

Delving Into Digital Destination Branding: The Case Study of Sicily and Le Soste di Ulisse

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Abstract

Moving beyond traditional DMO-managed destination branding, this research combines Corpus-Assisted Discourse Studies and Web Analytics to examine Sicily's destination branding online. The investigation focuses specifically on the website of *Le Soste di Ulisse*, an association of companies connected to the island's hospitality industry that targets niche tourism. Findings reveal a sophisticated and authentic destination brand, emphasizing luxury, tradition, and culinary excellence. The analysis of tourism discourse unveils three micro-discourses—corporate, food, and authenticity—in the narrative utilized on the website to convey the induced/projected destination image. Furthermore, the analysis of online metrics shows that brand engagement significantly mediates the relationship between brand awareness and brand equity, highlighting the importance of interactive and engaging content in increasing brand value. This mediation is crucial to foster a positive destination image. Overall, the study suggests that a multifaceted marketing approach, integrating engaging content and authentic narratives, can significantly enhance destination brand equity and image. Destination managers and active organizations are advised to improve visibility and reinforce positive brand associations to boost consumer loyalty and brand performance. Targeted marketing, emphasizing the island's unique culinary and cultural experiences through authentic, experience-based narratives, and multimodal communication, is proposed as a key strategy to enhance brand visibility and engagement.

Keywords: brand equity, web analytics, PLS-SEM, destination image, tourism discourse, CADS

Introduction

Brand equity, a core concept in marketing, represents the value a brand contributes to a product or service, driven by consumer perceptions and experiences. The American Marketing Association defines a brand as a combination of elements—such as a name, term, or symbol—intended to identify and differentiate goods or services from

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competitors. In competitive markets, brands significantly influence consumer choices, serving as powerful differentiators beyond mere functional attributes.

In the context of destination branding (Pike, 2021), which diverges markedly from product branding, Gartner (2014) notes that destinations are dynamic, multidimensional entities offering varied experiences to different tourists. Unlike tangible products, destinations cannot be returned, making destination branding inherently riskier, with brand elements susceptible to natural and human-induced changes. Destination branding involves complex processes, as places often have pre-existing images in consumers' minds that brand managers must either alter or build upon (Anholt, 2007). Gertner & Kotler (2004) highlight the complexity of branding destinations due to the involvement of diverse stakeholders, including corporations, small businesses, residents, and tourists (Kavaratzis, 2012). Effective destination branding combines tangible and emotion-based elements to create congruence between brand identity and stakeholder perceptions (Kavaratzis & Hatch, 2013). Kavaratzis & Ashworth (2005) argue that brands are socially constructed, requiring alignment between identity—defined by De Chernatony (1999) as the ethos, aims, and values that differentiate the brand—and image, which refers to consumer perceptions. Blain et al. (2005) describe destination branding as a set of marketing activities that create a recognizable identity for a destination, aiming to convey a unique travel experience, foster emotional connections, and reduce consumer search costs and perceived risks. Customer-based brand equity, as defined by Keller (1993), is the differential effect of brand knowledge on consumer responses to marketing, relying on strong, favorable, and unique brand associations. The strategic implications of brand equity are significant, affecting decisions related to resource allocation, customer relationships, and communication strategies. Effective management of brand equity can provide competitive advantages, ensuring a brand's relevance and success in a crowded marketplace.

Focusing exclusively on external assessments of brand equity neglects the internal organizational factors and the essential role that employees play in developing and maintaining brand equity, as highlighted by Burmann et al. (2009). The relationship between the service environment, brand experience, and customer brand engagement (CBE) is still underexplored, particularly in the luxury hotel sector, according to Itani et al. (2019). Similarly, the analysis of tourism discourse on websites and its influence on destination image formation remains a relatively underexplored area, with limited research addressing this topic, as noted by Maci (2020).

The study analyzes how tourism discourse is strategically utilized on a website to shape destination image in relation to the hospitality industry, with particular emphasis on the food & beverage and lodging segments. Furthermore, the study explores brand equity in this unique context by assessing consumer-based brand equity through clickstream data and a PLS-SEM model. The present study deviates from traditional DMO-managed destination branding, focusing instead on the website of *Le Soste di Ulisse*, an association of fine-dining restaurants, enchanting hotels, masterful pastry chefs, prestigious wineries, and distinguished companies connected to Sicily's hospitality industry.

