





## Article

# Innovation and Competitiveness in the Territorial Brand of the Algarve: A Comparative Analysis of Its Social Media Communication and Web Content

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**Abstract:** In an increasingly competitive global tourism context, territorial branding plays a key role in enhancing the visibility, identity, and resilience of regions. This study focuses on the Algarve, a region in southern Portugal, and investigates how innovation and competitiveness are reflected in its digital communication strategy. Using a mixed-methods approach, this research combines the quantitative analysis of 689 social media posts published in 2024 on Facebook, Instagram, and YouTube with the qualitative content analysis of 38 documents and the official website of Algarve. The findings reveal a coherent and visually appealing brand narrative centred on the coastal identity of the Algarve, complemented by content related to nature, gastronomy, and cultural heritage. Instagram stands out as the most engaging platform, particularly when posts adopt a participatory tone, emotional storytelling, and references to specific locations. However, only 6.4% of the content surpassed the 1% engagement threshold, suggesting limited audience connection. The website presents a broader thematic range but under-represents intangible heritage and local products. The Algarve brand successfully projects an aspirational image based on landscape and leisure but would benefit from greater content diversification, enhanced stakeholder integration, and expanded narrative strategies to strengthen digital engagement and destination competitiveness.

**Keywords:** place branding; Algarve; social media; digital marketing; tourism competitiveness; place identity



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## 1. Introduction

The territorial brand has become a key strategic tool for regions seeking to stand out in an increasingly competitive global market. This concept encompasses a territory's identity, values, and perceptions, influencing its ability to attract tourists, investors, and talent. According to [Kavaratzis and Hatch \(2013\)](#), a territorial brand is built through the dynamic interaction between a place's identity and its perceived image, highlighting the importance of coherent and authentic brand management.

The evolution of the territorial brand concept has led regions to adopt more holistic approaches, where active participation from stakeholders is essential. Stakeholders include residents, businesses, government institutions, and visitors, all of whom play a crucial role

in the co-creation and promotion of the brand. Collaboration among these actors ensures that the territorial brand authentically reflects the identity and values of the territory, thereby enhancing its competitiveness and appeal. As [Hanna and Rowley \(2015\)](#) note, stakeholder participation is essential to the success of place branding strategies.

In the digital age, the construction and management of territorial brands have undergone significant changes due to the rise of social media. These platforms enable two-way communication between regions and their target audiences, facilitating content dissemination, interaction, and the co-creation of experiences. Effective online reputation management has become vital, as opinions and perceptions shared on these platforms can significantly influence a region's image. According to [Gascó González \(2022\)](#), social media plays a crucial role in shaping the image of tourist destinations and influencing tourists' travel decisions.

The Algarve region, located in southern Portugal, is a region known for its coastal landscapes, pleasant climate, and rich cultural heritage. Historically, its economy has been closely tied to tourism, prompting local authorities and involved actors to focus on strengthening and promoting the Algarve's territorial brand. The effective management of this brand is essential to maintain and enhance the region's competitiveness in the global tourism market. As [Pike and Page \(2014\)](#) argue, destination management requires a strong branding strategy to stand out in a saturated market.

With the advancement of information and communication technologies, social media and official websites have become fundamental channels for promoting tourist destinations. These platforms allow direct and interactive communication with target audiences, facilitating content dissemination, engagement, and the co-creation of experiences. Recent studies have shown that proper social media management can significantly enhance the image and reputation of tourist destinations. For instance, [Leung et al. \(2013\)](#) highlight that social media influences tourist perceptions and behaviours, affecting travel decisions.

The official tourism website of the Algarve, [VisitAlgarve \(n.d.\)](#), together with its social media profiles, plays a crucial role in constructing and promoting the region's territorial brand. These digital channels provide information about tourist attractions, events, and services and influence the perception and decision-making of potential visitors. Therefore, analysing how these platforms are managed and what communication strategies are implemented is essential. As [Hays et al. \(2013\)](#) suggested, destination marketing organisations must use social media effectively to attract and engage tourists.

### *Geographical Context*

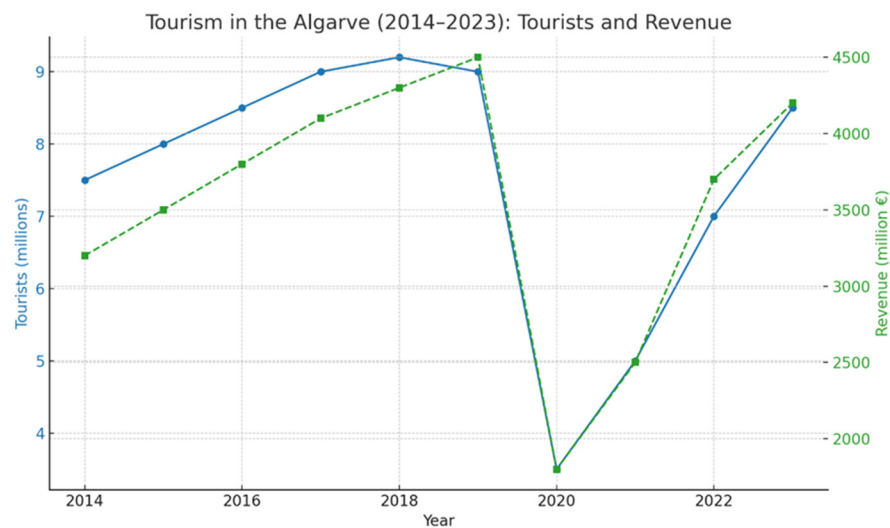
The Algarve is located in the southernmost part of Portugal, bordered to the north by the Alentejo, to the east by Spain (Huelva Province, Andalusia), and the south and west by the Atlantic Ocean (Figure 1). The Algarve is a region renowned for its coastline, Mediterranean climate, and cultural heritage. For more information about its territorial context, see the official website: <https://www.visitalgarve.pt> (accessed on 1 May 2025).

Demographically, the estimated population in 2024 was 467,343 inhabitants, with a density of approximately 80 inhabitants per square kilometre ([INE, 2025](#)). The tourism sector mainly supports the regional economy, supplemented by traditional activities such as agriculture and fishing. Tourism has become the region's dominant economic driver, gaining further prominence following the 2007 financial crisis ([Costa & Almeida, 2015](#)).



**Figure 1.** A map of the Algarve. Source: <http://www.mapas-del-mundo.net/europa/portugal/algarve/detallado-mapa-de-algarve-con-carreteras-ciudades-y-aeropuertos> (accessed on 7 May 2025).

In the last decade, tourism in the Algarve has experienced a sustained recovery, reaching 8.5 million visitors in 2023, representing a 21.43% increase compared to 2022, although this was still below pre-pandemic levels (INE, 2025) (Figure 2). This growth confirms the strategic importance of the sector for the regional economy. Since the 1960s, public policies such as the construction of Faro Airport and national tourism plans have aimed to position the Algarve as a competitive destination (Almeida-García, 2012; Reimao Costa & Batista, 2012). These measures laid the foundations for a tourism identity centred on the coastline and climate, which still prevails in today’s institutional and commercial narratives.



