



Building and communicating territorial brand values: The case of Destination British Columbia

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Abstract In today's interconnected world, effectively communicating territorial values is paramount for regions seeking to distinguish themselves globally. Effective destination branding requires carefully synthesizing cultural, historical, natural, and socio-economic elements to create an enticing identity for tourists, investors, and locals. How a region communicates its unique attributes is crucial in shaping its perception and attractiveness in a highly competitive global market. British Columbia is a prime example of successful destination branding, thanks to its remarkable cultural diversity and breathtaking natural landscapes. BC has effectively conveyed its values and appeal to a worldwide audience through various innovative strategies and platforms. This paper explores BC's communication efforts through its


website and social media, analyzing how it conveys its essence to a diverse audience and positions itself on the world stage. Ultimately, BC's success in this domain highlights the critical role of effective territorial value communication in today's globalized world.

Keywords British Columbia · Place Branding · Tourism Industry · Marketing

Introduction

The construction of a territory's image and identity has become increasingly intricate and multifaceted, especially in an age of rapid globalization and fierce competition for attention on the world stage. Territorial branding, or crafting and communicating a specific geographical entity's unique values and attributes, is a cornerstone in this endeavour. It allows regions to differentiate themselves from others, attract tourists and investors, and foster a deep sense of belonging among local inhabitants. This article embarks on a comprehensive examination of territorial branding, using British Columbia (BC) – a province in western Canada – as a focal case study. The subsequent sections delve deeply into BC's geographical context, the transmission of its territorial brand values, the broader framework and objectives of territorial branding, and the instrumental role of mass communication and social media in amplifying these brand values. We aim to shed light on the intricate

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dance between territory, identity, and communication in the twenty-first century through a fusion of rigorous academic references and data obtained from our research.

British Columbia (BC) is a province situated in western Canada. It borders the Pacific Ocean to the west, the Yukon Territory and the Northwest Territories to the north, the province of Alberta to the east, and the U.S. state of Washington to the south. The province covers an area of approximately 944,735 km², making it the third-largest province in Canada (McGillivray, 2011).

British Columbia, located on the western edge of Canada, has remarkable geographic diversity encompassing everything from coasts to deserts through mountains and dense forests. This geographic variety spans 1,180 km from north to south and 1,030 km from east to west, bordered by Yukon, the Northwest Territories, Alberta, several U.S. states, and the Pacific Ocean. The coastal region is distinguished by its wet and temperate climate, fostering the growth of rainforests and the biodiverse Vancouver Island. At the same time, the Coastal Mountain Range and the Strait of Georgia complement this area with their contrasting landscapes. Moving inland, the province transforms towards the Okanagan Valley, renowned for its drier climate and prominent wine industry. It contrasts with the towering Canadian Rockies in the east, offering spectacular landscapes and world-renowned national parks. This transition of climates and ecosystems underscores the region's rich agricultural and natural diversity, making British Columbia a significant wine-producing centre and a tourist destination for nature lovers (McGillivray, 2011).

The northern part of the province hosts vast boreal forests and subarctic tundra, further expanding the mosaic of ecosystems with its wildlife and unique geographic features such as the Cascade Range and the Interior Plateau. British Columbia reaches its highest elevation at Mount Fairweather and is dotted with islands along its coast, creating a maritime landscape of fjords and coastal lowlands. This geographic wealth not only defines the natural beauty and biodiversity of the province but also profoundly influences its inhabitants' lifestyle, economy, and cultural traditions (McGillivray, 2011). Indeed, McDonald (2021) notes that British Columbia is home to a wide variety of rivers, including the Fraser, Skeena, Columbia, and Peace, which are fundamental to the economy and

culture of the region. The Northern region extends to the province's north, with extensive tundra and boreal forests.

According to data from BC Stats (2021), British Columbia's population approximates 5.2 million inhabitants. Most of the province's population is concentrated in metropolitan areas such as Vancouver, Victoria, and Kelowna. British Columbia's economy is one of Canada's foremost, accounting for 13% of the nation's GDP.

The economy of British Columbia is characterized by a growing activity in the services sector, which has become the most important in the province, generating 80% of employment (Work BC, 2024). This service focus is complemented by significant traditional sectors such as agriculture, forestry, and fishing, each adapting to the region's unique geographic characteristics. Agriculture ranges from the capital-intensive dairy industry to orchards and vineyards, limited by geography and restricting arable land to a small percentage of the province's total area. Forestry, being the most significant resource, has seen changes in its corporate structure towards concentration in a few multinational corporations, while fishing, focused on Pacific salmon, has evolved towards the concentration of fish processing and the growth of aquaculture.

Mineral resources and energy play fundamental roles in the provincial economy, with a rich history in coal and gold mining and significant expansion in mineral mining and exploration in the twenty-first century. Hydroelectric power production has been crucial for economic expansion, harnessing the mountainous terrain and high precipitation for vast hydroelectric potential. Vancouver is the province's financial and commercial nucleus, while Victoria houses the provincial government.

Tourism is another critical economic sector for British Columbia; as per Statistics Canada (2024), in 2023, British Columbia welcomed 4,417 million international visitors (and 3,070 million U.S. overnight visitors), a figure that has not yet surpassed pre-pandemic levels, as in 2019 the number of international tourists amounted to 6.362 million (and 4.137 million U.S. overnight visitors).

Regarding employment, British Columbia's unemployment rate stood at 6.1% in January 2023, among the lowest in Canada. The province also boasts one of the country's highest per capita incomes, attributable to its robust economy and the quality of life of

its residents. However, British Columbia faces several significant challenges that impact its residents and the province's development. One of the most pressing issues is the high cost of living, particularly notable in cities like Vancouver, where housing prices are some of the highest in Canada. According to a 2023 Canadian Real Estate Association report, the median price of a home in Vancouver surpasses one million Canadian dollars, contributing to a growing housing affordability crisis. This phenomenon has sparked public debate on the need for more effective policies to increase the supply of affordable housing and control real estate speculation.

Additionally, according to data from the BC Wildfire Service, British Columbia experienced its worst recorded wildfire season in 2023. The season was marked by the magnitude and number of fires, resulting in extensive burnt areas and the evacuation of thousands of people. This disaster had an immediate impact on property loss and damage to natural habitats and raised long-term severe concerns about the effects of climate change and natural resource

management. These events underscore the urgent need to adopt more robust mitigation and adaptation strategies to address the growing climate-related risks in the region Fig. 1.

State of art

Territorial branding, an intricate blend of culture, history, geography, and distinct attributes, plays a crucial role in representing the essence of a region or territory. The construction of territorial branding is a multifaceted process that involves a wide range of critical actors. This process goes beyond mere promotion, being fundamental for the socio-economic development of a region (Anholt, 2010).