The choice to investigate destination branding on this specific website is strategically grounded in its prominent role in promoting Sicily's hospitality and culinary excellence. The website of Le Soste di Ulisse is not just a tourism platform that highlights the intersection of food, culture, and tourism in Sicily; it is a curated representation of Sicily's high-end hospitality sector, showcasing luxury accommodations, fine dining, and authentic experiences. This makes it an ideal case for studying how specific elements of destination branding—such as luxury, authenticity, and gastronomy—are constructed and how they resonate with potential visitors. This website, therefore, serves as a critical touchpoint for potential niche visitors and stakeholders, influencing their perceptions and expectations of Sicily.

Theoretical Framework

Destination Image and Tourism Discourse

Destination image has been defined as “the sum of beliefs, ideas, and impressions that a person has of a destination” (Crompton, 1979, p. 18), which “might or might not be similar to that intended in the brand identity” (Pike, 2021, p. 163). Gartner (1993) identifies three main components of destination image: cognition, affect, and conation. The cognitive component reflects awareness, encompassing all that is known or believed about a destination. The affective component pertains to an individual's feelings towards a destination, which may be positive, negative, or neutral. The conative component involves actions or intentions, such as the decision to visit a destination. Pike (2021) highlights that this three-dimensional structure is similar to the AIDA model, guiding consumers through the stages of Awareness, Interest, Desire, and Action.

With regard to destination image formation, Gunn (1988) distinguishes between organic and induced images. An organic image emerges naturally as individuals gather information from various sources in their daily lives, including personal visits but excluding promotional inputs controlled by marketers. In contrast, an induced image is shaped by targeted tourism promotion and becomes more prevalent when individuals actively seek information to plan a visit.

Furthermore, Bramwell & Rawding (1996) emphasize the importance of distinguishing between projected and received destination images. The former refers to the collective messages and impressions communicated about a destination, while the latter is the individual mental representation or construct of the destination that consumers develop based on their interpretation and understanding of these messages. A pivotal role in shaping an induced/projected destination image at the pre-trip stage is played by tourism discourse (Dann, 1996; Maci, 2020; Manca, 2016).

“Marketing and consumption depend largely on discourse” (Fitchett & Caruana, 2015, p. 1), which Fairclough (2015) defines as “language as social practice determined by social structures” (p. 51). In his pioneering work, Dann (1996) states that “tourism, in the act of promotion, as well as in the accounts of its practitioners and clients, has a discourse of its own” (p. 2). For illocutionary promotional purposes, tourism discourse is highly persuasive and exploits rhetorical strategies to influence tourist behavior at the pre-trip stage (Maci, 2020; Manca, 2016). Conversely, from a specialized viewpoint, tourism discourse implies “the specialist use of language in contexts which

are typical of a specialized community stretching across the academic, the professional, the technical, and the occupational areas of knowledge and practice” (Gotti, 2003, p. 24). In both its promotional and specialized forms of communication, tourism can be seen as a macro-discourse encompassing micro-discourses of the different disciplinary and professional domains it deals with (e.g., economics, law, geography, environment, history, art, cuisine, transportation, lodging, etc.) (Gotti, 2006; Maci, 2020).

With digital progress, tourism discourse has increasingly embraced a multimodal nature, involving multiple communication codes (e.g., verbal, visual, aural, etc.) that occur simultaneously and combine to create a multimodal communicative event (Francesconi, 2014). Furthermore, the evolution of technology has reshaped the role of tourists in the digital landscape. They have become prosumers, i.e., consumers who also produce content, thus shifting from a pure passive role to an active one (Maci, 2020). Instead of merely seeking for information about destinations online, they now produce and share content, actively participating in consumer-to-consumer (C2C) exchanges on the Web, particularly on social media (Confetto et al., 2023).

Despite today’s widespread use of social media and digital influencers (Zollo, 2021), tourism websites are still regarded as the most important and reliable communication channels for marketing, playing a key role in influencing tourist behavior and shaping destination images at the pre-trip stage (Hallett & Kaplan-Weinger, 2010; Wu, 2018). “Via static and moving pictures, written texts, and audio-visual offerings, the language of tourism attempts to persuade, lure, woo, and seduce millions of human beings, and, in so doing, convert them from potential into actual clients” (Dann, 1996, p. 2).

As remarked by Maci (2020), the analysis of tourism discourse on websites remains relatively unexplored, particularly concerning its role in destination image formation. Research in this area is sparse, with only a few studies addressing the topic (Cesiri, 2019; Pagano, 2014; Plastina, 2012; Qi & Sorokina, 2021; Reckard & Stokowski, 2021). With particular regard to Sicily, its induced/projected destination image has been investigated in relation to the island’s cultural heritage through the analysis of tourism discourse on UNESCO heritage-related websites (Pagano 2023; Pagano & De Cantis, 2018).