**Figure 2.** 2014–2023 Source: Own elaboration based on INE data. Note: Data for 2020 and 2021 reflect impact of COVID-19 pandemic on tourism sector.

In response to the limitations of a seasonal model concentrated in the summer months, a place branding strategy was implemented to reduce tourism seasonality in the early 21st century. The “Allgarve” campaign, replacing the Arabic suffix with an Anglo-Saxon one, aimed to project an image of openness to different markets and tourist profiles. This strategy was accompanied by a slogan centred on “experience” as an added value of the destination (Valle et al., 2011). The promotion was reinforced through an active social media presence (Iglesias-Sánchez et al., 2020), and it aimed to diversify tourism offerings, combining the classic “golf sun & fun” with landscape, cultural, and sun-and-beach tourism.

Other tourism modalities, such as business, sports, and culture, were encouraged in this context. This policy of diversifying the region's offerings and expanding the territorial brand was supported by the central government, which since the 1990s has promoted the country's international positioning through high-visibility events, such as the 2004 UEFA European Championship, for which the Estádio Algarve was built (De la Osada Saurí et al., 2023).

Objectives:

- O1: To analyse the presence and activity of the Algarve territorial brand on social media, assessing its effectiveness in engagement and reach.
- O2: To examine the content of the official Visit Algarve website, identifying the strategies used to promote the territory's innovation and competitiveness.
- O3: To compare the communication strategies used on social media and the website, determining their coherence and effectiveness in building the Algarve territorial brand.

This paper begins with an introduction, providing an overview of the research. This is followed by a literature review in order to frame the developments within the various theoretical fields relevant to the study. The next section focuses on explaining the proposed methodological triangulation, which is then followed by the presentation and interpretation of the results. Finally, although in separate sections, the paper offers an in-depth discussion and a Conclusion Section, which includes a series of recommendations.

This study contributes to the theoretical body of place branding by integrating quantitative and qualitative methodologies in analysing a tourist destination's digital narrative. In contrast to previous research focused exclusively on institutional content or social media in isolation, our approach proposes a triangulation that includes websites, social media platforms, and institutional documents. In doing so, we address a gap in the literature regarding the coherence between official and digital discourse, with particular attention to the emotional tone of the message, semantic coding, and the strategic use of formats and hashtags.

## 2. Theoretical Framework

### 2.1. Place Branding: An Updated Concept

Place branding is a strategy aimed at identifying, promoting, and managing the identity and perception of a specific territory—whether a city, region, or country—to attract tourists, investors, and residents and strengthen local community pride and cohesion. This concept has evolved significantly in recent decades, incorporating contributions from marketing, geography, sociology, and communication.

Initially, place promotion focused on tourism marketing, highlighting natural, historical, or cultural attractions to draw visitors. Over time, however, this perspective broadened to encompass tourism promotion, the attraction of investment, and the enhancement of residents' quality of life. According to Kavaratzis and Ashworth (2005), place branding involves applying traditional branding techniques adapted to the unique characteristics of geographic places, recognising that these are not homogeneous products but complex entities with multiple dimensions and meanings.

Territorial brands comprise tangible and intangible elements that form a place's identity together. Tangible components include a region's infrastructure, natural environment, architecture, and available services. Intangible elements involve culture, history, traditions, and the perceptions of residents and outsiders. De San Eugenio Vela (2013) emphasises that place branding is not solely focused on external promotion but also on building a strong internal identity that engages the local community. This participatory approach is essential

to ensuring the authenticity and sustainability of the brand, as residents serve as natural ambassadors whose perceptions directly shape the image projected externally.

Authenticity has become a key factor in building successful territorial brands. Places that genuinely reflect their culture, history, and values resonate more effectively with their target audiences. [Kavaratzis and Hatch \(2013\)](#) propose a dynamic model in which a place's identity and perceived image interact continuously, suggesting that brand management should be an ongoing process of adaptation and reflection.

The active involvement of the local community and stakeholders is fundamental to the place branding process. [De San Eugenio Vela \(2011\)](#) notes that involving residents in brand development strengthens their sense of belonging and ensures that the projected identity is representative and authentic. Moreover, [Kavaratzis and Kalandides \(2015\)](#) argue that stakeholder participation is essential for the success of place branding strategies.

Today, territorial brands face challenges related to globalisation, climate change, and growing demands for sustainability. [De San Eugenio Vela and Ginesta \(2023\)](#) argue that territorial brands must address contemporary issues, such as climate change and social justice, to remain relevant and resonate with their target audiences. Integrating sustainable and responsible practices into brand strategy enhances a place's reputation and contributes to the well-being of current and future generations.

A strong territorial brand can serve as a driver of economic and social development. Attracting investment, tourism, and talent creates job opportunities, improves infrastructure, and raises residents' quality of life. In addition, a well-managed brand can foster civic pride and social cohesion, strengthening the community fabric.

Place branding has evolved from a mere tool for tourism promotion to a comprehensive strategy that seeks to align a place's internal identity with its external image, involving multiple actors and addressing economic, social, and environmental factors. Authenticity, community participation, and sustainability are fundamental pillars in constructing successful territorial brands in today's context.

In tourism, various studies have shown how place branding strategies can influence the competitiveness of destinations ([Muñiz & Cervantes, 2010](#); [Méndez Prada & López Barraza, 2020](#)). For example, [Iglesias-Sánchez et al. \(2020\)](#) analysed the role of Instagram in brand image construction in the Algarve and Costa del Sol, highlighting the importance of visual and participatory narratives. Likewise, [Ginesta et al. \(2024\)](#) emphasise the role of younger generations in co-creating city brands. These empirical approaches reinforce the usefulness of the proposed conceptual framework, validating its application to the study of territorial branding in tourism.

## *2.2. Building the Territorial Brand Through Social Media*

The construction of place branding has undergone a significant transformation with the emergence of social media, which has redefined communication strategies and citizen engagement. These media offer interactive platforms that facilitate the co-creation of territorial identity, enabling active collaboration between authorities, citizens, and other relevant stakeholders.

Co-creation in the development of place branding involves the joint participation of various stakeholders in shaping and promoting a place's identity. This collaboration allows the brand to authentically reflect the cultural richness and diversity of the territory, fostering a sense of belonging and pride among residents. According to [Bocanegra Barbecho et al. \(2017\)](#), the trend toward citizen participation in scientific research processes is here to stay, and the involvement of individuals and groups connected to the subject matter offers access to privileged information and new primary sources.

Social media has emerged as an essential tool in this co-creation process. Platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram enable direct interaction between local authorities and citizens, allowing the dissemination of initiatives, collection of feedback, and promotion of cultural events. This bidirectional interaction enriches brand strategy and strengthens the relationship between the community and its representatives.

