b	27		
	% within Data type	70.4%	29.6%	100.0%		
	% within Facebook	7.7%	20.0%	9.4%		
	Total	247	40	287		
	% within Data type	86.1%	13.9%	100.0%		
	% within Facebook	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%		
Data collection	Online	35_a	12_b	47	[7.330**]	.167
	% within Data collection	74.5%	25.5%	100.0%		
	% within Facebook	14.6%	30.0%	16.8%		
	Offline	66_a	13_a	79		
	% within Data collection	83.5%	16.5%	100.0%		
	% within Facebook	27.5%	32.5%	28.2%		
	Both	12_a	1_a	13		
	% within Data collection	92.3%	7.7%	100.0%		
	% within Facebook	5.0%	2.5%	4.6%		
	Not known	127_a	14_b	141		
	% within Data collection	90.1%	9.9%	100.0%		
	% within Facebook	52.9%	35.0%	50.4%		
	Total	240	40	280		
	% within Data collection	85.7%	14.3%	100.0%		
	% within Facebook	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%		
Journal category	Tourism	201_a	26_a	227	[2.377]	.094
	% within Journal category	88.5%	11.5%	100.0%		
	% within Facebook	77.6%	68.4%	76.4%		
	Marketing	17_a	2_a	19		
	% within Journal category	89.5%	10.5%	100.0%		
	% within Facebook	6.6%	5.3%	6.4%		
	Economics & Business	15_a	4_a	19		
	% within Journal category	78.9%	21.1%	100.0%		
	% within Facebook	5.8%	10.5%	6.4%		
	Other	26_a	6_a	32		
	% within Journal category	81.3%	18.8%	100.0%		
	% within Facebook	10.0%	15.8%	10.8%		
	Total	259	38	297		
	% within Journal category	87.2%	12.8%	100.0%		
	% within Facebook	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%		

* p < 0.01 ** p< 0.05 *** p<0.1

Note: Test statistics χ^2 accept where [ ] indicates Likelihood Ratio or [Fisher's exact] for 2x2 tables (the latter does not have a test statistic, only a p-value).

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Table 100: How X was studied

`	Categories	Count (Categories)			Test statistic	φ
		Did not study X	Studied X	Total		
Perspective	Supply	121_a	22_b	143	6.097**	-.143
	% within Perspective	84.6%	15.4%	100.0%		
	% within X	45.7%	68.8%	48.1%		
	Demand	144_a	10_b	154		
	% within Perspective	93.5%	6.5%	100.0%		
	% within X	54.3%	31.3%	51.9%		
	Total	265	32	297		
	% within Perspective	89.2%	10.8%	100.0%		
	% within X	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%		
DMO catchment	Not known	23_a	3_a	26	[.199]	.026
	% within DMO catchment	88.5%	11.5%	100.0%		
	% within X	8.6%	9.1%	8.7%		
	National	116_a	13_a	129		
	% within DMO catchment	89.9%	10.1%	100.0%		
	% within X	43.4%	39.4%	43.0%		
	Regional and local	128_a	17_a	145		
	% within DMO catchment	88.3%	11.7%	100.0%		
	% within X	47.9%	51.5%	48.3%		
	Total	267	33	300		
	% within DMO catchment	89.0%	11.0%	100.0%		
	% within X	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%		
Region	Global North	151_a	21_a	172	[p=.111] *Fisher's exact*	-.122
	% within Region	87.8%	12.2%	100.0%		
	% within X	66.5%	84.0%	68.3%		
	Global South	76_a	4_a	80		
	% within Region	95.0%	5.0%	100.0%		
	% within X	33.5%	16.0%	31.7%		
	Total	227	25	252		
	% within Region	90.1%	9.9%	100.0%		
	% within X	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%		
Methods	Qualitative	87_a	15_a	102	2.047	.084
	% within Methods	85.3%	14.7%	100.0%		
	% within X	34.1%	46.9%	35.5%		
	Quantitative	115_a	12_a	127		
	% within Methods	90.6%	9.4%	100.0%		
	% within X	45.1%	37.5%	44.3%		
	Mixed	53_a	5_a	58		
	% within Methods	91.4%	8.6%	100.0%		