In this sense, Almeida and Cardoso (2023) point out that stakeholders play a crucial role in authentically conveying the brand's values. Public and political actors intervene in this process by establishing policies and regulatory frameworks that support territorial identity. Optimal territory management is

Fig. 1 British Columbia Territory. Fuente: Wikipedia Commons. CC4



achieved through interconnection at different institutional scales, creating links between local institutions and entities external to them. Therefore, it is necessary to focus on the relationships between place images and variables such as products, demonstrating the complexity of conveying territorial brand values through various dimensions such as nature, culture, and the socio-economic environment (Gnoth, 2002).

Communicating territorial brand values is a complex and multifaceted process that requires a coherent and well-integrated strategy. Consistency in brand elements is fundamental to the effectiveness of destination marketing. In an extensive study of the official websites of U.S. states, Lee et al. (2006) pointed out that many needed more consistency in their slogans, images, graphics, and verbal expressions, reducing their effectiveness as marketing tools. A strong and consistent brand strategy, incorporating consistent slogans and a coherent visual/verbal image, is essential for effective destination branding (Lee et al., 2006, pp. 2–3). In this regard, Echtner and Ritchie (2003) and Oliveira and Panyik (2015) highlight the necessity of combining structured and unstructured methodologies to capture the holistic image of a destination, emphasizing both the cognitive and affective components of brand values.

The role of public and political actors, specifically provincial Destination Management Organizations (DMOs), is fundamental in authentically transmitting these brand values (Hanna & Rowley, 2011). Their collaborative efforts with local stakeholders, businesses, and communities ensure the region's true spirit is conveyed, drawing tourists, investors, and residents alike (Pike, 2009).

Moreover, the perception and resonance of these values among the target audience significantly influence the success of territorial branding (Lopez-Santos et al., 2017). In an era of digital communication and the dominance of social media, understanding the nuances of territorial brand values and their transmission becomes paramount for regions striving to carve out a distinct space in the global landscape, offering insights into how territorial entities can leverage these platforms to strengthen their destination brand and enhance visitors' perception (Xiang et al., 2010).

To understand the consistency of the brand message across platforms and the integration of different stakeholders' perspectives, qualitative methods should be used to explore the narratives and

experiences shared by travellers online, combining these insights into a coherent branding strategy (Knox & Hannam, 2015). Koltringer and Dickinger (2015) point out that, for this, the analysis of online sources should emphasize the need to maintain the consistency of the brand message across different digital platforms and traditional media.

Transmission of territorial brand values and the role of public/political actors

Territorial brand values are an essential component in shaping the image of a region or territory (Cruz-Ruiz et al., 2022). These values comprise the characteristics and attributes that define the territory's personality and set it apart from other places. The brand values of a territory are crucial in shaping its identity and perception, serving as a fundamental pillar in its economic and social development. These values are a true embodiment of a territory's unique and authentic characteristics, such as its culture, heritage, natural resources, and innovative potential. These factors play a pivotal role in attracting tourism, investment, and talent, thereby enhancing the overall growth and prosperity of the region (Kavaratzis & Hatch, 2013).

To understand how the organization perceives its values and align these with the values communicated through its channels, it is essential to enhance authenticity and credibility in brand communication. Kavaratzis (2012) discusses the involvement of stakeholders in place branding, suggesting that integrating their perspectives ensures authenticity and credibility (Oliveira & Panyik, 2015, pp. 20). Additionally, Pike (2009) evaluates destination brand positions and emphasizes the importance of consistent stakeholder engagement to maintain a coherent brand identity (Hanna et al., 2021).

The significance of territorial brand values stems from their pivotal role in differentiating the territory from other places and building a positive image and reputation for the territory (Villagra et al., 2015). Territorial brand values can be a decisive factor in attracting tourists, investors, and residents, as well as promoting the economic and social development of the territory.

The integration of diverse stakeholder perspectives, social content analysis, and the use of digital channels are crucial in destination branding strategies. Indeed, understanding the dynamic and controversial

nature of place identity requires stakeholder engagement and branding strategies (Hanna et al., 2021, pp. 8–10). Oliveira and Panyik (2015) emphasize that destination marketing organizations (DMOs) should adopt strategies that involve travellers as co-creators of brand content, leveraging user-generated content (UGC) and maintaining a consistent online presence for success in the digital age (Oliveira & Panyik, 2015, pp. 4–5).

A range of factors influences the development of territorial brand values. The values must be authentic and reflect the territory's identity and culture. This entails that the values should be meticulously chosen and consistent with the territory's history, geography, and unique attributes (Kavaratzis, 2022).

On the other hand, Kavaratzis underscores that developing territorial brand values also necessitates collaboration and joint efforts among various territorial stakeholders, such as local governments, businesses, civil society organizations, and the broader community. Collaboration and joint effort are paramount to ensuring that territorial brand values are authentic, pertinent, and aligned with the territory's identity.

This integration should lead to customer-focused branding strategies prioritizing creating memorable experiences and fostering solid emotional connections with destinations. Ruiz-Real et al. (2020) highlight the importance of customer-based brand equity, place attachment, and the role of social media in branding. It should be noted that analyzing user-generated content (UGC) can provide valuable insights into consumer needs and perceptions, allowing communication and promotion strategies to be adapted to improve destination identity (Költringer & Dickinger, 2015).

The implementation and management of these territorial brand values require active and coordinated participation from public and political actors, who, through territorial marketing strategies, seek to enhance the image and reputation of the territory at both national and international levels. Territorial marketing strategies play a crucial role in disseminating and promoting the values of the territorial brand. According to Anholt (2007), these strategies are fundamental for creating a coherent and appealing image of the territory nationally and internationally. Collaboration among the public, political actors, and the local community is essential to ensure the

authenticity and relevance of the territorial brand (Zenker & Erfgen, 2014).

Additionally, Govers (2013) highlights the importance of adapting marketing strategies to market dynamics and consumer expectations while simultaneously maintaining the unique values of the territory. In this context, the active participation of different stakeholders in defining and promoting the territorial brand is fundamental to ensuring its acceptance and long-term sustainability (Hanna & Rowley, 2015). Thus, marketing strategies become an effective tool for communicating and disseminating a territory's identity and differentiating values, thereby contributing to its positioning and economic and social development.

The relevance of public and political actors in promoting territorial brand values lies in their capacity to influence and make strategic decisions that directly impact the perception and development of a territory. According to Anholt (2007), these actors play a decisive role in creating a country or city brand that integrates economic, cultural, and social aspects to build a cohesive and attractive external image. Collaboration between different levels of government and citizen participation is essential to ensure that the territorial brand accurately represents the values and aspirations of the local community.

Territorial brand strategies must be developed through a participatory and transparent approach, involving all stakeholders in defining and promoting the brand (Zenker & Erfgen, 2014). These strategies ensure greater acceptance and identification of the population with the brand and contribute to the long-term sustainability of the strategy.

However, managing a territorial brand faces significant challenges, especially in a globalized context where competition among territories is intense. Public and political actors must be able to adapt their strategies to the changing dynamics of the market and consumer expectations while maintaining the authenticity and unique values of the territory (Govers, 2013). This requires constant strategic vision and innovation.