Moreover, the role of the online community manager is crucial in managing the digital presence of a territorial brand. This professional is responsible for maintaining and enhancing the relationship between the entity and its audience in the digital realm, acting as a bridge between the organisation and the online community. Their tasks include content creation and management, monitoring conversations, and responding to comments, thus contributing to developing and maintaining a positive online reputation.

Online reputation management is another fundamental aspect of building a territorial brand through social media. Users' perceptions of a place can be influenced by comments, reviews, and posts shared on digital platforms. Therefore, actively monitoring and managing online presence is essential, responding appropriately to interactions and fostering a positive image of the territory.

The strategic use of social media also enables the implementation of viral marketing campaigns, in which users share content related to the territorial brand, thereby expanding its reach and visibility. These campaigns may include contests, challenges, and user-generated content, encouraging active community participation and strengthening a shared territorial identity. Integrating social CRM (customer relationship management) tools into the territorial brand strategy allows for effectively managing relationships with citizens and visitors. These tools facilitate the collection and analysis of data derived from social media interactions, offering more profound insight into audience needs and preferences. This information is invaluable for tailoring and improving communication and promotional strategies for the territory.

Managing an online presence requires strategic planning that includes creating relevant content and monitoring key metrics. It is vital to establish a consistent voice and tone that reflects the territory's identity and maintain constant and authentic engagement with the online community. Transparency and responsiveness are essential to building trust and credibility among followers of the territorial brand. The construction of a territorial brand through social media also benefits from collaboration with local influencers and brand ambassadors. These individuals, who have a significant following and a genuine connection with the territory, can amplify the brand's message and attract new audiences. It is important to select collaborators who share the territorial brand's values and vision to ensure authentic and consistent representation.

Measuring and evaluating social media strategies are crucial for the success of place branding efforts. Analytical tools allow for tracking posts' performance, community growth, and user engagement levels. These data provide valuable insights to refine and optimise strategies, ensuring they align with established objectives and meet audience expectations.

### *2.3. Place Branding and Stakeholders*

Developing an effective territorial brand requires the active collaboration of various actors, known as stakeholders, including local authorities, businesses, residents, and visitors. These interest groups play fundamental roles in defining, promoting, and sustaining a territory's identity.

Stakeholder participation in the process of place branding is essential to ensuring that the identity authentically reflects the characteristics and values of the place. According to [Kavaratzis and Hatch \(2013\)](#), interaction among the different actors and their perceptions contributes to forming a strong and coherent brand identity.

As leaders of place branding initiatives, local authorities must encourage collaboration among various stakeholders. An example is the “Marca Navarra” strategy, which aims to attract talent and investment by involving institutions, universities, businesses, and civil society. Local businesses also play a crucial role in promoting the territorial brand. By aligning themselves with quality initiatives such as the collective brand “Nuez de Navarra/Nafarroako Intxaurra”, companies demonstrate their commitment to excellence and contribute to the positive reputation of the territory.

The active participation of residents is vital for the authenticity of the territorial brand. Community involvement in defining a city’s identity ensures that the brand is representative and aligned with local expectations and values. An example of this approach is the creation of “Marca Pamplona”, which engaged over 1700 organisations through focus groups and co-creation workshops to define the city’s visual identity and narrative. Visitors and tourists, through their interactions with the territory, contribute to disseminating the brand via their experiences and recommendations. Implementing distinguishing labels, such as “Producto Cooperativo”, allows consumers to identify and value cooperative products in the market, strengthening the connection between the territorial brand and its audience.

Managing a territorial brand’s reputation is a continuous process that requires the monitoring of stakeholder perceptions and opinions. According to [Eshuis and Edwards \(2013\)](#), a brand’s reputation is shaped by the social constructions surrounding its credibility, reliability, and consistency.

Effective communication among stakeholders is fundamental to the success of place branding. Implementing reputational marketing strategies—which integrate corporate social responsibility and marketing tools—contributes to constructing and enhancing a brand’s reputation.

### 3. Material and Methods

#### 3.1. Social Media Metrics Analysis

This study adopted a quantitative methodology based on digital content analysis to examine the communication strategies employed by the territorial brand Visit Algarve through its official social media channels in 2024. The objective was to identify the discursive, visual, and structural elements shaping its digital narrative and evaluate their effectiveness in engagement and positioning.

The analysed sample consisted of  $n = 689$  posts from the official Visit Algarve Facebook, Instagram, and YouTube profiles. These three platforms were selected because they are the only ones officially listed on the institutional website, [www.visitalgarve.pt](http://www.visitalgarve.pt), and account for the entire brand’s digital communication activity during the study period.

All posts available on these platforms during the calendar year 2024 were considered, allowing us to refer to a complete and representative sample for qualitative analysis, ensuring theoretical data saturation.

Notably, no official profiles were identified on other social platforms, such as X (formerly Twitter) or TikTok, which justifies their exclusion from the analysis.

The data were obtained using the professional tool Fanpage Karma, which allows for the systematic extraction of social media metrics such as the number of posts and their format type, interactions, engagement rate, use of hashtags, predominant sentiment, and key terms. This tool has been used in previous research on digital communication and tourism, such as the study by [Carcelén-García and Díaz-Soloaga \(2022\)](#), which supports its reliability and applicability in academic contexts.

The temporal scope of the analysis covered the entire calendar year 2024 to capture potential seasonal variations, specific campaigns, and periods of high or low communication

activity. This time frame ensured a comprehensive view of the brand's digital behaviour throughout a complete annual cycle.

The methodological strategy was structured into two complementary phases:

1. The quantitative analysis of activity and performance. The number of posts per platform was recorded, alongside the formats used (image, video, carousel, link, status), average engagement per post, and monthly content distribution. Individual post engagement levels were also analysed, with posts exceeding a 1% interaction rate highlighted as high-performance cases.
2. Lexical and hashtag analysis. A frequency analysis was applied to the entire set of posts to identify the most frequently used words and recurring hashtags. These elements were also compared against their expected averages to detect linguistic patterns, positioning strategies, and communication structures potentially linked to the success of the posts.

In parallel, post sentiment was categorised into three groups (positive, neutral, and negative) based on lexical and contextual variables recognised by the analysis tool. This approach enabled the study of form and content as well as the emotional tone of the communication strategy. We used NVivo14 software to assign sentiment based on semantic analysis using lexical dictionaries and language patterns. To enhance the validity of the analysis, a manual validation was conducted on a random 10% sample of the corpus.

According to data extracted with Fanpage Karma, the official Visit Algarve accounts in 2024 had over 230,000 followers on Facebook, 145,000 on Instagram, and 3680 on YouTube. The average engagement per post was approximately 0.26%, with peaks exceeding 5.5% in specific cases on Instagram.

Although platforms such as TikTok and X (formerly Twitter) are gaining relevance, they were not included due to the absence of active institutional profiles from the DMO. This methodological choice may be considered a limitation; however, it ensured that the analysis focused exclusively on verified official channels.