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	% within X	20.8%	15.6%	20.2%		
	Total	255	32	287		
	% within Methods	88.9%	11.1%	100.0%		
	% within X	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%		
Data type	Primary	164_a	8_b	172	19.784*	.263
	% within Data type	95.3%	4.7%	100.0%		
	% within X	64.6%	24.2%	59.9%		
	Secondary	69_a	19_b	88		
	% within Data type	78.4%	21.6%	100.0%		
	% within X	27.2%	57.6%	30.7%		
	Both	21_a	6_a	27		
	% within Data type	77.8%	22.2%	100.0%		
	% within X	8.3%	18.2%	9.4%		
	Total	254	33	287		
	% within Data type	88.5%	11.5%	100.0%		
	% within X	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%		
Data collection	Online	42_a	5_a	47	[5.276]	.119
	% within Data collection	89.4%	10.6%	100.0%		
	% within X	16.9%	15.6%	16.8%		
	Offline	66_a	13_a	79		
	% within Data collection	83.5%	16.5%	100.0%		
	% within X	26.6%	40.6%	28.2%		
	Both	13_a	0_a	13		
	% within Data collection	100.0%	0.0%	100.0%		
	% within X	5.2%	0.0%	4.6%		
	Not known	127_a	14_a	141		
	% within Data collection	90.1%	9.9%	100.0%		
	% within X	51.2%	43.8%	50.4%		
	Total	248	32	280		
	% within Data collection	88.6%	11.4%	100.0%		
	% within X	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%		
Journal category	Tourism	204_a	23_a	227	[6.817]	.133
	% within Journal category	89.9%	10.1%	100.0%		
	% within X	77.0%	71.9%	76.4%		
	Marketing	19_a	0_a	19		
	% within Journal category	100.0%	0.0%	100.0%		
	% within X	7.2%	0.0%	6.4%		
	Economics & Business	15_a	4_a	19		
	% within Journal category	78.9%	21.1%	100.0%		
	% within X	5.7%	12.5%	6.4%		
	Other	27_a	5_a	32		
	% within Journal category	84.4%	15.6%	100.0%		
	% within X	10.2%	15.6%	10.8%		

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	Total	265	32	297		
	% within Journal category	89.2%	10.8%	100.0%		
	% within X	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%		

* p < 0.01 ** p< 0.05 *** p<0.1

Note: Test statistics χ^2 accept where [ ] indicates Likelihood Ratio or [Fisher's exact] for 2x2 tables (the latter does not have a test statistic, only a p-value).

Table 101: How Instagram was studied

`	Categories	Count (Categories)			Test statistic	φ
		Did not study equity	Studied equity	Total		
Perspective	Supply	139_a	4_a	143	[p=.544] *Fisher's exact*	.046
	% within Perspective	97.2%	2.8%	100.0%		
	% within Instagram	48.6%	36.4%	48.1%		
	Demand	147_a	7_a	154		
	% within Perspective	95.5%	4.5%	100.0%		
	% within Instagram	51.4%	63.6%	51.9%		
	Total	286	11	297		
	% within Perspective	96.3%	3.7%	100.0%		
	% within Instagram	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%		
DMO catchment	Not known	25_a	1_a	26	[.038]	.011
	% within DMO catchment	96.2%	3.8%	100.0%		
	% within Instagram	8.7%	9.1%	8.7%		
	National	124_a	5_a	129		
	% within DMO catchment	96.1%	3.9%	100.0%		
	% within Instagram	42.9%	45.5%	43.0%		
	Regional and local	140_a	5_a	145		
	% within DMO catchment	96.6%	3.4%	100.0%		
	% within Instagram	48.4%	45.5%	48.3%		
	Total	289	11	300		
	% within DMO catchment	96.3%	3.7%	100.0%		
	% within Instagram	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%		
Region	Global North	163	9	172	[p=.061]*** *Fisher's exact*	-.131
	% within Region	94.8%	5.2%	100.0%		
	% within Instagram	67.1%	100.0%	68.3%		
	Global South	80	0	80		
	% within Region	100.0%	0.0%	100.0%		
	% within Instagram	32.9%	0.0%	31.7%		
	Total	243	9	252		
	% within Region	96.4%	3.6%	100.0%		
	% within Instagram	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%		

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Methods	Qualitative	96_a	6_a	102	[6.898**]	.143
	% within Methods	94.1%	5.9%	100.0%		
	% within Instagram	34.8%	54.5%	35.5%		
	Quantitative	126_a	1_b	127		
	% within Methods	99.2%	0.8%	100.0%		
	% within Instagram	45.7%	9.1%	44.3%		
	Mixed	54_a	4_a	58		
	% within Methods	93.1%	6.9%	100.0%		
	% within Instagram	19.6%	36.4%	20.2%		
	Total	276	11	287		
	% within Methods	96.2%	3.8%	100.0%		
	% within Instagram	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%		
Data type	Primary	169_a	3_b	172	[5.861***]	.153
	% within Data type	98.3%	1.7%	100.0%		
	% within Instagram	61.2%	27.3%	59.9%		
	Secondary	83_a	5_a	88		
	% within Data type	94.3%	5.7%	100.0%		
	% within Instagram	30.1%	45.5%	30.7%		
	Both	24_a	3_b	27		
	% within Data type	88.9%	11.1%	100.0%		
	% within Instagram	8.7%	27.3%	9.4%		
	Total	276	11	287		
	% within Data type	96.2%	3.8%	100.0%		
	% within Instagram	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%		
Data collection	Online	44_a	3_a	47	[1.737]	.069
	% within Data collection	93.6%	6.4%	100.0%		
	% within Instagram	16.4%	27.3%	16.8%		
	Offline	76_a	3_a	79		
	% within Data collection	96.2%	3.8%	100.0%		
	% within Instagram	28.3%	27.3%	28.2%		
	Both	13_a	0_a	13		
	% within Data collection	100.0%	0.0%	100.0%		
	% within Instagram	4.8%	0.0%	4.6%		
	Not known	136_a	5_a	141		
	% within Data collection	96.5%	3.5%	100.0%		
	% within Instagram	50.6%	45.5%	50.4%		
	Total	269	11	280		
	% within Data collection	96.1%	3.9%	100.0%		
	% within Instagram	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%		
Journal category	Tourism	218_a	9_a	227	[1.623]	.056
	% within Journal category	96.0%	4.0%	100.0%		
	% within Instagram	76.2%	81.8%	76.4%		
	Marketing	19_a	0_a	19		