Territorial brand values are fundamental for a territory's positioning and development in constructing a region's image. Public and political actors play a crucial role in promoting and managing these values, facing the challenge of balancing territorial authenticity with the demands of a globalized market. The

effectiveness of a territorial brand depends on collaboration between different actors and the ability to adapt to emerging challenges, thus ensuring the relevance and sustainability of the brand in the long term (Hanna & Rowley, 2015).

Construction and purpose of territorial branding

Places, understood in their diversity, can simultaneously represent various dimensions such as residence, work, leisure, business, finance, social interaction, social activism, emotional attachment, and tourism (Kavaratzis, 2016). Proper positioning of each Place is necessary since the conceptual reality of Place branding is multifaceted. Consequently, differentiating various territorial concepts, understood as spatial representation undergoing constant transformation due to human social action, culture, and economic interactions, becomes vital (Llanos-Hernández, 2010).

Furthermore, these varied spatial realities manifest the diversity of territorial branding. *Place branding* could be defined as the perception that the rest of the world holds of that territory, transcending traditional promotional and marketing meanings. Place branding enables the creation of constructs encompassing ideas, symbols, and even territorial practices, allowing a local society to identify itself. This is a horizontal process where inhabitants (Freire, 2005) and visitors must be involved in appropriation and active participation based on a shared vision of a space's developmental potential (Kavaratzis, 2016).

In the realm of tourism, Dias and Cardoso (2017) suggest that the image of the territory (as a destination) encompasses impressions about places where tourists do not reside. Consumers tend to construct the overall image of a destination through a cognitive and affective evaluation of the destination's brand (dos Santos Almeida, 2010; Guzman-Parra et al., 2016; and Molinillo et al., 2017). Thus, the tourist experience (Ferreira & Sousa, 2019) should be positive and memorable, becoming a pivotal element that tourist destinations should offer to foster a positive image and increase recommendation levels among potential tourists (Lin & Lu, 2010; Rather, 2019).

The social purpose of territorial brands is extensively discussed in the territorial marketing and branding literature (De Almeida et al., 2023). This theoretical framework addresses the concept of

territorial branding and its relationship with social purpose, as well as factors influencing the efficacy of territorial brands in achieving a social purpose.

The social purpose of territorial brands relates to their ability to positively impact society and the territory itself (de San Eugenio Vela et al., 2023). Social purpose connects with territorial brands' commitment to relevant social and environmental issues for the territory, such as sustainable development, social inclusion, strengthening local culture, and protection of natural and cultural Heritage.

Several key factors are necessary for territorial brands to fulfil their social purpose. Firstly, the territorial brand should align with the territory's identity, mirroring the Place's values, culture, and distinctive attributes (Lasarte, 2014). Moreover, a clear and coherent strategy for the territorial brand is required, outlining concrete objectives and actions to achieve its social purpose (Cristófol, 2017).

Furthermore, for a territorial brand to effectively serve a social purpose, it is crucial to have the active support and participation of various territorial stakeholders, such as local governments, businesses, civil society organizations, and the general community (Oñate, 2013). Collaboration and collective effort are essential for achieving a meaningful and sustainable social purpose over time.

In conclusion, the social purpose of territorial brands holds significance in the current context of globalization and competition between territories. Territorial brands can be a powerful tool to promote sustainable development, social inclusion, and Heritage protection, providing a clear and coherent strategy aligned with the territory's identity and active support and participation from various territorial actors (Cristófol et al., 2020).

The significance of mass communication and social media in conveying brand values

Mass communication has emerged as an essential component in conveying brand values. With the advent of social media and digital platforms, the communication landscape has undergone a substantial transformation, positioning itself as an indispensable tool for relaying brand values. Companies have discovered a virtual arena in which they can hone their communication, target their audiences, and fortify their brand values. (Hidalgo-Marí et al., 2019).

Assessing the communication strategies brands employ to reach their audiences is imperative. (Parres Serrano, et al., 2020).

Social media platforms are websites where individuals or entities swiftly interact and cultivate relationships based on their interests or activities, with minimal physical or geographical constraints. By 2025, the global count of active social media users is approximately 5.4 billion, predominantly from Europe, America, and Asia. In Spain, the anticipated user count for the same year exceeds 43 million. (Statista, 2023).

Similarly, regarding consumer purchasing behaviour, the incursion of novel technologies is a potent force reshaping this activity and its connotation. (Winner, 2004, p. 105) Communication methods have evolved, and this, coupled with "the cult of speed" (Honoré, 2012, p. 13), means social activities now progress at a faster pace, thinking is accelerated, innovation quickens, and consequently, communication speeds up (Camps, 2003, p. 31).

Brands, therefore, endeavour to position themselves as a touchstone in the digital community, bridging the digital realm with the physical format. Herein, optimal communication strategies are researched to effectively convey brand values to their audience, employing social media and websites as pivotal channels for message transmission and content dissemination aligned with brand values. (Parres Serrano, et al., 2020).

The globalization of the economic sphere has influenced consumers, and increasingly, online communities are constructed through social media. Virtually, these communities influence corporate purchasing behaviours. Brand values have become a robust medium, channelling inclinations favourable to consuming products and services. Consequently, social platforms are integral to corporate strategies (Lacasa-Mas, 2017).

Numerous studies propose a framework for the strategic branding of destinations, emphasizing the importance of collaboration among stakeholders to create a cohesive destination brand. Stephens Balakrishnan (2009) highlights how territorial entities can effectively manage their destination brand by integrating resources and promoting a unique identity. Similarly, Boo et al. (2009) demonstrate how visitors' perceptions of destination quality and image can be managed to enhance the value of the territorial brand.

Territorial entities can develop and manage the destination brand to maximize its appeal (Konecnik & Gartner, 2007), focusing on creating a coherent and attractive brand (Pike, 2005). Analyzing a destination branding model that integrates branding and destination image, it is suggested that territorial entities must emphasize the importance of consistency between the projected image and the visitor's experience to manage their brand effectively (Qu et al., 2011).

In this line of thought, some studies offer valuable insights into best practices for using social networks to build and maintain a strong brand image in an ever-evolving digital environment. Albérico Travassos and Dias (2023) conducted a strategic analysis on leveraging social media platforms for brand communication, examining how companies can use social media as a critical tool to interact with their audience, strengthen their brand presence, and achieve their business objectives, allowing companies to reach their audiences more directly and personally. Understanding the changing dynamics of the digital environment and adapting communication strategies to maximize the impact of the brand in an increasingly competitive and technologically advanced market is crucial (Bilgin, 2018; Kushwaha et al., 2020).