### 3.2. Website Content Analysis

Based on a qualitative analysis of 38 documents and the textual content of the official Visit Algarve website, a thematic categorisation was conducted using NVivo software. This process enabled the identification of the main discursive lines shaping the Algarve territorial brand. The analysis was structured around eight major analytical categories: Identity/Brand, Emotions and Experience, Hospitality and Welcome, Quality and Comfort, Accessibility, Sun and Beach, Nature and Active Tourism, and Gastronomy and Culture.

The analysis was conducted using the Portuguese-language content of the website, [www.visitalgarve.pt](http://www.visitalgarve.pt), whose structure is illustrated in Figure 3, and 38 downloadable PDF documents hosted on the site (see Appendix A). The selection criteria included documents with narrative text, excluding primarily image-based guides. A qualitative analysis of the selected materials was carried out using NVivo software. This tool is recognised as a practical resource for automating the processing of non-numerical data—such as interviews, surveys, and textual content—thereby facilitating the work of researchers by enabling the construction of models through intersection matrices.

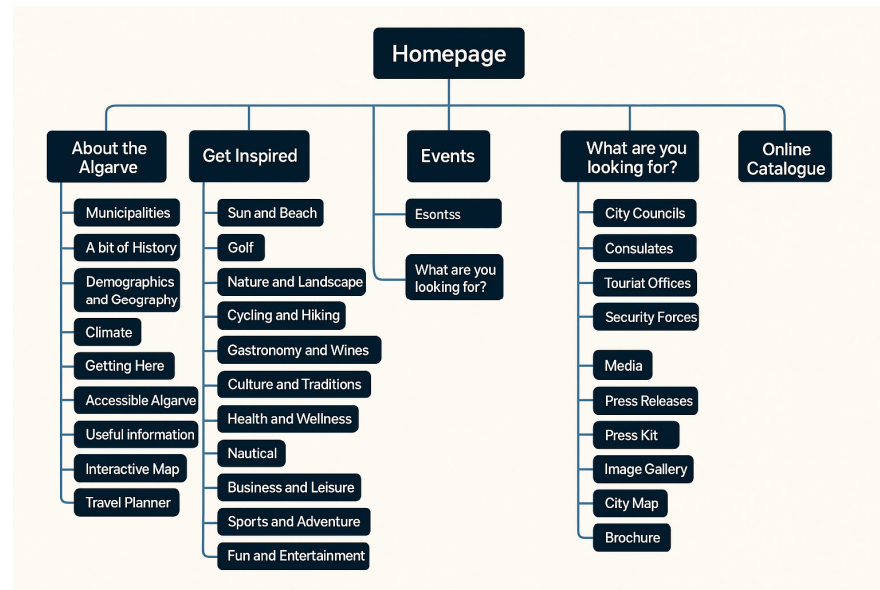


Figure 3. Website map of [www.visitalgarve.pt](http://www.visitalgarve.pt). Source: Own elaboration.

Drawing on studies in tourism marketing (Govers & Go, 2009; Buhalis & Foerste, 2015; Morgan et al., 2002) and semantic content analysis of tourism destinations (Dann, 1996; Choi et al., 2007), a classification of semantic fields was proposed to reflect the key dimensions of the destination brand. These dimensions correspond to tourists’ values and are promoted by destination marketing organisations (DMOs). The 38 documents analysed were selected from the downloadable materials available on [www.visitalgarve.pt](http://www.visitalgarve.pt). Only those with narrative textual content were included, excluding documents focused exclusively on images, lists, or duplicated materials. Regarding the downloadable documents from the [www.visitalgarve.pt](http://www.visitalgarve.pt) website, a ranking measure was also applied, considering the number of documents in which each element appeared, thus allowing for the assessment of the frequency and relevance of the terms used in the analysed set.

The categories selected were as follows:

1. General Cross-Cutting Categories: These categories were based on the aforementioned destination branding studies and were designed to assess the coherence of brand positioning.

Category	Portuguese	English
Identity /Brand	marca, identidade, autenticidade	brand, identity, authenticity
Emotions and Experience	emoções, memórias, vivência	emotions, memories, experience
Welcome and Hospitality	acolhimento, hospitalidade	hospitality, welcome
Quality and Comfort	conforto, qualidade, serviços	comfort, quality, services
Accesibility	acessibilidade, mobilidade	accessibility, mobility

## 2. Tourism-specific thematic categories and associated subcategories.

Sun and Beach	praia, mar, sol, costa, litoral, férias, clima
Nature	paisagem, parque natural, observação, fauna, flora, trilha, biodiversidade
Turismo Activo	caminhada, ciclismo, aventura, desporto, canoagem, vela, escalada, ar livre
Gastronomy	gastronomia, vinho, comida tradicional, sabor/es, prova de bichos, produto local, mercado
Culture	cultura, história, património, museu, tradição, arquitectura, evento/festival

To ensure the validity and reliability of the qualitative analysis, two researchers double-coded a random sample of the corpus and validated it. In addition, methodological triangulation was applied between the semantic results from the documents, social media metrics, and thematic categorization. The coding structure was peer-reviewed to ensure coherence and interpretative consistency. These measures strengthen the credibility and transparency of the analytical process.

## 4. Results

### 4.1. Results of Content Analysis

The analysis of the subcategories yields noteworthy results, highlighting the high frequency of specific terms (Figure 4). First and foremost, the “Sun and Beach” category emerges as the most prominent in terms of recurrence. Terms such as Praia ( $n = 1333$  on the website and 164 in PDFs), mar ( $n = 976$ ), costa ( $n = 669$ ), and litoral ( $n = 333$ ) reflect a clear positioning strategy centred on coastal appeal. The average number of mentions per concept within this category (for example, Praia having an average of 44.43 mentions) is significantly higher than in other categories, confirming that the coastline is the backbone of the Algarve’s tourism identity.

Following in relevance is the “Nature” category, where terms such as Paisagem, Parque Natural, Fauna, Flora, and Biodiversidade stand out. The narrative constructed around these elements suggests an intention to position the Algarve as a sustainability and biodiversity destination. Special attention should be given to the term observação (observation), which appears with an average of 10.24 mentions, reinforcing the connection to ecotourism activities.