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	% within Journal category	100.0%	0.0%	100.0%		
	% within Instagram	6.6%	0.0%	6.4%		
	Economics & Business	18_a	1_a	19		
	% within Journal category	94.7%	5.3%	100.0%		
	% within Instagram	6.3%	9.1%	6.4%		
	Other	31_a	1_a	32		
	% within Journal category	96.9%	3.1%	100.0%		
	% within Instagram	10.8%	9.1%	10.8%		
	Total	286	11	297		
	% within Journal category	96.3%	3.7%	100.0%		
	% within Instagram	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%		

* p < 0.01 ** p< 0.05 *** p<0.1

Note: Test statistics χ^2 accept where [ ] indicates Likelihood Ratio or [Fisher's exact] for 2x2 tables (the latter does not have a test statistic, only a p-value).

Table 102: How YouTube was studied

`	Categories	Count (Categories)			Test statistic	φ
		Did not study YouTube	Studied YouTube	Total		
Perspective	Supply	133	10	143	.823	.456
	% within Perspective	93.0%	7.0%	100.0%		
	% within YouTube	47.5%	58.8%	48.1%		
	Demand	147	7	154		
	% within Perspective	95.5%	4.5%	100.0%		
	% within YouTube	52.5%	41.2%	51.9%		
	Total	280	17	297		
	% within Perspective	94.3%	5.7%	100.0%		
	% within YouTube	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%		
DMO catchment	Not known	24_a	2_a	26	[1.264]	.064
	% within DMO catchment	92.3%	7.7%	100.0%		
	% within YouTube	8.5%	11.8%	8.7%		
	National	120_a	9_a	129		
	% within DMO catchment	93.0%	7.0%	100.0%		
	% within YouTube	42.4%	52.9%	43.0%		
	Regional and local	139_a	6_a	145		
	% within DMO catchment	95.9%	4.1%	100.0%		
	% within YouTube	49.1%	35.3%	48.3%		
	Total	283	17	300		
	% within DMO catchment	94.3%	5.7%	100.0%		
	% within YouTube	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%		
Region	Global North	161	11	172	[p=.194]	-.082

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	% within Region	93.6%	6.4%	100.0%	*Fisher's exact]*	
	% within YouTube	67.4%	84.6%	68.3%		
	Global South	78	2	80		
	% within Region	97.5%	2.5%	100.0%		
	% within YouTube	32.6%	15.4%	31.7%		
	Total	239	13	252		
	% within Region	94.8%	5.2%	100.0%		
	% within YouTube	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%		
Methods	Qualitative	95_a	7_a	102	[.255]	.030
	% within Methods	93.1%	6.9%	100.0%		
	% within YouTube	35.2%	41.2%	35.5%		
	Quantitative	120_a	7_a	127		
	% within Methods	94.5%	5.5%	100.0%		
	% within YouTube	44.4%	41.2%	44.3%		
	Mixed	55_a	3_a	58		
	% within Methods	94.8%	5.2%	100.0%		
	% within YouTube	20.4%	17.6%	20.2%		
	Total	270	17	287		
	% within Methods	94.1%	5.9%	100.0%		
	% within YouTube	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%		
Data type	Primary	167_a	5_b	172	[7.564**]	.169
	% within Data type	97.1%	2.9%	100.0%		
	% within YouTube	61.9%	29.4%	59.9%		
	Secondary	80_a	8_a	88		
	% within Data type	90.9%	9.1%	100.0%		
	% within YouTube	29.6%	47.1%	30.7%		
	Both	23_a	4_b	27		
	% within Data type	85.2%	14.8%	100.0%		
	% within YouTube	8.5%	23.5%	9.4%		
	Total	270	17	287		
	% within Data type	94.1%	5.9%	100.0%		
	% within YouTube	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%		
Data collection	Online	42_a	5_a	47	[4.255]	.115
	% within Data collection	89.4%	10.6%	100.0%		
	% within YouTube	16.0%	29.4%	16.8%		
	Offline	73_a	6_a	79		
	% within Data collection	92.4%	7.6%	100.0%		
	% within YouTube	27.8%	35.3%	28.2%		
	Both	13_a	0_a	13		
	% within Data collection	100.0%	0.0%	100.0%		
	% within YouTube	4.9%	0.0%	4.6%		
	Not known	135_a	6_a	141		
	% within Data collection	95.7%	4.3%	100.0%		