Critically examining authenticity involves analyzing the power dynamics and determining which values and cultural elements are promoted through these branding strategies. Banet-Weiser (2012) argues that authenticity in the context of brands and mass communication reflects and shapes cultural and social norms, suggesting a complex interaction between power, culture, and values in the digital era. Furthermore, Couldry and Hepp (2018) highlight how culture mediation through social networks reconfigures authority and authenticity, raising questions about representation and inclusion in the digital space. This critical approach to authenticity demands examining how brands can facilitate genuine and representative dialogue, avoiding cultural homogenization and promoting a diversity of voices and experiences in their communication strategies.

Objectives

Destination BC (2024) defines the brand as a purpose brand. This purpose is mainly social and focuses on

conveying particular social values, as will be seen later. Thus, the following objectives are proposed:

This objective identifies the values Destination BC seeks to communicate through its strategies. Values such as sustainability or the importance of the legacy of First Nations or Indigenous peoples appear in the brand narrative as significant points.

This objective analyses and compares the brand values communicated across different platforms. Through methodological triangulation, the aim is to compare how the values conveyed via social media correspond with those appearing in the official website's content. Additionally, the responses received from the Destination BC marketing team will be considered.

This objective seeks to understand how the organization perceives its values and how they align with what is communicated through its channels. We aim to explain how this self-perception of the organization regarding its communicated values contributes to its authenticity and credibility regarding social purpose.

Methodology

The research focuses on a detailed exploration of Destination BC's communication strategies, employing a mixed methodology that includes textual content analysis on social media, in-depth interviews, and web content analysis. Through the lens of recent studies highlighting the relevance of textual content in brand construction communication and interaction with consumers, it examines how Destination BC utilizes language and digital content to foster consumer engagement and convey its brand values. The research builds upon the work of Pezzuti et al. (2021), who investigate the impact of brand language on consumer engagement on social media, and Cruz et al. (2022), who emphasize the importance of online brand communication such as blogging or posting on social media platforms for digital marketing strategy. Such messaging is text-based mainly and provides an opportunity for brands to interact with many consumers simultaneously.

In-depth Interview with stakeholders

Báez & Pérez de Tudela (2007) defines the interview as a research technique consisting of a conversation

between an interviewer and an interviewee to gather information on a specific topic. The interview is beneficial for obtaining in-depth information about participants' experiences, opinions, perceptions, and attitudes. It is commonly used in psychology, sociology, anthropology, and communication to explore individuals' internal processes, the meanings they attribute to their experiences, and the factors influencing their behaviour.

Online interviewing, within the context of academic research, is a qualitative data collection technique conducted through digital means such as video conferencing, phone calls, emails, or messaging platforms. This method enables researchers to interact with participants without geographical or temporal limitations, facilitating access to a more diverse and extensive sample (Taylor & Bogdan, 1992; Valles, 1999; Marradi et al., 2007).

Purpose

To gather comprehensive insights from key stakeholders involved in Destination BC's branding strategy, ensuring the authenticity and alignment of brand values with the region's identity.

Participants: Members of Destination BC's marketing team, local government officials, business leaders, and representatives from civil society organizations.

Procedure: Recruitment: Identify and invite relevant stakeholders using purposive sampling.

Interview Structure: Semi-structured interviews divided into three sections:

1. Creative and media strategy in communication with a social purpose.
2. Digital communication strategies and humanizing the brand.
3. Territorial brand elements and innovation strategies.

Creative strategy and media strategy in the company's communication with a social purpose.

BC Destination is a brand with a purpose¹. What is/are the brand's purposes?

From your perspective, what is the objective of the BC Destination brand?

In your opinion, to what extent does the brand's purpose identify with the BC territory?

What role do stakeholders play in constructing the creative and media strategy?

Digital communication strategies: humanizing the brand.

What values do you believe are conveyed by the BC Destination brand?

How are the brand's values conveyed (form)?

On which channels does BC Destination transmit its brand (medium)?

What are the criteria for selecting mediums and platforms for transmitting the BC Destination brand?

Territorial Brand

What elements (heritage-related) constitute the BC Destination territorial brand?

Do you believe the BC Destination territorial brand employs open innovation strategies for its construction?

Does the territorial brand reflect the values of the social context surrounding the brand?

Lastly:

a. How would you describe the current BC territorial brand?

b. How do you believe the BC territorial brand should be?

Social media content analysis

As defined by Krippendorff (1990), content analysis is a research technique used to analyze the content of text, images, or discourse and extract significant and relevant information. Krippendorff posits that content analysis is an interpretative process that involves identifying patterns, themes, and categories in content to understand its meaning.

FanPage Karma is a social media analytics tool that allows users to monitor and analyze content and interaction on social media fan pages. According to a study by Gmiterek (2021), FanPage Karma analysed how Polish university libraries utilized social media services during the COVID-19 lockdown, evaluating user interaction and collaboration. This tool facilitated the comparison of library fan pages, enabling the calculation of critical variables such as the number of user reactions to content, the number of posts,

comments, likes, dislikes, and the use of hashtags by librarians.

Additionally, in a study by Jayasingh and Venkatesh (2015), FanPage Karma was utilized to gather data and analyze customer engagement on Facebook brand pages, providing a conceptual framework for understanding the factors influencing consumer engagement on Facebook brand pages.

Purpose

To evaluate the consistency and effectiveness of Destination BC's brand messaging across different social media platforms.

Platforms analyzed

Facebook, YouTube, and Instagram (@HelloBC accounts).

Procedure:

1. Data Collection: Use FanPage Karma to gather data from January 1 to December 31, 2022.
2. Content Selection: Analyze 716 posts, focusing on the top 50 most frequently used hashtags.
3. Metrics:
 - Engagement rates (likes, comments, shares).
 - Frequency and context of hashtags and keywords related to brand values.

Analysis

Use quantitative content analysis to identify patterns and themes and compare these with the values stated in Destination BC's official communications.

Analysis of the destinationBC website

Lastly, an analysis was carried out using the contents of their website, www.destinationbc.ca, whose structure is shown in Fig. 2 via a qualitative analysis of the data obtained using the NVivo software. This software is renowned as a tool capable of automating non-numerical data such as interviews, surveys, and textual content, thereby aiding researchers (AlYahmady & Al Abri, 2013) in processing qualitative data by allowing the creation of models through



Fig. 2 Destination BC Website Structure. Source: Own elaboration. Source: Own elaboration.

intersection matrices (Valdemoros-San-Emeterio et al., 2011). Consequently, four analysis categories were created, and corresponding subcategories were grouped.

Purpose: To analyze the alignment of Destination BC's website content with its communicated brand values and strategies.

Website: www.destinationbc.ca

Procedure:

1. Data Collection: Extract text from all relevant sections of the website.
2. Categorization: Create four main categories for analysis: Marketing, Place, Tourism, and Heritage.
3. Tool: Use NVivo software for qualitative analysis, creating intersection matrices to identify how frequently and in what context key terms related to brand values appear.

Analysis: Evaluate the consistency of the website content with the brand's stated values and strategies.