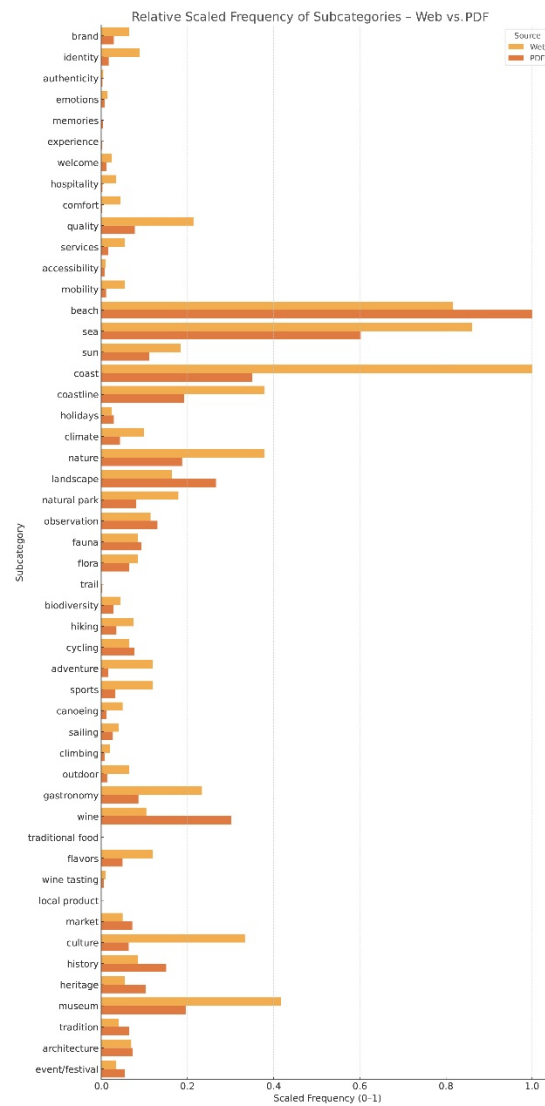
In the “Active Tourism” category, the terms ciclismo ( $n = 103$  on the website) and Desporto ( $n = 44$  on the website and 24 in PDFs) demonstrate a commitment to diversifying the tourism offer toward outdoor sports activities. The high average number of mentions for ciclismo (14.71) reflects a concrete effort to establish this thematic line within the overall branding strategy.

In the gastronomic dimension, the term Vinho stands out, with 402 mentions on the website and an average of 30.92—the highest within this category. This value indicates a clear focus on enogastronomic promotion, further supported by mentions of Sabores ( $n = 66$ ) and Mercado ( $n = 96$ ). However, the low frequency of terms such as Produto local or Comida tradicional suggests an opportunity to strengthen the narrative by anchoring it more deeply in local culinary authenticity.

The cultural category shows a high density of terms such as Museu ( $n = 261$ ), história ( $n = 201$ ), and Património ( $n = 137$ ), indicating a solid representation of the region’s heritage

component. The recurrence of Evento/Festival (average 9.13 mentions) also reflects an interest in highlighting the territory’s dynamic and contemporary cultural expressions.

Finally, the categories “Identity/Brand”, “Hospitality and Welcome”, “Quality and Comfort”, and “Accessibility” show intermediate levels of representation, with terms like Qualidade (average 6.5), Acolhimento (1.78), and Acessibilidade (5.0) contributing to the positioning of the region in terms of visitor experience and service standards. However, compared to the more experiential content categories (sun, beach, nature), these dimensions appear more as supporting attributes than central pillars of the brand narrative.



**Figure 4.** The relative frequencies of the subcategories on the website and in the PDF brochures. Source: Own elaboration.

#### 4.2. Results of Social Media Metrics

The platform-specific analysis reveals a clear preference for Visit Algarve’s digital content strategy. Facebook dominates the activity: 471 posts were published on this platform, representing 68.4% of the total (see Table 1 below). This choice is not accidental; Facebook remains one of the most established platforms in reach and segmentation, particularly among adult and family-oriented audiences, which aligns well with the type of tourism associated with the Algarve.

**Table 1.** Distribution of posts by social media platform. Source: Own elaboration.

Social Network	Iterations
Facebook	68.36
Youtube	0.58
Instagram	31.06

Instagram is the second most-used platform, with 214 posts (31.1%). The brand's significant presence on this visually driven network reflects its effort to capture the attention of younger audiences accustomed to ephemeral and aesthetic content consumption. The Instagram strategy focuses on visual inspiration, experience promotion, and engagement through stories, reels, and carousel posts.

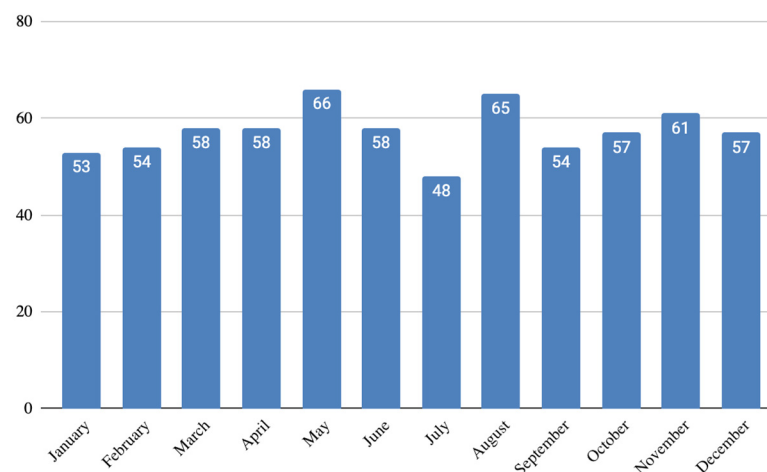
By contrast, the YouTube channel accounts for only 0.6% of the total posts, with just four pieces of content detected. This figure suggests that the brand is not prioritising this platform as a primary channel, despite its potential for building more elaborate and emotionally compelling narratives through long-form video.

The temporal analysis of Visit Algarve's social media activity reveals a consistent posting strategy throughout the year, with slight month-to-month variations, as shown in the accompanying chart. The monthly average is approximately 57 posts, with occasional peaks and drops that correspond to tourism seasonality and specific campaign periods.

The month with the highest number of posts is May, totalling 66, followed closely by August (65) and November (61). These figures align with key moments in tourism promotion: May marks the beginning of the high season in the Northern Hemisphere, August represents the peak of summer, and November may correspond to winter campaigns and short getaway promotions.

Conversely, July has the lowest activity level, with only 48 posts. This drop may reflect a strategic content break or a focus shift to other channels, such as on-site visitor engagement.

The monthly distribution reveals a well-structured editorial calendar, with increased posting during strategic moments in the tourism calendar while maintaining an active year-round presence, as shown in Figure 5.