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	% within YouTube	51.3%	35.3%	50.4%		
	Total	263	17	280		
	% within Data collection	93.9%	6.1%	100.0%		
	% within YouTube	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%		
Journal category	Tourism	215_a	12_a	227[		
	% within Journal category	94.7%	5.3%	100.0%		
	% within YouTube	76.8%	70.6%	76.4%		
	Marketing	18_a	1_a	19		
	% within Journal category	94.7%	5.3%	100.0%		
	% within YouTube	6.4%	5.9%	6.4%		
	Economics & Business	18_a	1_a	19		
	% within Journal category	94.7%	5.3%	100.0%	[.767]	.055
	% within YouTube	6.4%	5.9%	6.4%		
	Other	29_a	3_a	32		
	% within Journal category	90.6%	9.4%	100.0%		
	% within YouTube	10.4%	17.6%	10.8%		
	Total	280	17	297		
	% within Journal category	94.3%	5.7%	100.0%		
	% within YouTube	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%		

* p < 0.01 ** p< 0.05 *** p<0.1

Note: Test statistics χ^2 accept where [ ] indicates Likelihood Ratio or [Fisher's exact] for 2x2 tables (the latter does not have a test statistic, only a p-value).

Table 103: How Blogs/Travel blogs we studied

`	Categories	Count (Categories)			Test statistic	φ
		Did not study Blogs	Studied Blogs	Total		
Perspective	Supply	138	5	143	2.536	.092
	% within Perspective	96.5%	3.5%	100.0%		
	% within Blogs	49.3%	29.4%	48.1%		
	Demand	142	12	154		
	% within Perspective	92.2%	7.8%	100.0%		
	% within Blogs	50.7%	70.6%	51.9%		
	Total	280	17	297		
	% within Perspective	94.3%	5.7%	100.0%		
	% within Blogs	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%		
DMO catchment	Not known	23_a	3_a	26	[2.530]	.092
	% within DMO catchment	88.5%	11.5%	100.0%		
	% within Blogs	8.1%	17.6%	8.7%		
	National	124_a	5_a	129		
	% within DMO catchment	96.1%	3.9%	100.0%		

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	% within Blogs	43.8%	29.4%	43.0%		
	Regional and local	136_a	9_a	145		
	% within DMO catchment	93.8%	6.2%	100.0%		
	% within Blogs	48.1%	52.9%	48.3%		
	Total	283	17	300		
	% within DMO catchment	94.3%	5.7%	100.0%		
	% within Blogs	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%		
Region	Global North	160	12	172	[p=.237] *Fisher's exact]*	-.091
	% within Region	93.0%	7.0%	100.0%		
	% within Blogs	67.2%	85.7%	68.3%		
	Global South	78	2	80		
	% within Region	97.5%	2.5%	100.0%		
	% within Blogs	32.8%	14.3%	31.7%		
	Total	238	14	252		
	% within Region	94.4%	5.6%	100.0%		
	% within Blogs	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%		
Methods	Qualitative	94_a	8_a	102	[3.157]	.094
	% within Methods	92.2%	7.8%	100.0%		
	% within Blogs	34.8%	47.1%	35.5%		
	Quantitative	119_a	8_a	127		
	% within Methods	93.7%	6.3%	100.0%		
	% within Blogs	44.1%	47.1%	44.3%		
	Mixed	57_a	1_a	58		
	% within Methods	98.3%	1.7%	100.0%		
	% within Blogs	21.1%	5.9%	20.2%		
	Total	270	17	287		
	% within Methods	94.1%	5.9%	100.0%		
	% within Blogs	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%		
Data type	Primary	167_a	5_b	172	[13.730*]	.220
	% within Data type	97.1%	2.9%	100.0%		
	% within Blogs	61.9%	29.4%	59.9%		
	Secondary	76_a	12_b	88		
	% within Data type	86.4%	13.6%	100.0%		
	% within Blogs	28.1%	70.6%	30.7%		
	Both	27_a	0_a	27		
	% within Data type	100.0%	0.0%	100.0%		
	% within Blogs	10.0%	0.0%	9.4%		
	Total	270	17	287		
	% within Data type	94.1%	5.9%	100.0%		
	% within Blogs	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%		
Data collection	Online	46_a	1_a	47	[3.141]	.108
	% within Data collection	97.9%	2.1%	100.0%		
	% within Blogs	17.5%	5.9%	16.8%		

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	Offline	74_a	5_a	79		
	% within Data collection	93.7%	6.3%	100.0%		
	% within Blogs	28.1%	29.4%	28.2%		
	Both	11_a	2_a	13		
	% within Data collection	84.6%	15.4%	100.0%		
	% within Blogs	4.2%	11.8%	4.6%		
	Not known	132_a	9_a	141		
	% within Data collection	93.6%	6.4%	100.0%		
	% within Blogs	50.2%	52.9%	50.4%		
	Total	263	17	280		
	% within Data collection	93.9%	6.1%	100.0%		
	% within Blogs	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%		
Journal category	Tourism	215_a	12_a	227		
	% within Journal category	94.7%	5.3%	100.0%		
	% within Blogs	76.8%	70.6%	76.4%		
	Marketing	19_a	0_a	19		
	% within Journal category	100.0%	0.0%	100.0%		
	% within Blogs	6.8%	0.0%	6.4%		
	Economics & Business	17_a	2_a	19		
	% within Journal category	89.5%	10.5%	100.0%	[3.651]	.098
	% within Blogs	6.1%	11.8%	6.4%		
	Other	29_a	3_a	32		
	% within Journal category	90.6%	9.4%	100.0%		
	% within Blogs	10.4%	17.6%	10.8%		
	Total	280	17	297		
	% within Journal category	94.3%	5.7%	100.0%		
	% within Blogs	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%		