Compare these findings with the insights gathered from social media and stakeholder interviews to identify any discrepancies or areas for improvement.

Results

Firstly, the individual results of each methodology used will be presented.

Interview results

Creative Strategy and Media Strategy in the Company's Communication with Social Purpose.

BC Destination is a purpose-driven brand. What is/are the brand's purposes? To share with the world the transformative power of BC experiences. To increase sustainable social, cultural, environmental, and economic benefits for all inhabitants of British Columbia.

From your perspective, what is the objective of the BC Destination brand? See above.

In your opinion, to what extent does the brand's purpose identify with the BC territory? Our brand is grounded in the true nature of British Columbia, which is vast, diverse, abundant, astonishing, and powerful. Our promise to travellers is that the robust nature of British Columbia will bring out the best in each of them. By reconnecting with nature, they are reminded of what truly is and matters; they are transformed and renewed.

What role do stakeholders play in constructing the creative and media strategy? We work with a creative agency to develop striking creativity and involve specific stakeholders depending on the content produced. We collaborate with regional and community DMOs (Destination Management Organizations) across the province and with Indigenous Tourism British Columbia and Destination Canada.

Digital communication strategies: humanizing the brand

What values do you believe the BC Destination brand conveys? Our brand attributes are strength, free spirit, adventure, openness, and generosity.

How are the brand's values conveyed (form)? We communicate our values through our content and creative works; the types of experiences we present and the stories we tell are rooted in our values. In which channels does BC Destination transmit its brand (medium)? Mainly digital channels, such as social networks, YouTube, and display. Some traditional media, like television and outdoor advertising. The types of media we choose depend on our objectives and the markets we want to communicate with.

What are the criteria for selecting media and transmission platforms for the BC Destination brand? Objectives (e.g., awareness vs. conversion), campaign budget, market, and audience.

Territorial Brand

9. What elements (heritage-related) make up the BC Destination territorial brand? The elements of our

brand are timeless. Our brand is rooted in the geography and natural environment of British Columbia and in the values of the Indigenous peoples who have been here for millennia. The experiences and stories we share speak of current cultures, not the historical cultures of British Columbia.

Do you believe the BC Destination territorial brand employs open innovation strategies for its construction? Yes, we have strategies to evolve the brand to remain relevant and current, ensuring that, as a brand, we grow and evolve with our communities and travellers (audience).

Does the territorial brand reflect the social context's values surrounding the brand? Yes, we are working to incorporate destination management, reconciliation with Indigenous peoples, and inclusion into the brand. This work goes beyond our brand and constitutes the foundation of our organization's operations.

Lastly:

a. How would you describe the current BC territorial brand? It is currently being updated to reflect the values essential to us better, our residents, and our travellers: destination management, reconciliation, and inclusion.

b. How do you believe the BC territorial brand should be? We are constantly evolving and adapting the brand; stay tuned!

Results from the social media content analysis

The automated data analysis collected the number of posts made by the social network. On Facebook, @HelloBC posted 368 times between January 1, 2022, and December 31 of the same year. For Instagram, the number is smaller, with 326 posts, while 22 content posts were made on YouTube Table 1.

Thus, from the total of 716 content posts, an analysis of the most-used hashtags was conducted, selecting the 50 most repeated according to the FanPageKarma analysis. Figure 3 presents this classification in a word cloud format.

Based on the 50 most commonly used hashtags, a content analysis was conducted on the DestinationBC.ca website, from which the following results, presented in Fig. 4, were extracted.

Table 1 Interview Results Grouped by Theme

1. Creative Strategy and Media Strategy in the Company's Communication with a Social Purpose	
Question	Response
What is/are the brand's purposes?	To share the transformative power of BC experiences and increase sustainable benefits for British Columbia's inhabitants
From your perspective, what is the objective of the BC Destination brand?	Refer to the brand's purposes as mentioned above
In your opinion, to what extent does the brand's purpose identify with the BC territory?	The brand is grounded in the true nature of BC, which is vast, diverse, and powerful, offering transformation and renewal through reconnecting with nature
What role do stakeholders play in constructing the creative and media strategy?	Work with a creative agency and involve specific stakeholders, including DMOs, Indigenous Tourism BC, and Destination Canada in strategy development
2. Digital Communication Strategies: Humanizing the Brand	
Question	Response
What values do you believe are conveyed by the BC Destination brand?	Strength, free spirit, adventure, openness, and generosity
How are the brand's values conveyed (form)?	Through content and creative works that are rooted in the brand's values
On which channels does BC Destination transmit its brand (medium)?	Mainly digital channels, with some traditional media, depending on objectives and target markets
What are the criteria for selecting mediums and platforms for transmitting the BC Destination brand?	Objectives (awareness vs. conversion), campaign budget, market, and audience
3. Territorial Brand	
Question	Response
What elements (heritage-related) constitute the BC Destination territorial brand?	Geography and natural environment of BC, Indigenous values, experiences and stories of current cultures
Do you believe the BC Destination territorial brand employs open innovation strategies for its construction?	Yes, to remain relevant and evolve with communities and travellers
Does the territorial brand reflect the values of the social context surrounding the brand?	Yes, incorporating destination management, reconciliation with Indigenous peoples, and inclusion
How would you describe the current BC territorial brand?	It is being updated to better reflect essential values of destination management, reconciliation, and inclusion
How do you believe the BC territorial brand should be?	Constantly evolving and adapting; stay tuned

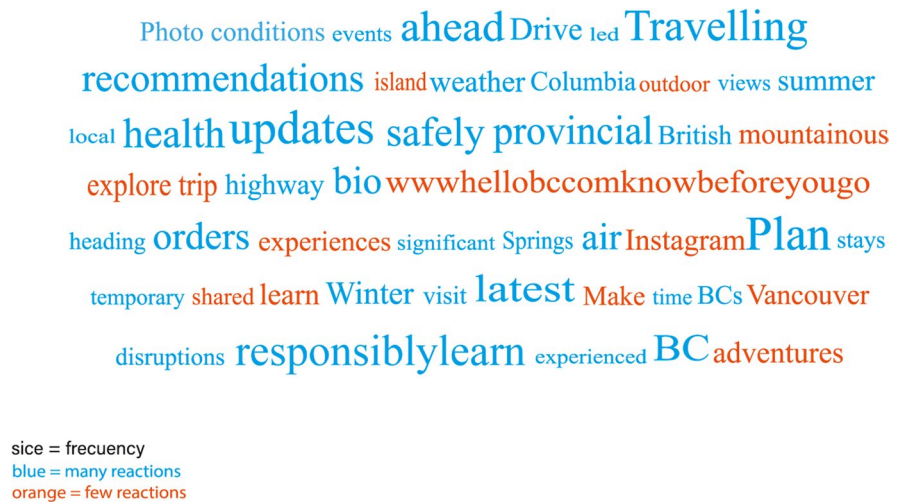
After meticulously analyzing the DestinationBC.ca website, various categories and subcategories that reflect the key elements that British Columbia (BC) wishes to convey to its visitors have been identified.