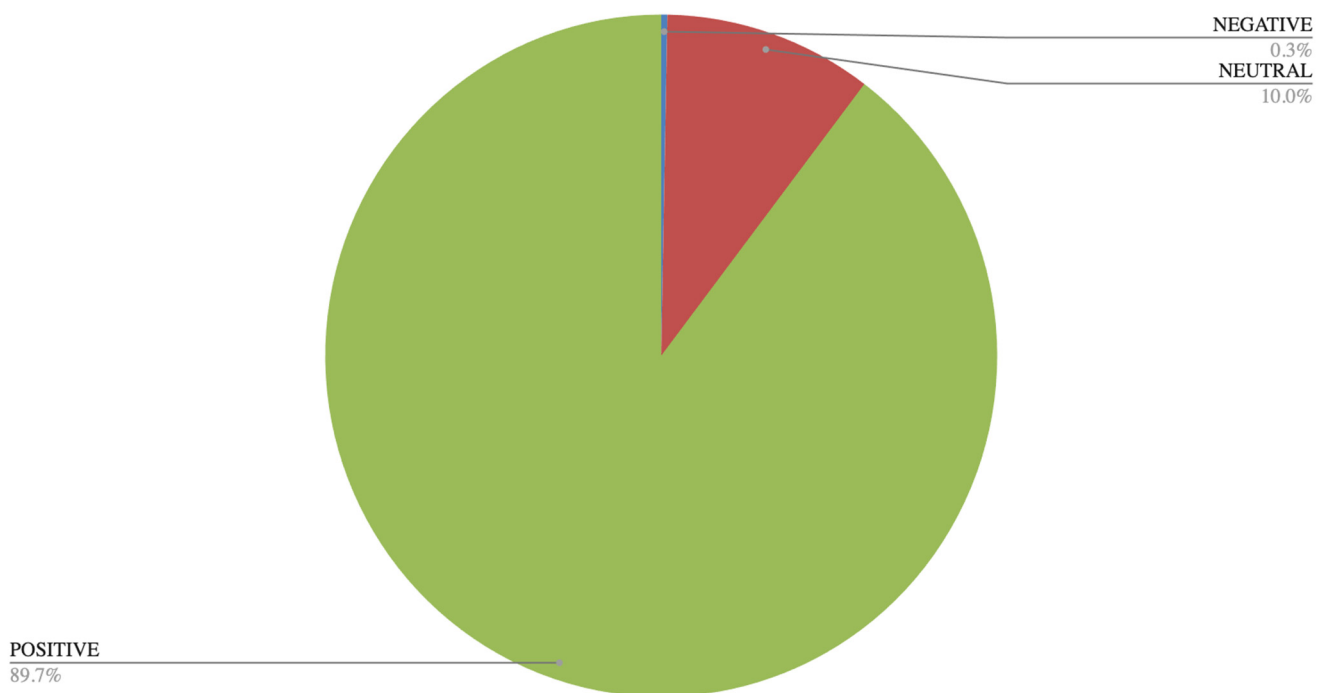
**Figure 5.** Monthly distribution of social media posts. Source: Own elaboration.

The sentiment analysis of Visit Algarve's social media posts reveals a strongly positive orientation in its communication strategy. The accompanying chart shows that 89.7% of the analysed content was classified as positive, corresponding to 616 posts. This optimistic

approach reinforces the image of the Algarve as a desirable, attractive, and emotionally rewarding destination—fully aligned with tourism marketing strategies that appeal to pleasant and memorable experiences.

The second most common sentiment is neutral, present in 10% of the posts (69 cases). This type of content is typically associated with service information, factual announcements, or institutional updates that may not carry substantial emotional weight yet remain essential for keeping the audience informed.

Conversely, negative messages are virtually non-existent, with only two posts recorded. This very low proportion (0.3%) reflects a highly controlled editorial policy that avoids controversy or conflict in its public messaging and prioritises consistently reinforcing a friendly, cohesive, and positive image of the territory, as shown in Figure 6.

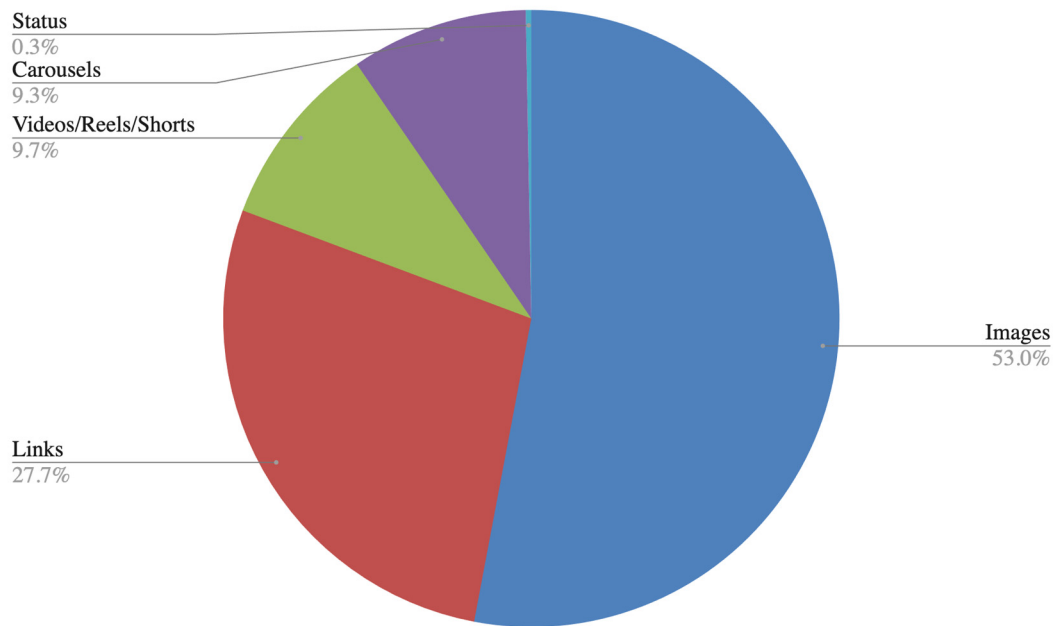


**Figure 6.** Sentiment distribution of social media posts. Source: Own elaboration.

One of the first elements analysed was the format of the posts published by the territorial brand Visit Algarve on its social media profiles. The accompanying pie chart shows that the predominant format is static images, which account for more than half of all posts (53%, with 365 entries). This strategic choice emphasises the visual appeal of the destination and directly targets the emotional component, which is essential in tourism promotion.

External links (27.7%, 191 posts) are in second place, redirecting users to content hosted on the official website or other platforms. This reflects an effort to connect social media activity with the brand's broader digital ecosystem, thereby encouraging the conversion of initial interest into effective website traffic.

Among the more interactive formats adapted to current social media consumption habits (Figure 7), there is a notable presence of videos, reels, or shorts (9.7%) and carousels (9.3%). Although their share is minor, these formats allow for more complete and visually rich narratives, enhancing viewing time and engagement.



**Figure 7.** Distribution of post formats on social media. Source: Own elaboration.

Lastly, only two posts were published in the “status” format, indicating limited use of this ephemeral content type within the brand’s content strategy.

### Engagement

Among the 689 posts analysed, only 44 (6.4%) surpassed the 1% engagement threshold used in this study to identify content pieces that achieved significant interaction with their audience. This small group of posts constitutes a highly representative qualitative sample of the most effective content regarding user connection.

Of these high-performing posts, 41 were published on Instagram, accounting for 93.2%, compared to just 3 on Facebook (6.8%) and none on YouTube. This confirms the central role of Instagram in Visit Algarve’s engagement strategy, due to both its visual orientation and ability to foster quick, emotionally driven interactions among followers.

A content analysis of these posts reveals several common patterns. First, those using a conversational and participatory tone stand out—featuring open-ended questions, visual challenges, or direct invitations to comment. Notable examples include the posts from September 11 (“Termina la frase: ‘Encontra-me na costa Algarve em. . .’”) and January 3 (“What is your favourite image?”), which achieved the highest engagement rates (5.84% and 1.56%, respectively). See [https://www.instagram.com/reel/C\\_xVhMChA0E/](https://www.instagram.com/reel/C_xVhMChA0E/) (accessed 13 Decemeber 2024).