Brand Equity

Consumer-based brand equity is typically evaluated across four key dimensions: i.e., brand awareness, brand associations, perceived brand quality, and brand loyalty (Buil et al., 2013). Ideally, destination brand managers should leverage established consumer-based brand equity scales, such as those proposed by Yoo et al. (2000), to comprehensively assess these dimensions among various stakeholder groups and translate these insights into organizational and marketing improvements. However, practical challenges like resource limitations and access to these scales often hinder such comprehensive evaluations. Moreover, focusing solely on external assessments of brand equity overlooks the internal organizational factors and the crucial role that employees play in building and sustaining brand equity (Burmman et al., 2009).

The assessment of customer-based brand equity involves measuring brand knowledge, and must include both brand awareness and the characteristics, and relationships among brand associations. Given the multidimensional nature of brand knowledge, a range of

measures is necessary. For instance, brand awareness can be gauged through aided and unaided recall tests (Srull, 1984). Relationships among brand associations can be measured by comparing characteristics or directly querying consumers about the congruence, competitive overlap, or uniqueness of these associations. Congruence refers to the extent to which brand associations are shared among consumers, while competitive overlap assesses the degree to which associations are linked to the product category and whether they are unique to the brand or shared with others.

Understanding brand knowledge, both in terms of content and structure, is crucial, as it determines what comes to mind when a consumer thinks about a brand. The key dimensions of brand knowledge that influence consumer responses include brand awareness, measured by recall and recognition, as well as the favorability, strength, and uniqueness of brand associations in the consumer's memory. These dimensions are further shaped by the type of brand association (e.g., its level of abstraction and qualitative nature) and the congruence among associations (Keller, 1993). While brand identity encompasses various elements, such as the brand name, logo, or symbol (Kotler, 1991).

Brand awareness, reflecting the strength of a brand's presence in consumer memory, plays a crucial role in decision-making. It comprises brand recognition—where a consumer confirms prior exposure to the brand when prompted—and brand recall, which is the ability to retrieve the brand from memory based on category cues (Rossiter & Percy, 1987). The relative importance of these aspects depends on various factors, such as whether consumer decisions are made in-store or elsewhere (Bettman, 1979).

Brand awareness significantly impacts consumer decision-making for several reasons. First, it ensures that the brand is considered when consumers think of the product category, thereby increasing the likelihood of being part of the consideration set (Baker et al., 1986; Nedungadi, 1990). Second, even in the absence of other brand associations, brand awareness can influence decisions within this set by affecting the formation and strength of these associations in the brand image.

H1: Brand awareness is positively related to brand equity

Brand image, defined as the perceptions of a brand as reflected by consumer-held associations, can be categorized into attributes, benefits, and attitudes (Keller, 1993).

Attributes are the descriptive features of a product or service, while benefits represent the personal value consumers associate with these attributes, and attitudes reflect consumers' overall evaluations of the brand (Wilkie, 1986). According to Keller (1993), benefits can be functional, linked to the product or service's features; experiential, satisfying sensory pleasure or cognitive stimulation; or symbolic, addressing needs for social approval or personal expression. Attitudes, as defined by Wilkie (1986), are the overarching evaluations of a brand that significantly influence consumer behavior.

High levels of brand awareness and a positive brand image increase the likelihood of brand choice, foster consumer loyalty, and reduce vulnerability to competitive actions. This loyalty manifests in repeat purchasing behavior, driven by favorable beliefs and attitudes towards the brand. Additionally, a positive brand image allows a brand to command higher margins and exhibit more inelastic responses to price changes, primarily influenced by overall brand attitude (Simonson et al., 1988).

H2: Brand image (association) is positively related to brand equity

Furthermore, strong brand awareness and a positive brand image enhance the effectiveness of marketing communication. Research suggests that consumers with a positive predisposition toward a brand may require fewer advertising exposures to achieve communication objectives (Rossiter & Percy, 1987). Similarly, robust brand associations might necessitate less reinforcement through marketing efforts.

Expanding on the role of brand equity, consumer brand engagement (CBE) has gained attention for its role in driving brand satisfaction, trust, loyalty, and behavioral intent (Le et al., 2021; Rather & Camilleri, 2019; Yen et al., 2020). Luxury hotel brands recognize CBE as a key driver of sales and marketing performance (Kumar et al., 2019; Touni et al., 2022). Effective engagement can lead to significant brand and firm value, highlighting the importance of organizational strategies in tandem with CBE to create this value (Itani et al., 2019; Ou et al., 2020). Despite its significance, the interplay between service environment, brand experience, and CBE remains underexplored, particularly in the luxury hotel sector (Itani et al., 2019).