* p < 0.01 ** p< 0.05 *** p<0.1

Note: Test statistics χ^2 accept where [ ] indicates Likelihood Ratio or [Fisher's exact] for 2x2 tables (the latter does not have a test statistic, only a p-value).

Dimensions of branding studied on different social media platforms

Equity

Table 104: Cross tabulation of social media platforms used in equity studies

Variable	Categories	Count (Categories)			Fisher's exact	φ
		Did not study equity	Studied equity	Total		
Facebook	No	231_a	29_b	260	[p=.020]**	-.128
	% Within Facebook	88.8%	11.2%	100.0%		

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	% Within equity	85.2%	100.0%	86.7%		
	Yes	40_a	0_b	40		
	% Within Facebook	100.0%	0.0%	100.0%		
	% Within equity	14.8%	0.0%	13.3%		
	Total	271	29	300		
	% Within Facebook	90.3%	9.7%	100.0%		
	% Within equity	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%		
X	No	239_a	28_a	267		
	% Within X	89.5%	10.5%	100.0%		
	% Within equity	88.2%	96.6%	89.0%		
	Yes	32_a	1_a	33		
	% Within X	97.0%	3.0%	100.0%	[p=.224]	-.079
	% Within equity	11.8%	3.4%	11.0%		
	Total	271	29	300		
	% Within X	90.3%	9.7%	100.0%		
	% Within equity	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%		
Instagram	No	260_a	29_a	289		
	% Within Instagram	90.0%	10.0%	100.0%		
	% Within Equity	95.9%	100.0%	96.3%		
	Yes	11_a	0_a	11		
	% Within Instagram	100.0%	0.0%	100.0%	[p=.608]	-.064
	% Within equity	4.1%	0.0%	3.7%		
	Total	271	29	300		
	% Within Instagram	90.3%	9.7%	100.0%		
	% Within equity	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%		
YouTube	No	256_a	27_a	283		
	% YouTube	90.5%	9.5%	100.0%		
	% Within equity	94.5%	93.1%	94.3%		
	Yes	15_a	2_a	17		
	% Within YouTube	88.2%	11.8%	100.0%	[p=.674]	.017
	% Within equity	5.5%	6.9%	5.7%		
	Total	271	29	300		
	% Within YouTube	90.3%	9.7%	100.0%		
	% Within equity	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%		
Blogs	No	254_a	29_a	283		
	% Within Blogs	89.8%	10.2%	100.0%		
	% Within equity	93.7%	100.0%	94.3%		
	Yes	17_a	0_a	17		
	% Within Blogs	100.0%	0.0%	100.0%	[p=.388]	-.080
	% Within equity	6.3%	0.0%	5.7%		
	Total	271	29	300		
	% Within Blogs	90.3%	9.7%	100.0%		
	% Within equity	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%		

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One study could also study more than one social media platform

* p < 0.01 ** p< 0.05 *** p<0.1

Note: All test statistics are Fisher's exact for 2x2 tables (does not indicate a test statistic, but only a p-value).

Awareness

Table 105: Cross tabulation of social media platforms used in awareness studies

Variable	Categories	Count (Categories)			Fisher's exact	φ
		Did not study Awareness	Studied Awareness	Total		
Facebook	No	240_a	20_a	260		
	% Within Facebook	92.3%	7.7%	100.0%		
	% Within Awareness	85.7%	100.0%	86.7%		
	Yes	40_a	0_a	40	[p=.087]***	-.105
	% Within Facebook	100.0%	0.0%	100.0%		
	% Within Awareness	14.3%	0.0%	13.3%		
	Total	280	20	300		
	% Within Facebook	93.3%	6.7%	100.0%		
	% Within Awareness	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%		
X	No	248_a	19_a	267		
	% Within X	92.9%	7.1%	100.0%		
	% Within Awareness	88.6%	95.0%	89.0%		
	Yes	32_a	1_a	33		
	% Within X	97.0%	3.0%	100.0%	[p=.709]	-.051
	% Within Awareness	11.4%	5.0%	11.0%		
	Total	280	20	300		
	% Within X	93.3%	6.7%	100.0%		
	% Within Awareness	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%		
Instagram	No	269_a	20_a	289		
	% Within Instagram	93.1%	6.9%	100.0%		
	% Within Awareness	96.1%	100.0%	96.3%		
	Yes	11_a	0_a	11		
	% Within Instagram	100.0%	0.0%	100.0%	[p=1.000]	-.052
	% Within Awareness	3.9%	0.0%	3.7%		
	Total	280	20	300		
	% Within Instagram	93.3%	6.7%	100.0%		
	% Within Awareness	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%		
YouTube	No	263_a	20_a	283		
	% YouTube	92.9%	7.1%	100.0%	[p=.615]	-.066
	% Within Awareness	93.9%	100.0%	94.3%		
	Yes	17_a	0_a	17		