The tourism category (Table 2) comprises eight subcategories and receives the highest number of appearances. 'Trip' accounts for 4.82% of the terms. The term "Trip" is relevant but does not dominate the category, emphasizing a broader experience than short trips. 'Business' accounts for 10.44%, emphasizing business tourism. 'Tour' makes up 4.82%. Similarly to the term 'Trip', it has a modest presence. 'Tourism', at 36.95%, dominates the category, highlighting the apparent importance of the tourism

industry in the region. 'Local' has a limited presence at 2.41%, suggesting a broad focus on foreign tourists. 'Visitor' and 'Traveller' each account for 6.83% of the frequency, indicating the target of the DestinationBC.ca website. 'Travel', at 26.91%, along with the 'Tourism' subcategory, constitutes the pillars of communication within this category.

As for the category named Place, which groups subcategories related to geographical locations, 'Vancouver' appears with 14.29% of mentions, a presence linked to being one of BC's major cities. 'British Columbia' takes up the majority of mentions at 55.36%, emphasizing the full name of the province to reinforce its identity and highlight its significance in

Fig. 3 Top 50 Hashtags Word Cloud. Source: FanPageKarma. Own elaboration



the tourist context. This category is rounded off with the term 'Canada' at 30.26%, placing the province of British Columbia in the context of the entire country.

The third category pertains to terms related to Heritage (Heritage). A total of 21 terms are spread across the following subcategories. 'Nature' represents 19.05%, a low presence despite BC's rich natural environment. 'Indigen', accounting for 38.10% within its category, has a significant presence, underscoring the importance of highlighting and respecting indigenous culture in the region's tourist context. 'Sports' (23.81%) and 'Arts' (19.05%) conclude a category with a frequency lower than the previous ones.

Comparative analysis of categories: networks vs. web content

The comparative analysis of categories derived from network analysis and web content analysis reveals both similarities and differences that enrich our understanding of social phenomena:

Both approaches enable the identification of critical actors. In network analysis, these actors are central nodes that play a crucial role in the network structure. In web content analysis, critical actors are recurring authors or sources that generate or distribute relevant content.

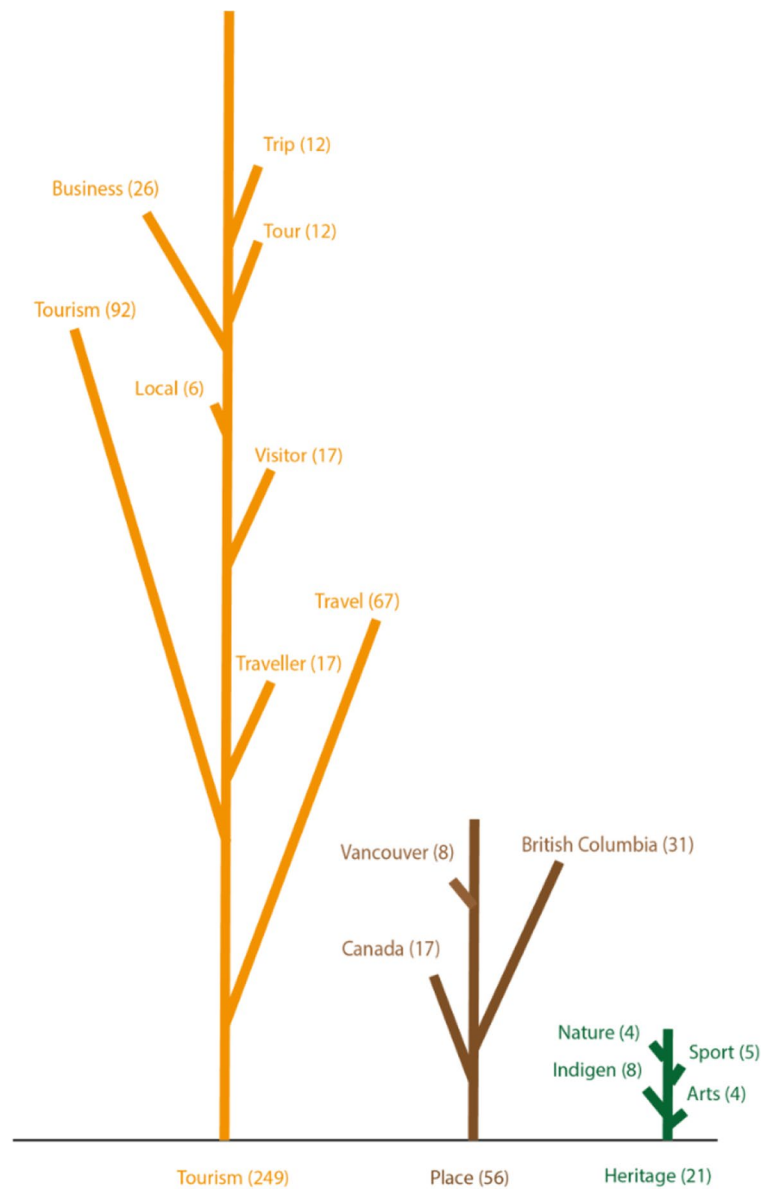
Both methods are effective in pattern detection: while network analysis focuses on identifying connection patterns among nodes, web content analysis detects thematic and discursive patterns that emerge from the texts.

Both analyses help to understand information dynamics: network analysis observes how information moves through connections between nodes, whereas web content analysis does so through the content's frequency and distribution of topics.

However, there are significant differences between the two approaches. One of the main differences is the focus on relationships versus content. Network analysis centres on the structural relationships between nodes, examining how these connections configure the network. In contrast, web content analysis focuses on textual and multimedia material, interpreting its meaning and relevance. Another critical difference is the level of abstraction: network analysis operates at a more abstract level, evaluating the overall structure of the network, while web content analysis is more concrete, directly examining texts and media. Finally, the visual versus textual results also distinguish these approaches: network analysis results are typically presented in graphs that visualize connections between nodes, while web content analysis results are presented in textual summaries, frequency tables, and discourse analysis.

The comparative analysis of categories from both approaches is crucial for a more profound and multidimensional understanding of social phenomena. The validation of findings through data triangulation strengthens the validity of the results, confirming patterns detected in both analyses. By integrating categories from both approaches, a comprehensive understanding is achieved, considering structural relationships and thematic content. This integration offers a more complete view of the phenomena studied,

Fig. 4 Graphical representation of the studied categories. Source: Own elaboration with Nvivo



allowing for the identification of both interaction dynamics and prevailing discourses. Additionally, this comparative analysis has significant practical applications, as it can inform the formulation of communication strategies, public policies, and awareness campaigns. Researchers and practitioners can design more effective and contextually appropriate interventions by providing insights into the structure of interaction networks and predominant themes.