CBE, as a central construct in relationship marketing, enhances the understanding of interactions between brands, firms, and consumers (Vivek et al., 2012).

H3: Brand awareness is related to brand engagement

H4: Brand image is related to brand engagement

Harmeling et al. (2017) emphasize the critical role of CBE in relationship marketing strategies, advocating for consumer engagement marketing as a theory. CBE has been increasingly recognized in marketing and hospitality research since 2005 (Abbasi et al., 2022; Ahn & Back, 2018; Kumar et al., 2019). It offers valuable insights into consumer management practices and provides an effective framework for evaluating consumer-brand relationships (Harmeling et al., 2017; Lim et al., 2021; Vivek et al., 2014). Various perspectives on CBE conceptualize it as consumers' non-transactional behaviors with a brand, psychological processes leading to brand loyalty, or positively-valenced cognitive, emotional, and behavioral activities related to brand interaction (Hollebeek et al., 2014; Le et al., 2021; van Doorn et al., 2011).

Authors often describe brand equity as a relational market-based asset formed through the interactions between brands and customers (Huang, 2022; Yoo et al., 2000). In experiential services like hospitality, active customer engagement is advised to enhance brand equity (Cambra-Fierro et al., 2021). Iglesias et al. (2020) provide empirical evidence of the significant impact of sensory brand experience and affective commitment on brand equity in the banking sector. Research indicates that CBE mediates the relationship between customer perceptions and behavioral intentions (Rather et al., 2018).

H5a: Brand engagement is positively related to brand equity

H5b: Brand engagement has a mediating effect on brand equity

In conclusion, CBE plays a pivotal role in advancing brand relationship quality and brand equity, especially in the luxury hotel industry.

Methodolgy

Corpus-Assisted Discourse Studies

A combined methodology has been utilized in this work to investigate the induced/projected destination image of Sicily through the analysis of tourism discourse:

i.e., Corpus-Assisted Discourse Studies (CADS) (Baker, 2023; Gillings et al., 2023; Partington et al., 2013). CADS involves the triangulation of Corpus Linguistics (CL) (Brezina, 2018; McEnery & Hardie, 2011) and Critical Discourse Studies (CDS) (Wodak & Meyer, 2015) to analyze large electronic sets of textual data, including their textual and social contexts. CL employs statistical techniques and software tools for the construction and analysis of corpora, providing objective results that mitigate researcher bias. CDS takes a critical stance for a more in-depth analysis of textual data within their co-text and social context, thereby integrating evaluative perspectives into meaning construction and analyzing texts within a broader social framework. Both computational and interpretative approaches are crucial in CADS research. The website under investigation includes five sections (i.e., *Hotels*, *Restaurants*, *Chefs*, *Wineries*, and *Sicily*) and one homepage. Each section presents an introduction webpage to the section main topic and several webpages dedicated to the hotels, restaurants, chefs, wineries and Sicilian areas promoted. A table showing the website structure is presented below (Table 1).

Table 1. *Le Soste di Ulisse Website Structure*

Website section	Number of webpages
Home (homepage)	1
Hotels	26
Restaurants	39
Chefs	39
Wineries	22
Sicily	4

Textual data were manually extracted from each webpage and compiled into individual text files, ensuring a one-to-one correspondence between the webpages and the text files. Only one webpage from the *Restaurants* section was excluded due to its unavailability. Additionally, the texts concerning the chefs' biographies were not extracted from each restaurant webpage, as they repeated content already present in the *Chefs* section. The *Ulisse* corpus, whose features are detailed in Table 2, was created by means of #LancsBox (Brezina et al., 2021). The same software was used for the analysis of the corpus.

Table 2. *Ulisse Corpus Features*

Files	Tokens ⁶	Types ⁷
130	32,933	4,275

Keyword analysis was performed to unveil the keywords characterizing tourism discourse in the *Ulisse* corpus. A keyword is “a word which occurs statistically

⁶ “A token is a single occurrence of a word form in the text” (Brezina, 2018, p. 39).