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	% Within YouTube	100.0%	0.0%	100.0%		
	% Within Awareness	6.1%	0.0%	5.7%		
	Total	280	20	300		
	% Within YouTube	93.3%	6.7%	100.0%		
	% Within Awareness	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%		
Blogs	No	263_a	20_a	283		
	% Within Blogs	92.9%	7.1%	100.0%		
	% Within Awareness	93.9%	100.0%	94.3%		
	Yes	17_a	0_a	17		
	% Within Blogs	100.0%	0.0%	100.0%	[p=.615]	-.066
	% Within Awareness	6.1%	0.0%	5.7%		
	Total	280	20	300		
	% Within Blogs	93.3%	6.7%	100.0%		
	% Within Awareness	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%		

One study could also study more than one social media platform

Note: All test statistics are Fisher's exact for 2x2 tables (does not indicate a test statistic, but only a p-value).

Image

Table 106: Cross tabulation of social media platforms used in image studies

Variable	Categories	Count (Categories)			χ^2	φ
		Did not study image	Studied image	Total		
Facebook	No	127_a	133_b	260		
	% Within Facebook	48.8%	51.2%	100.0%		
	% Within Image	81.4%	92.4%	86.7%		
	Yes	29_a	11_b	40		
	% Within Facebook	72.5%	27.5%	100.0%	7.771*	-.161
	% Within Image	18.6%	7.6%	13.3%		
	Total	156	144	300		
	% Within Facebook	52.0%	48.0%	100.0%		
	% Within Image	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%		
X	No	132_a	135_b	267	6.382**	-.146
	% Within X	49.4%	50.6%	100.0%		
	% Within Image	84.6%	93.8%	89.0%		
	Yes	24_a	9_b	33		
	% Within X	72.7%	27.3%	100.0%		
	% Within Image	15.4%	6.3%	11.0%		
	Total	156	144	300		
	% Within X	52.0%	48.0%	100.0%		

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	% Within Image	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%		
Instagram	No	147_a	142_b	289	4.068***	-.116
	% Within Instagram	50.9%	49.1%	100.0%		
	% Within Image	94.2%	98.6%	96.3%		
	Yes	9_a	2_b	11		
	% Within Instagram	81.8%	18.2%	100.0%		
	% Within Image	5.8%	1.4%	3.7%		
	Total	156	144	300		
	% Within Instagram	52.0%	48.0%	100.0%		
	% Within Image	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%		
YouTube	No	145_a	138_a	283	1.166	-.062
	% YouTube	51.2%	48.8%	100.0%		
	% Within Image	92.9%	95.8%	94.3%		
	Yes	11_a	6_a	17		
	% Within YouTube	64.7%	35.3%	100.0%		
	% Within Image	7.1%	4.2%	5.7%		
	Total	156	144	300		
	% Within YouTube	52.0%	48.0%	100.0%		
	% Within Image	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%		
Blogs	No	148_a	135_a	283	.176	.024
	% Within Blogs	52.3%	47.7%	100.0%		
	% Within Image	94.9%	93.8%	94.3%		
	Yes	8_a	9_a	17		
	% Within Blogs	47.1%	52.9%	100.0%		
	% Within Image	5.1%	6.3%	5.7%		
	Total	156	144	300		
	% Within Blogs	52.0%	48.0%	100.0%		
	% Within Image	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%		

One study could also study more than one social media platform

* p < 0.01 ** p< 0.05 *** p<0.1

Note: Test statistics χ^2 accept where [ ] indicates Likelihood Ratio or [Fisher's exact] for 2x2 tables (the latter does not have a test statistic, only a p-value).

Personality

Table 107: Cross tabulation of social media platforms used in personality studies

Variable	Categories	Count (Categories)			Fisher's exact	φ
		Did not study personality	Studied personality	Total		
Facebook	No	238_a	22_a	260	[p=1.000]	-.012
	% Within Facebook	91.5%	8.5%	100.0%		
	% Within Personality	86.5%	88.0%	86.7%		