Comparing categories obtained from network and web content analysis enriches the theoretical understanding of social phenomena and offers practical tools for social intervention. The complementarity of these methodological approaches allows for addressing social phenomena from multiple angles, providing a richer and more detailed understanding. This integrated perspective enhances the validity of the findings and facilitates the practical application of these insights in various social contexts.

Table 2 Mentions (m) & Percentage

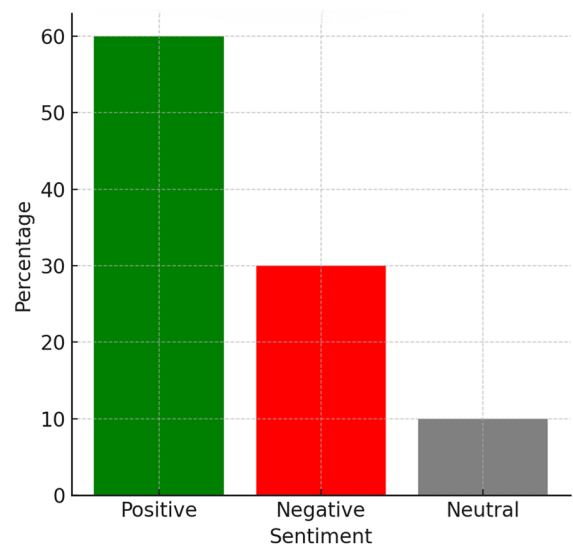
	Mentions (m)	Percentage
Tourism	249	
Trip	12	4,82
Business	26	10,44
Tour	12	4,82
Tourism	92	36,95
Local	6	2,41
Visitor	17	6,83
Travel	67	26,91
Traveller	17	6,83
Place	56	
Vancouver	8	14,29
British Columbia	31	55,36
Canada	17	30,36
Heritage	21	
Nature	4	19,05
Sport	5	23,81
Indigen	8	38,1
Arts	4	19,05

Sentiment analysis and cross-referencing with web and social media data

This section focuses on the sentiment analysis derived from qualitative interviews, complemented with web and social network data. The textual content of interviews with various participants was extracted to conduct this analysis using advanced natural language processing (NLP) techniques. The TextBlob tool allowed for classifying each sentence in terms of polarity and identifying positive, negative, and neutral sentiments. This approach facilitates the understanding of individuals' perceptions towards the subject of study and provides a quantitative basis for comparison with other publicly available data.

The results of the sentiment analysis of the interviews (Fig. 5) showed a predominantly positive trend, with many participants describing the investigated system as "efficient" and "easy to use." However, negative sentiments were also detected, related to initial setup problems, perceived as "frustrating" by some users.

This duality in perceptions highlights the importance of considering positive and negative experiences to obtain a holistic view of the system's acceptance and performance (Fig. 6). The categorization of

**Fig. 5** Cross-Referencing Sentiment Trends. Source: Own elaboration

sentiments provided a solid basis for comparing these perceptions with comments and opinions expressed on social media and related websites.

Similar patterns and trends were identified when cross-referencing the data obtained from the interviews with those from the web and social media (Fig. 7). Mentions on social networks corroborated the predominant positive sentiments, highlighting features such as the system's efficiency and ease of use. While distinct in focus and methodology, network and web content analysis share several common aspects in their approach to understanding social phenomena. Network analysis identifies key actors as central nodes crucial to the network structure, focusing on the patterns of connections among these nodes. It examines how information moves through these connections and explores the structural relationships within the network, often presenting results in visual graphs. Conversely, web content analysis identifies key actors as recurring authors or sources that generate or distribute content, detecting thematic and discursive patterns within this content. It observes the frequency and distribution of topics, focusing on textual and multimedia material analysis, with results typically presented in textual summaries, frequency tables, and discourse analysis. Both methods emphasize the importance of crucial actors and information dynamics. However, network analysis

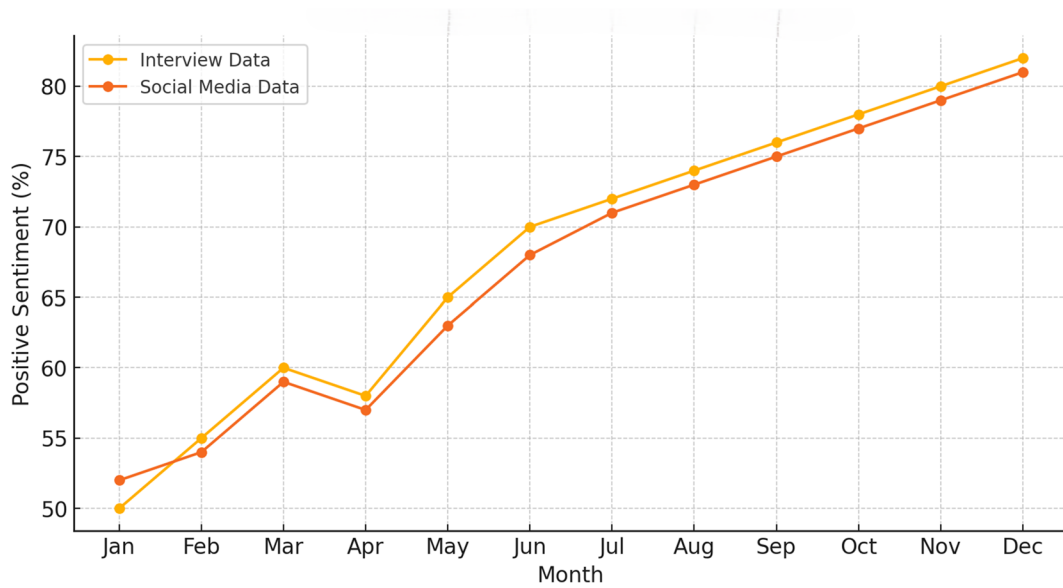


Fig. 6 Cross-Referencing Sentiment Trends. Source: Own elaboration

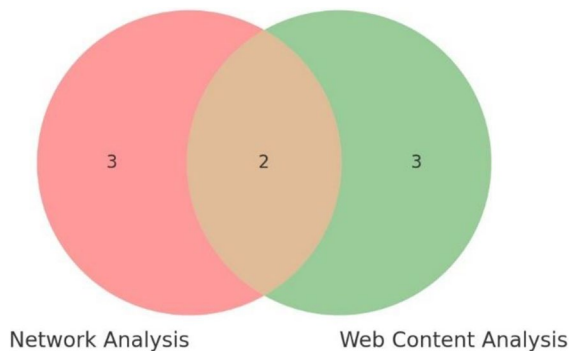


Fig. 7 Key Aspects Comparison. Source: Own elaboration

centers on structural relationships and visual representation, while web content analysis delves into thematic content and textual summaries.

However, criticisms regarding the initial setup were also reflected, indicating consistency in user experiences across different platforms. This comparative analysis validates the interview findings and underscores the relevance of using multiple data sources for a more exhaustive and accurate evaluation. The integration of these results offers a comprehensive and robust perspective, essential for informed decision-making and the development of continuous improvement strategies.