⁷ “A type is a unique word form in the corpus” (Brezina, 2018, p. 39).

significantly in one corpus when compared against another corpus” (Gillings et al., 2023, p. 33). The Ulisse corpus was compared against a baseline corpus of general English language—the *Brown* corpus—using Cohen’s d as the comparison statistic to measure keyness. Based on the standard interpretation of this effect size measure (Brezina, 2018; Cohen, 1988), a threshold of $s \geq 0.5$ was set to identify keywords with a moderate or higher effect size. Additionally, absolute frequency and the coefficient of variation were utilized to analyze keyword frequency and dispersion, respectively. The keywords were further investigated through concordance analysis, which allowed the examination of keywords within their co-text and social context.

Web Analytics

The ubiquity of the Internet and its expanding role as an information source, marketplace, and social interaction place have spurred significant interest in understanding online behavior and predicting user actions. Clickstream data, which record users’ online activity, present both opportunities and challenges due to their varying detail and coverage (Padmanabhan et al., 2001). Despite potential pitfalls, clickstream data are collected in natural environments without artificial interruptions, making them a valuable resource for researchers and practitioners seeking insights into individual behavior and decision-making processes. According to Kaur (2021), web analytics, notably Google Analytics, are viewed as essential tools for understanding customer behaviours and improving website performance. These tools facilitate the creation of personalized user experience and enhance brand loyalty.

Clickstream data provide a detailed path that a visitor takes while navigating the Web, reflecting numerous choices made both within and across websites. These data are crucial for studying well-known phenomena in novel ways, enabling analyses that were previously too difficult or costly. For instance, they facilitate research into topics such as the formation of consideration sets (Wu & Rangaswamy, 2003) and the modelling of decision-making processes and stages. Moreover, clickstream data allow researchers to examine how users interact with websites, respond to site design, and transition between websites, offering valuable insights into online behavior (Moe & Fader, 2004a, 2004b).

Among clickstreams user-centric panel data, which combine online behavior tracing across websites with user information, offers significant modelling and managerial advantages but also face limitations such as potential sampling issues and machine-level tracking challenges (Padmanabhan et al., 2001). Despite these challenges, the richness of these data enables the study of purchase conversion and other key behaviors. For instance, Moe & Fader (2004a, 2004b) utilized stochastic models to predict online purchases, demonstrating that users who visit retail sites more frequently are more likely to buy, and that the evolution of individual visit frequency is a strong predictor of purchase likelihood.

Sismeiro & Bucklin (2004) have further advanced this field by decomposing the online purchase process into a series of tasks, allowing for better prediction of rare binary events. Their study of an Internet car retailer revealed that only 2% of website visitors completed a purchase, but by breaking down the process into tasks, they provided deeper insights into user behavior. Specifically, 30% of visitors completed product

configuration, 20% of those provided personal information, and 34% of those who completed these tasks ultimately made a purchase.

Overall, clickstream research is likely to drive further methodological advancements in marketing as scholars continue to address the challenges of using this data to understand web usage, advertising effects, and e-commerce (Sismeiro & Bucklin, 2004; Moe & Fader, 2004a). The growing interest in this area underscores the critical role that clickstream data play in uncovering the intricacies of online consumer behavior and shaping future marketing strategies.

In this study, 19,958 observations have been collected on a daily and hourly clickstream of the first six months of the 2024, capturing the surfing behavior of nearly 23,700 visits to the lesostediulisse.it website. The estimation model leverages behavioral data to estimate latent variables related to guest buying activity, diverging from previous studies like those by Rosenman et al. (2011), which relies on survey questionnaires and faced concerns over accuracy and response bias. Instead, the present study aligns with scholars such as Liu et al. (2019), who advocate for analyzing consumer engagement through web and social media data as a more reliable alternative.

Google Analytics was chosen for this study. It is a free web analytics service offering basic tools for SEO and marketing, which provides real-time website activity reports. These data are accessible to authorized users and stored for over five years, enabling longitudinal comparisons. Following Xun (2015), Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM), a composite-based approach as developed by Jöreskog & Wold (1982), was applied. PLS-SEM is particularly effective for small sample sizes and complex models, as it makes no distributional assumptions and is extensively used in hospitality and tourism research (Ali et al., 2018; Hair et al., 2012).

PLS-SEM path models visually represent hypotheses and variable relationships, with constructs (latent variables) shown as hexagons and indicators (manifest variables) as rectangles, connected by arrows to indicate relationships. The structural (inner) model links constructs, while the measurement (outer) models illustrate relationships between constructs and indicators. Error terms reflect unexplained variance in the model.