In addition to the quantitative engagement analysis, qualitative patterns were observed in user interactions. In the most successful posts, the comments reflect positive emotions, personal recollections of past trips, and responses to questions posed by the brand. These responses indicate an active reception, in which users not only consume but also reinterpret and amplify the message, contributing to the destination’s narrative.

Second, frequent references to iconic regional locations—such as Praia do Camilo, Lagos, or Ilha da Armona—are evident. These locations, paired with high-quality visuals, evoke a strong emotional appeal that translates into higher levels of interaction. The use of symbolic expressions (“stairway to heaven”, “Castelo do mar”, “paraíso na terra”) further reinforces the aspirational narrative associated with the Algarve as a destination.

Additionally, bilingual posts (Portuguese–English) expand the potential reach, enabling connections with local and international audiences while preserving the brand’s

natural tone and territorial identity. This multilingual approach appears repeatedly among the high-engagement content, suggesting its effectiveness as a communication strategy.

Finally, while Instagram dominates the list of high-performing posts, it is worth noting that specific Facebook posts also achieved notable engagement—particularly those highlighting institutional achievements or quality recognitions, such as the Algarve’s designation as “Best Beach Destination in Europe 2024”.

### Hashtag and Lexical Analysis

A lexical analysis of the highest-performing posts in terms of engagement reveals the key concepts, places, and emotions that structure the promotional discourse of the Visit Algarve brand. The resulting table shows the most frequently repeated words, their absolute frequency, and the number of times they appeared above the expected average, allowing not only the measurement of presence but also the identification of their relative significance within the overall corpus.

The term Algarve appears as the core of the discourse, with 132 mentions—exceeding the average in 130 instances—highlighting a deliberate and persistent territorial positioning strategy. This repetition effectively anchors the brand’s identity to the destination, reinforcing brand recognition. It is followed by key spatial concepts such as Praia (96 mentions) and its English equivalent, beach (59 mentions), underscoring the centrality of the coastline as a primary attraction. Other frequently mentioned place names include Lagos (28), Faro (24), Albufeira (21), and Lagoa (22), suggesting a localised promotional focus that blends regional identity with the visibility of specific destinations.

From an emotional and experiential perspective, words such as enjoy (41), momento (36), perfect (36), beauty (23), and charmante (26) stand out, evoking a narrative of enjoyment, contemplation, and well-being. The frequent use of evaluative adjectives such as beautiful, natural, golden, and stunning reinforces an aesthetic construction of the destination in line with global tourism imaginaries.

Notably, the repeated appearance of affective and direct-address expressions in Portuguese—such as *tua* (51), *sua* (27), *Estás* (26), and *numa* (23)—demonstrates the frequent use of a personalised communication style that speaks directly to the user. This close, conversational tone aligns with dominant Instagram formats and the rhetorical style of high-engagement content. To a lesser extent, terms like Portugal or exploring appear below the expected average, suggesting that the focus is not on the country as a whole, nor an adventure narrative, but on the specificity of the Algarve and the sensory evocation of the destination.

Overall, the dominant lexical field in the most successful posts constructs a highly localised, visual, and emotional territorial identity—anchored in coastal landscapes, natural beauty, and personal invitations to explore.

### Hashtag Analysis

An analysis of the hashtags used in the 44 posts that exceeded 1% engagement identifies the most commonly used tags and highlights those that appear above their average frequency—indicating a strategic use of hashtags linked to successful social interaction. The two most prominent hashtags are #Algarve (527 appearances) and #VisitAlgarve (513), both far above average, with +87 and +90, respectively. Their consistent use confirms a clear and deliberate brand visibility policy that aims to position both the geographic name and the official brand identity. These tags function as identity anchors and search tools, facilitating connections between users, content, and the destination.

Additionally, thematic or geographic hashtags such as #beach (11), #Faro (7), #Lagos (7), #praia (5), #Olhao (4), #Aljezur (4), #Tavira (3), and #Ferragudo (3) emerge, reinforcing local positioning and territorial diversity. Their use suggests a hashtag strategy oriented

toward the micro-territorial promotion of specific areas within the Algarve, which enhances content personalisation and allows for audience segmentation by geographic interest.

The analysis also reveals the notable presence of hashtags linked to the landscape and emotional experience, such as #nature, #sunset, #cliff, #ocean, #magical, #beautiful, #amazing, and #wonderful. In addition to serving as thematic connectors, these tags help to construct a visual and emotional narrative of the destination, appealing to global imaginaries of beauty, escapism, and contemplation. Finally, hashtags related to events or institutional recognitions—such as #WorldTourismAwards, #WTA, #wta2024, or #leadingbeachdestination—demonstrate the brand's intent to associate itself with excellence and international prestige.

The limited use of YouTube may be due to the high costs of audiovisual production and the platform's lower alignment with the destination's target audience. We recommend exploring formats like shorts or experiential vlogs to leverage their narrative and emotional potential better.

#### 4.3. Synthesis of Results

The findings from the content analysis of the official Visit Algarve website and institutional documents, combined with the social media metrics, offer a coherent and complementary overview of the brand's communication strategy. Across both dimensions, it is clear that the Algarve's positioning is built around a coastal imaginary dominated by terms such as Praia, mar, costa, and litoral, reinforcing the idea of an aesthetic and sensory experience linked to nature, beauty, and relaxation. This discourse is systematically reproduced in institutional texts and digital publications, reflecting a solid identity narrative grounded in landscape-related attributes. Additional semantic fields—such as those associated with sustainability (Flora, Fauna, Biodiversidade) and gastronomy (Vinho, Sabores, Mercado)—also appear frequently in web content and are present in posts with high engagement levels.

On the other hand, the data from the social media analysis provide insights into how these contents are received and interacted with by the public. Only 6.4% of posts surpassed the 1% engagement threshold, suggesting that, while the strategy is consistent, it does not consistently achieve a strong emotional connection. Nevertheless, the most successful posts align with the discursive elements already identified: they stand out for their conversational tone, direct appeals, use of emotional language, and frequent references to natural and coastal landmarks. Additionally, the sentiment analysis supports this interpretation: 89.7% of the content was classified as positive, indicating a clear preference for friendly, aspirational messaging focused on pleasurable destination experiences. Moreover, the dominance of Instagram as the leading platform for high-performing posts aligns with the brand's visual orientation and strategic hashtags (#Algarve, #VisitAlgarve, #beach) that anchor the content to the territory and enhance its reach.

In summary, integrating both data sources reveals an effective alignment between institutional discourse and digital communication practices in thematic focus (nature, coastline, culture, gastronomy) and narrative style (positive, emotional, evocative). However, opportunities for optimisation remain, particularly in diversifying content formats, integrating underexplored themes such as local products or intangible heritage, and enhancing personalisation on platforms like Facebook and YouTube, where communicative impact is currently lower. The convergence of insights across these different analytical dimensions suggests that the Algarve brand has established a coherent and recognisable identity. However, there is still room to strengthen its ability to foster meaningful connections with diverse audiences through a more finely tuned narrative and media approach.