Discussion

The identification of the values of strength, free spirit, adventure, openness, and generosity by Destination British Columbia (DMO) are determined by a collaboration between public/political actors and other territorial stakeholders. These values reflect the unique identity of British Columbia and the expectations and aspirations of its residents and visitors. Determining these values aligns with the principles of value co-creation, where the involvement of the local community and potential visitors plays a crucial role (Prahalad & Ramaswamy, 2004).

The methodology employed to ascertain how these values are conveyed through social media and the website includes textual and visual content analysis, following Krippendorff's proposal (2018) that emphasizes the importance of understanding communicative content across various mediums. This approach allows for a deep exploration of how brand values are integrated and communicated in the digital landscape, reflecting the essence of British Columbia.

The selection of the four categories of analysis—marketing, place, tourism, and heritage—is grounded in the literature highlighting the significance of these elements in building territorial brand and destination identity (Anholt, 2007; Kavaratzis & Hatch, 2013). These categories offer a comprehensive framework

for analyzing how brand values manifest through different facets of destination communication. The sub-codes used in the analysis are derived from core values and main categories, allowing for a more detailed categorization of themes and patterns identified in the data. This stratification facilitates a more granular and specific analysis of value communication, following the content analysis methodology proposed by Neuen-dorf (2017).

Territorial branding plays a fundamental role in a region or city's differentiation and attractiveness, attracting tourists, investors, and residents. According to Anholt and Hildreth (2010), to build a compelling territorial brand, conveying a clear and consistent message is crucial. However, as noted in our analysis, there is a significant deviation between territorial values and messages delivered through social media, a problem that is further amplified on the web. Hankinson (2004) argues that message consistency online is crucial for building consumer trust and brand loyalty. This principle underscores the importance of maintaining a consistent image over time and across all communication channels, as Kavaratzis and Ashworth (2005) emphasized in place branding.

Our study reveals that the transmission of British Columbia's brand values needs to be supplemented and, in some cases, seems unrelated to tourism objectives, primarily reflected in the content of the BC website. This observation highlights the need to redefine the goals of those developing the brand, ensuring that emotional values are effectively conveyed on social media and websites. The absence of mentions of such values in BC brand communication underscores the importance of addressing this disconnect.

Additionally, Koivisto and Mattila (2020) point out that social media is a significant channel for brand creation, as it allows users to interact with the brand and create user-generated content. This approach can be efficient due to the nature of these platforms, allowing users to share their positive experiences and emotions about a city or region on social media, contributing to creating a positive and authentic image that attracts more visitors, investors, and residents.

The objectives of the article highlight the need for a detailed exploration of Destination BC's communication strategies, employing a mixed methodology that includes textual content analysis on social media, in-depth interviews, and web content analysis. This methodological approach responds to recent studies

that emphasize the relevance of textual content in brand communication and interaction with consumers (Pezzuti et al., 2021).

This analysis underscores the critical importance of coherence in territorial brand communication, effective transmission of emotional values through social media and websites, and the need to redefine brand objectives to reflect the values and aspirations of British Columbia accurately. Adapting these strategies and objectives will strengthen BC's territorial brand and significantly contribute to the region's attractiveness and sustainable development.

Conclusions

This study has examined Destination British Columbia (BC) as a focal case, revealing the profound impact of strategic communication on shaping the perception and allure of a region in the global arena. Through an exploration of BC's geographical diversity, cultural richness, and the pivotal role of digital platforms, the research offers critical insights into the practice of territorial branding in the twenty-first century.

Firstly, the study highlights the significance of territorial brand values as the cornerstone of a region's identity and differentiation strategy. DestinationBC indicated that "our brand attributes are strength, free spirit, adventure, openness, and generosity." British Columbia's approach to branding, which encapsulates its natural beauty, cultural diversity, and commitment to sustainability, is a powerful example of how regions can leverage their unique attributes to attract tourists, investors, and residents. The brand values of strength, free spirit, adventure, openness, and generosity are vital components that reflect the essence of BC and resonate with its target audiences.

Secondly, the research emphasizes the critical role of digital communication strategies in amplifying these brand values. The analysis of Destination BC's online presence, including its website and social media platforms, showcases the importance of cohesive and authentic communication in reaching a diverse audience. The findings suggest that while BC's digital content aligns with its brand values to some extent, there are opportunities to enhance the representation of Indigenous heritage and nature

conservation, enriching the territorial narrative and reinforcing the brand's authenticity.

Furthermore, the study calls attention to the necessity of a participatory approach in territorial branding, involving various stakeholders such as local governments, businesses, Indigenous communities, and residents. This collaborative effort ensures the authenticity of the brand values and facilitates a more inclusive and representative portrayal of the region's identity. The engagement of these stakeholders in the creative and media strategies is paramount in constructing a brand that truly embodies the spirit of the territory.

In summary, this research highlights the importance of staying current with trends and meeting audience expectations when it comes to territorial branding. By examining Destination British Columbia's successful journey in building and communicating its brand values, other regions can learn valuable lessons to improve their global positioning. A strategic and inclusive approach, coupled with digital savvy, can make a significant impact on a region's attractiveness and sustainable development. Integrating findings from qualitative interviews, web platforms, and social media analysis provides a comprehensive understanding of how brand values are perceived and communicated across different channels. The sentiment analysis revealed a predominant trend of positive perceptions towards British Columbia's branding efforts, particularly in terms of efficiency and user-friendliness. However, initial setup frustrations highlight the importance of addressing all user experiences to foster a holistic and accurate brand image. This study underscores the need for continuous monitoring and adaptation of communication strategies, ensuring that the values of strength, free spirit, adventure, openness, and generosity are consistently and authentically conveyed. The alignment of digital content with these core values and an emphasis on Indigenous heritage and nature conservation will enhance the overall narrative and authenticity of British Columbia's brand, contributing to its long-term success and resonance with global audiences.

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Declarations

Conflict of interest We, the authors of the manuscript titled "Building and communicating territorial brand values: the case of Destination British Columbia" submitted for consideration

in the academic journal "GeoJournal" hereby declare the following:

Financial Independence: We have not received any form of funding, grants, or financial compensation from entities that could benefit from or be affected by the results of this study.

Professional and Personal Relationships: We do not have any professional or personal relationships that could influence, or appear to influence, the work presented in this manuscript.

Organizational Involvement: We are not affiliated with, nor involved in, any organizations with interests that could be perceived as conflicting with the content of this manuscript.

Intellectual Property: We do not possess, nor expect to acquire, any patents or copyrights that could be impacted by the publication of this work.

Other Considerations: There are no other financial or non-financial aspects that could be considered as potential conflicts of interest in relation to the submitted manuscript. Therefore, we assure that this work is a genuine and honest reflection of our study and is not influenced by any form of conflict of interest.

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