In hospitality and tourism research, PLS-SEM is favored for its versatility across confirmatory, explanatory, predictive, descriptive, and exploratory approaches, as noted by Ali et al. (2018). To estimate the model, *SeminR*, an open-source PLS-SEM package in R Studio, was employed, as recommended by Xun (2015) and Hair et al. (2021). Data were transformed into a Likert scale from 1 (low visits or time) to 9 (high visits or time spent) by dividing the distribution into quantiles.

Clickstreams can be considered as constructs and indicators of consumer behavior and intention (Xun, 2015). In this study, the number of events per group of pages (*Home*, *Hotels*, *Restaurants*, etc.) — Se_i , with $i = 1 \dots 6$ — were used as a formative construct for brand image, as it can be related to brand association for the web visitor. The number of visualizations per visitor, Bo_2 , was used as a formative construct for brand awareness, as it can be related to brand recall because of the search method adopted by the consumer to surf in the website (direct search, organic search, paid search, social, referral). The number of sessions with engagement, En_1 , and their duration, En_2 , were used as formative constructs for brand engagement. Additionally, the mediating role of

brand engagement in the estimation of consumer brand equity, as stated by Rather et al. (2018), was considered.
The model can be described as follows:

$$\text{Brand Equity} = w_{Bo}\text{BrandAwareness} + w_{Se}\text{BrandImage} + (\beta_{En} + p_1p_2p_3)\text{BrandEngagement} + \varepsilon_{BEQ}$$

Where w represents the regression weights, β represents the correlation weights, and $p_1p_2p_3$ represents the indirect effect of the mediation.

In particular:

$$\begin{aligned}\text{BrandAwareness} &= \lambda_{Bo}Bo_2 \\ \text{BrandImage} &= \lambda_{Se_1}\text{Home} + \lambda_{Se_2}\text{Hotel} + \lambda_{Se_3}\text{Restaurant} + \lambda_{Se_4}\text{Winery} \\ &\quad + \lambda_{Se_5}\text{Chef} + \lambda_{Se_6}\text{Destination} \\ \text{BrandEngagement} &= \lambda_{En_1}En_1 + \lambda_{En_2}En_2\end{aligned}$$

Where λ are the loading factors.

Findings and Discussion

Corpus-Assisted Discourse Studies

The keyword analysis performed on the Ulisse corpus yielded a list of keywords that characterize the tourism discourse on the website. Using Cohen's d as the comparison statistic with a threshold of $s \geq 0.5$ led to the identification of 62 keywords with a moderate or higher effect. This choice produced a list of keywords that demonstrate a substantial difference in occurrence between the two corpora, indicating a noticeable difference in language usage between them. Out of the 62 keywords identified, 9 were excluded because they were not significant, resulting in a total number of 53 keywords. Table 3 reports the keywords characterizing tourism discourse in the Ulisse corpus, along with their respective keyness, frequency, and dispersion values.

Table 3. *Ulisse Corpus Keywords*

#	Keyword	Keyness	Frequency	Dispersion
1	restaurant	1.41	234	1.00
2	chef	1.12	174	1.26
3	Sicily	1.08	150	1.31
4	cuisine	1.04	123	1.36
5	discover	0.96	84	1.45
6	Sicilian	0.90	130	1.57
7	wine	0.84	144	1.66
8	tasting	0.84	60	1.69
9	menu	0.80	97	1.77
10	sea	0.76	109	1.77
11	dishes	0.75	59	1.85
12	cellar	0.74	71	1.88
13	experience	0.72	91	1.72

14	Michelin	0.70	59	2.02
15	hotel	0.70	152	1.92
16	offers	0.69	50	2.00
17	wines	0.67	81	2.12
18	unique	0.66	56	2.08
19	territory	0.66	44	2.12
20	info	0.66	24	2.18
21	Etna	0.63	100	2.25
22	passion	0.63	36	2.22
23	pets	0.61	23	2.22
24	cards	0.61	28	2.23
25	rooms	0.61	92	2.20
26	UNESCO	0.60	35	2.36
27	check	0.60	95	2.18
28	area	0.59	63	2.00
29	kitchen	0.59	33	2.24
30	family	0.58	43	2.07
31	located	0.56	34	2.41
32	Italy	0.56	29	2.48
33	parking	0.54	32	2.40
34	guests	0.54	38	2.45
35	nature	0.53	68	2.12
36	heritage	0.52	39	2.63
37	island	0.52	45	2.43
38	destinations	0.52	16	2.72
39	international	0.52	28	2.46
40	raw	0.52	31	2.63
41	labels	0.52	26	2.74
42	garden	0.51	42	2.52
43	journey	0.51	28	2.67
44	location	0.51	38	2.48
45	ancient	0.51	48	2.62
46	services	0.51	55	2.32
47	gastronomic	0.51	35	2.78
48	experiences	0.51	34	2.70
49	wineries	0.51	27	2.79
50	cooking	0.51	38	2.73
51	stella	0.50	16	2.80
52	tradition	0.50	35	2.63
53	historic	0.50	33	2.75

Based on Cohen's *d* standard interpretation, the first 9 keywords of the list show a large effect, while the other 44 show a medium effect. The former group of keywords, which is highly significant and differ greatly between the two compared corpora, clearly belongs to the semantic field of food, except for two keywords (i.e., "Sicily" and "explore").