## 5. Discussion

The results obtained in this study reinforce theoretical contributions asserting that place branding is not merely a tourism promotion strategy but rather a comprehensive communicative system that articulates identity, image, and perception (Kavaratzis & Hatch, 2013; De San Eugenio Vela, 2013). The content analysis reveals a clear dominance of the “sun and beach” model, which forms the core of the Algarve’s discursive identity both on the website and across social media platforms. This orientation is consistent with the findings of Pike and Page (2014) and with the historical context of the region, where competitiveness has long been grounded in its coastline and climate. Nevertheless, there are emerging efforts to diversify the narrative through content related to nature, gastronomy, and culture—aligning with Nissan et al. (2011), who advocate for the de-seasonalisation of tourism through narrative expansion.

From a communication standpoint, the findings support the perspectives of Gascó González (2022) and Leung et al. (2013), who emphasise the central role of social media in shaping a destination’s image. Instagram’s dominance as the top-performing channel aligns with the visual and emotional logic that characterises contemporary social media, confirming its effectiveness in generating engagement—particularly when participatory, visually rich, and personalised strategies are employed. The prevailing positive narrative and the consistent use of targeted hashtags such as #Algarve and #VisitAlgarve underpin a coherent territorial positioning strategy grounded in emotional branding. Likewise, the conversational tone of the most successful posts reinforces the identity co-creation model proposed by Kavaratzis and Kalandides (2015), wherein audience interaction is not ancillary but constitutive of the branding process itself.

Although this study did not specifically address cultural variables, it is clear that the brand discourse is influenced by identity elements rooted in the Lusitanian context, such as hospitality, nostalgic evocations of the territory, and the centrality of the maritime landscape. These cultural references shape the content and the way emotional appeal is constructed for the audience (Cristòfol et al., 2024). Future studies could explore how international audiences perceive these cultural references and what role they play in the destination’s differentiation. However, the study also highlights specific gaps in theoretical frameworks. The limited presence of dimensions such as local products and cultural authenticity—barely represented in the lexical analysis—stands in contrast to the importance attributed to these elements by De San Eugenio Vela (2013), De San Eugenio Vela and Ginesta (2023) and Kavaratzis and Ashworth (2005) in the development of a genuine and sustainable brand. Similarly, the underuse of YouTube—despite its potential for constructing deeper and more emotionally resonant narratives—can be seen as a missed opportunity regarding digital reputation and strategic differentiation (Hays et al., 2013). Regarding relationship management, the low visibility of local stakeholders, both in content and narrative structure, suggests a possible disconnection from the participatory dimension of place branding—an essential aspect in contexts that value authenticity and community engagement (Bocanegra Barbecho et al., 2017).

Taken together, the empirical data confirm the overall effectiveness of Visit Algarve’s digital strategy but also point to areas for improvement. The brand projects a clear, visually compelling, and emotionally engaging identity. However, it must move toward greater diversification, authenticity, and engagement with local actors to address contemporary challenges related to sustainability, participation, and differentiation in the global tourism market.

## 6. Conclusions

Considering Objective 1 (O1), the analysis of the Algarve territorial brand's presence and activity on social media reveals a consistent and planned communication strategy, with a clear predominance of Facebook and Instagram. However, only 6.4% of posts exceed the 1% engagement threshold, indicating room for improvement in terms of emotional connection with the audience. A conversational tone characterises the highest-performing posts, along with attractive visuals and direct user appeals, particularly on Instagram, which is the most effective channel for generating meaningful interaction. Sentiment analysis confirms a positive orientation (89.7% of content), which aligns with emotional tourism marketing strategies.

Regarding Objective 2 (O2), the content of the Visit Algarve website reflects a solid and well-structured narrative built around the territory's identity elements, with a strong emphasis on the "sun and beach" category, followed by nature, culture, and gastronomy. The recurrence of terms such as Praia, Vinho, Museu, and Biodiversidade indicates a strategy grounded in visual and sensory attributes. However, dimensions such as local products or intangible heritage are under-represented, limiting the site's ability to project a more diverse and authentic territory image. Nevertheless, discursive coherence remains high, and the content reinforces the Algarve's competitiveness as an established tourist destination.

About Objective 3 (O3), the comparison between social media and the website reveals strong thematic coherence across both platforms, centred on landscape-related attributes, positive emotions, and sensory experiences. There is an effective alignment between the institutional narrative and digital content, especially in promoting the coastal and natural imaginary. However, some dissonances are also evident: while the website offers a broader representation of the territory, social media tends to focus on fast visual formats with less depth. The limited presence of local stakeholders in the narratives and participatory dynamics represents a missed opportunity to enhance authenticity and brand co-creation.

In our future research, we intend to continue exploring the evolution of the Algarve's tourism brand, paying particular attention to the perception of its identity among international audiences, the role of local products and intangible heritage in enhancing authenticity, and the opportunities offered by emerging platforms such as TikTok. Further investigation into the participation of local stakeholders in the branding process will also be essential to strengthen the authenticity and competitiveness of the destination.

In conclusion, the digital strategy of the Algarve's territorial brand demonstrates coherent planning with a recognisable and emotionally appealing identity. Theoretically, the study reaffirms the value of integrating mixed-method approaches in analysing digital place branding. It provides empirical evidence of the importance of narrative coherence across institutional channels and social media. From a practical perspective, the findings suggest that destination managers should prioritise format diversification (especially video), a more participatory narrative, and the active involvement of local actors to enhance authenticity. Additionally, it is recommended that the use platforms like YouTube be expanded, and emerging channels like TikTok should be explored to reach new audiences and strengthen engagement.

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## Appendix A

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### Brouchures Analysed:

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Algarve Rota dos Omiada

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Algarve Desporto

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Algarve Natureza

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Algarve Ideias & Inspirações

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Algarve Criativo

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Algarve Cultural

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Cozinha do Algarve

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Dieta Mediterrânica

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Rota da Costa Atlântica

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Guía da Oferta Turística Acessível Algarve

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Guía de percursos pedestres do Algarve

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Albufeira

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Alcoutim

---

Aljezur

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Castromarim

---

Algarve Guía de Praias

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Faro

---

Lagoa

---

Loule

---

Monchique

---

Guía de observação de aves no Algarve

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Olhao

---

Portimao

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Sao Brás de Alportel

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<b>Brouchures Analysed:</b>
Silves
Tavira
Vila do Obispo
Vila Real de Santo António
Algarve. Guia do patrimonio cultural
Algarve. Rutas e caminos
Algarve. O segredo mais famoso da Europa.
Guia turismo de natureza do Algarve
Algarve Percursos Cicláveis
Monchique percursos pedestres
Algarve Percursos de Ciclismo de Estrada
Algarve e a dieta mediterránea
Vinos do Algarve

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