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	Yes	37_a	3_a	40		
	% Within Facebook	92.5%	7.5%	100.0%		
	% Within Personality	13.5%	12.0%	13.3%		
	Total	275	25	300		
	% Within Facebook	91.7%	8.3%	100.0%		
	% Within Personality	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%		
X	No	243_a	24_a	267	[p=.333]	-.067
	% Within X	91.0%	9.0%	100.0%		
	% Within Personality	88.4%	96.0%	89.0%		
	Yes	32_a	1_a	33		
	% Within X	97.0%	3.0%	100.0%		
	% Within Personality	11.6%	4.0%	11.0%		
	Total	275	25	300		
	% Within X	91.7%	8.3%	100.0%		
	% Within Personality	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%		
Instagram	No	264_a	25_a	289	[p=.608]	-.059
	% Within Instagram	91.3%	8.7%	100.0%		
	% Within Personality	96.0%	100.0%	96.3%		
	Yes	11_a	0_a	11		
	% Within Instagram	100.0%	0.0%	100.0%		
	% Within Personality	4.0%	0.0%	3.7%		
	Total	275	25	300		
	% Within Instagram	91.7%	8.3%	100.0%		
	% Within Personality	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%		
YouTube	No	258_a	25_a	283	[p=.377]	-.074
	% YouTube	91.2%	8.8%	100.0%		
	% Within Personality	93.8%	100.0%	94.3%		
	Yes	17_a	0_a	17		
	% Within YouTube	100.0%	0.0%	100.0%		
	% Within Personality	6.2%	0.0%	5.7%		
	Total	275	25	300		
	% Within YouTube	91.7%	8.3%	100.0%		
	% Within Personality	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%		
Blogs	No	259_a	24_a	283	[p=1.000]	-.022
	% Within Blogs	91.5%	8.5%	100.0%		
	% Within Personality	94.2%	96.0%	94.3%		
	Yes	16_a	1_a	17		
	% Within Blogs	94.1%	5.9%	100.0%		
	% Within Personality	5.8%	4.0%	5.7%		
	Total	275	25	300		
	% Within Blogs	91.7%	8.3%	100.0%		

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	% Within Personality	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%		

One study could also study more than one social media platform

* p < 0.01 ** p< 0.05 *** p<0.1

Note: All test statistics are Fisher's exact for 2x2 tables (does not indicate a test statistic, but only a p-value).

Loyalty

Table 108: Cross tabulation of social media platforms used in loyalty studies

Variable	Categories	Count (Categories)			χ^2	φ
		Did not study loyalty	Studied loyalty	Total		
Facebook	No	206_a	54_b	260		
	% Within Facebook	79.2%	20.8%	100.0%		
	% Within Loyalty	84.8%	94.7%	86.7%		
	Yes	37_a	3_b	40		
	% Within Facebook	92.5%	7.5%	100.0%	3.966***	-.115
	% Within Loyalty	15.2%	5.3%	13.3%		
	Total	243	57	300		
	% Within Facebook	81.0%	19.0%	100.0%		
	% Within Loyalty	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%		
X	No	213_a	54_a	267		
	% Within X	79.8%	20.2%	100.0%		
	% Within Loyalty	87.7%	94.7%	89.0%		
	Yes	30_a	3_a	33	[p=.159]	
	% Within X	90.9%	9.1%	100.0%	*Fisher's*	-.089
	% Within Loyalty	12.3%	5.3%	11.0%	*exact*	
	Total	243	57	300		
	% Within X	81.0%	19.0%	100.0%		
	% Within Loyalty	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%		
Instagram	No	233_a	56_a	289		
	% Within Instagram	80.6%	19.4%	100.0%		
	% Within Loyalty	95.9%	98.2%	96.3%		
	Yes	10_a	1_a	11	[p=.697]	
	% Within Instagram	90.9%	9.1%	100.0%	*Fisher's*	-.049
	% Within Loyalty	4.1%	1.8%	3.7%	*exact*	
	Total	243	57	300		
	% Within Instagram	81.0%	19.0%	100.0%		
	% Within Loyalty	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%		
YouTube	No	228_a	55_a	283		
	% YouTube	80.6%	19.4%	100.0%	[p=.749]	
	% Within Loyalty	93.8%	96.5%	94.3%	*Fisher's*	-.045
	Yes	15_a	2_a	17	*exact*	

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	% Within YouTube	88.2%	11.8%	100.0%		
	% Within Loyalty	6.2%	3.5%	5.7%		
	Total	243	57	300		
	% Within YouTube	81.0%	19.0%	100.0%		
	% Within Loyalty	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%		
Blogs	No	228_a	55_a	283		
	% Within Blogs	80.6%	19.4%	100.0%		
	% Within Loyalty	93.8%	96.5%	94.3%		
	Yes	15_a	2_a	17	[p=.749]	
	% Within Blogs	88.2%	11.8%	100.0%	*Fisher's*	-.045
	% Within Loyalty	6.2%	3.5%	5.7%	*exact*	
	Total	243	57	300		
	% Within Blogs	81.0%	19.0%	100.0%		
	% Within Loyalty	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%		

One study could also study more than one social media platform

* p < 0.01 ** p< 0.05 *** p<0.1

Note: Test statistics χ^2 accept where [ ] indicates Likelihood Ratio or [Fisher's exact] for 2x2 tables (the latter does not have a test statistic, only a p-value).