Concordance analysis was conducted on each keyword of the list by means of #LancsBox to explore their co-text and social context. As shown in Table 4, this procedure allowed the categorization of keywords into three main micro-discourses: i.e., corporate discourse (Breeze, 2013), authenticity discourse (Dann, 1996), and food discourse (Karrebæk et al., 2018). Interestingly, some keywords related to food discourse pertain more specifically to chef food discourse (Irimiás & Volo, 2022), which is featured in the website section specifically devoted to famous Sicilian chefs.

Table 4. *Micro-Discourses in the Ulisse Corpus*

Corporate discourse	Food discourse	Authenticity discourse
restaurant	cuisine	Sicily
discover	wine	Sicilian
experience	tasting	sea
hotel	menu	unique
offers	dishes	territory
info	cellar	Etna
pets	wines	UNESCO
rooms	cards	located
check	international	Italy
area	raw	nature
family	labels	heritage
parking	gastronomic	island
guests	Chef food discourse	ancient
destinations	chef	tradition
garden	Michelin	historic
location	passion	
services	kitchen	
wineries	journey	
	experiences	
	cooking	
	stella	

Corporate discourse tautologically presents keywords indicating the different businesses promoted on the website, such as “restaurant,” “hotel,” and “wineries.” The keyword “family” suggests that these are primarily family-led businesses. The tourism “experience” is promoted through superlatives and positive qualitative adjectives that provide a sense of euphoria and enthusiasm, which Dann (1996) defines as “a form of extreme language” (p. 65). The keyword “discover” shows a particular use of the imperative mood in tourism promotional discourse, where the pragmatic function is not to give orders but to invite the addressee to take advantage of the opportunities that are offered (Maci, 2020; Manca, 2016). Notably, keywords like “info,” “pets,” “rooms,” “check,” “area,” “parking,” “garden,” “location” and “services” point specifically to the spaces of the hotels and the practical information and amenities available to guests. The induced/projected destination image of Sicily, as conveyed by corporate discourse, reflects the centrality of family in Sicilian culture. Sicily is presented as “one of the

most beautiful and famous destinations,” whose hospitality industry “offers” its “guests” the best experiences, with high-quality customer care.

As far as food discourse is concerned, the keyword with the highest keyness value is “cuisine.” Referred to as Sicilian, Italian, or Mediterranean, this keyword is associated with adjectives such as: *haute*, sophisticated, gourmet, creative, researched, traditional, sustainable, and zero-kilometer. This highlights that the website targets a niche audience. The abundance of keywords related to wine (i.e., “wine,” “cellar,” “wines,” “cards,” “international,” and “labels”) reflects the significance of viticulture in Sicily. The keywords “menu,” “dishes,” and “row” emphasize the attention to quality and the variety of food. The focus on high-quality, locally sourced ingredients is a crucial aspect of Sicily’s gastronomic appeal. Additionally, the keyword “tasting” points to the culinary experience in Sicily, which goes beyond mere consumption of food and encompasses sensory, cultural, and social elements. Overall, food discourse conveys an image of Sicily as a culinary destination that offers a rich, immersive, and authentic “gastronomic” experience. The island is presented as a place where visitors can savor not only the local flavors but also a curated selection of international wines, all contributing to a holistic and memorable dining experience.

The keywords related to chef food discourse highlight the role of renowned chefs and their contributions to Sicily’s culinary heritage. The keyword “chef” frequently appears in connection with descriptions of the culinary experts who are central to the culinary experience. The mention of “Michelin” and “*stella*” (i.e., star in Italian) suggests that some of these chefs have been recognized by prestigious culinary awards, indicating a high standard of excellence. Additionally, the narrative about chefs emphasizes their “international” work experiences throughout their culinary “journey.” “Passion” and “kitchen” point to the dedication and creativity of these chefs, who are portrayed as artists in their own right, transforming raw ingredients into exceptional dishes. The keyword “cooking” relates to the craft and technique involved, emphasizing the skill and artistry that chefs bring to their work. Chef food discourse presents Sicily not just as a place to eat but as a destination where visitors can engage with the culinary arts on a deeper level, experiencing the passion and creativity of its chefs. Overall, chef food discourse contributes to the image of Sicily by showcasing it as a hub of culinary excellence, where passionate, award-winning chefs create memorable culinary experiences that are integral to the island’s allure.