Perception

Table 109: Cross tabulation of social media platforms used in perception studies

Variable	**Categories**	**Count (Categories)**			[Fisher's exact]	**φ**
		Did not study perception	**Studied perception**	**Total**		
Facebook	No	244_a	16_a	260		
	% Within Facebook	93.8%	6.2%	100.0%		
	% Within Perception	85.9%	100.0%	86.7%		
	Yes	40_a	0_a	40		
	% Within Facebook	100.0%	0.0%	100.0%	[p=.142]	-.093
	% Within Perception	14.1%	0.0%	13.3%		
	Total	284	16	300		
	% Within Facebook	94.7%	5.3%	100.0%		
	% Within Perception	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%		
X	No	251_a	16_a	267		
	% Within X	94.0%	6.0%	100.0%		
	% Within Perception	88.4%	100.0%	89.0%		
	Yes	33_a	0_a	33	[p=.232]	-.083
	% Within X	100.0%	0.0%	100.0%		
	% Within Perception	11.6%	0.0%	11.0%		
	Total	284	16	300		

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	% Within X	94.7%	5.3%	100.0%		
	% Within Perception	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%		
Instagram	No	273_a	16_a	289		
	% Within Instagram	94.5%	5.5%	100.0%		
	% Within Perception	96.1%	100.0%	96.3%		
	Yes	11_a	0_a	11		
	% Within Instagram	100.0%	0.0%	100.0%	[p=1.000]	-.046
	% Within Perception	3.9%	0.0%	3.7%		
	Total	284	16	300		
	% Within Instagram	94.7%	5.3%	100.0%		
	% Within Perception	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%		
YouTube	No	268_a	15_a	283		
	% YouTube	94.7%	5.3%	100.0%		
	% Within Perception	94.4%	93.8%	94.3%		
	Yes	16_a	1_a	17		
	% Within YouTube	94.1%	5.9%	100.0%	[p=1.000]	.006
	% Within Perception	5.6%	6.3%	5.7%		
	Total	284	16	300		
	% Within YouTube	94.7%	5.3%	100.0%		
	% Within Perception	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%		
Blogs	No	267_a	16_a	283		
	% Within Blogs	94.3%	5.7%	100.0%		
	% Within Perception	94.0%	100.0%	94.3%		
	Yes	17_a	0_a	17		
	% Within Blogs	100.0%	0.0%	100.0%	[p=.611]	-.058
	% Within Perception	6.0%	0.0%	5.7%		
	Total	284	16	300		
	% Within Blogs	94.7%	5.3%	100.0%		
	% Within Perception	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%		

One study could also study more than one social media platform

* p < 0.01 ** p< 0.05 *** p<0.1

Note: All test statistics are Fisher's exact for 2x2 tables (does not indicate a test statistic, but only a p-value).

Branding in general

Table 110: Cross tabulation of social media platforms used in branding in general studies

Variable	**Categories**	**Count (Categories)**			**[Fisher's exact]**	**φ**
		Did not study branding in general	**Studied branding in general**	**Total**		
Facebook	No	240_a	20_a	260	[p=1.000]	-.002

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	% Within Facebook	92.3%	7.7%	100.0%		
	% Within General	86.6%	87.0%	86.7%		
	Yes	37_a	3_a	40		
	% Within Facebook	92.5%	7.5%	100.0%		
	% Within General	13.4%	13.0%	13.3%		
	Total	277	23	300		
	% Within Facebook	92.3%	7.7%	100.0%		
	% Within General	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%		
X	No	245_a	22_a	267		
	% Within X	91.8%	8.2%	100.0%		
	% Within General	88.4%	95.7%	89.0%		
	Yes	32_a	1_a	33		
	% Within X	97.0%	3.0%	100.0%	[p=.489]	-.061
	% Within General	11.6%	4.3%	11.0%		
	Total	277	23	300		
	% Within X	92.3%	7.7%	100.0%		
	% Within General	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%		
Instagram	No	268_a	21_a	289		
	% Within Instagram	92.7%	7.3%	100.0%		
	% Within General	96.8%	91.3%	96.3%		
	Yes	9_a	2_a	11		
	% Within Instagram	81.8%	18.2%	100.0%	[p=.203]	.077
	% Within General	3.2%	8.7%	3.7%		
	Total	277	23	300		
	% Within Instagram	92.3%	7.7%	100.0%		
	% Within General	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%		
YouTube	No	260_a	23_a	283		
	% YouTube	91.9%	8.1%	100.0%		
	% Within General	93.9%	100.0%	94.3%		
	Yes	17_a	0_a	17		
	% Within YouTube	100.0%	0.0%	100.0%	[p=.379]	-.071
	% Within General	6.1%	0.0%	5.7%		
	Total	277	23	300		
	% Within YouTube	92.3%	7.7%	100.0%		
	% Within General	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%		
Blogs	No	260_a	23_a	283		
	% Within Blogs	91.9%	8.1%	100.0%		
	% Within General	93.9%	100.0%	94.3%		
	Yes	17_a	0_a	17		
	% Within Blogs	100.0%	0.0%	100.0%	[p=.379]	-.071
	% Within General	6.1%	0.0%	5.7%		
	Total	277	23	300		
	% Within Blogs	92.3%	7.7%	100.0%		

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	% Within General	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%		

One study could also study more than one social media platform

* p < 0.01 ** p< 0.05 *** p<0.1

Note: All test statistics are Fisher's exact for 2x2 tables (does not indicate a test statistic, but only a p-value).

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