The induced/projected destination image of Sicily is conveyed from an authenticity perspective (Dann, 1996), with keywords such as “Sicily,” “Sicilian,” “territory,” “located,” “Italy,” and “island,” emphasizing the strong connection of hoteliers, restaurant and winery owners, and chefs with the territory, and making the promoted experiences appear “unique.” Additionally, keywords like “sea,” “Etna,” “UNESCO,” “nature,” “heritage,” “ancient,” “tradition,” and “historic” highlight the island’s rich cultural and natural heritage.

Web Analytics

Evaluating a mediation model requires that all quality criteria for the measurement and structural models be satisfied. Upon reviewing reliability, it is observed (Table 5) that brand image exhibits a lack of reliability, which may contribute to a reduced indirect

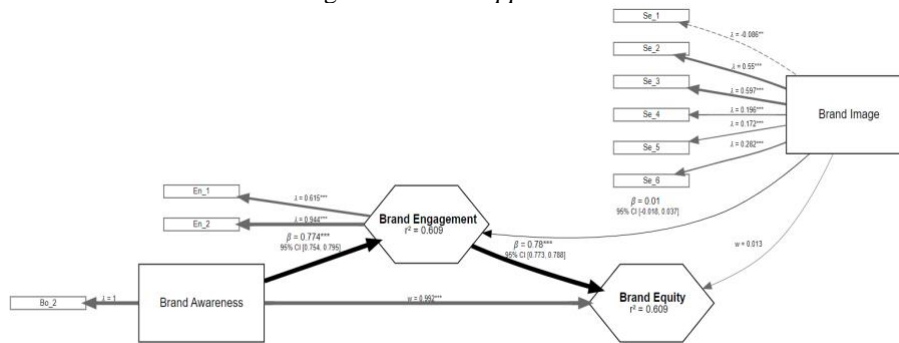
effect. The Bootstrap model (Figure 1) indicates that all constructs are significant, confirming the relationships with the variables. With regard to the hypotheses, the findings are as follow:

- H1: Brand awareness is positively related to brand equity ($w = 0.992$, significant at 95%).
- H2: The relationship between brand image and brand equity is not significant.
- H3: Brand awareness is positively related to brand engagement ($\beta = 0.774$, significant at 95%).
- H4: The relationship between brand image and brand engagement is not significant.
- H5a: Brand engagement is positively related to brand equity ($\beta = 0.78$, significant at 95%).
- H5b: Brand engagement acts as a complementary partial mediator in the relationship between brand awareness and brand equity, with a specific effect of 0.604, and the product of the three paths is positive (0.0059).

Table 5. *Reliability*

	rhoC	AVE
Brand Awareness	1.000	1.000
Brand Image	0.360	0.135
Brand Engagement	0.769	0.635
Brand Equity	0.818	0.702

Figure 1. *Bootstrapped Model*



Conclusions

The research provides a comprehensive analysis of destination branding through the synergy of Web Analytics and CADs. The integration of these methods has yielded insightful findings on both consumer behavior and the nature of tourism discourse associated with the destination and the website.

Web Analytics has showed that brand engagement significantly mediates the relationship between brand awareness and brand equity, highlighting the importance of engaging content in building brand value. This implies that destination marketing should prioritize creating interactive and engaging experiences to foster deeper connections with potential visitors.

Complementing this, the CADS investigation has revealed that the induced/projected destination image of Sicily is strongly influenced by three discourses: corporate, food, and authenticity. Specifically, the emphasis on family-owned businesses and high-quality service (corporate discourse) aligns with the need for enhanced user engagement, suggesting that marketing efforts should spotlight the island's family-friendly attributes. The prominence of food-related content (food discourse) aligns with the Web Analytics findings on the significance of engaging content, indicating that promoting Sicily's culinary excellence can attract food enthusiasts and improve brand perception. Additionally, authenticity discourse underscores the appeal of Sicily's cultural and natural heritage, which should be leveraged in marketing strategies to reinforce the island's unique and authentic identity.

By integrating these findings, destination managers can create a more compelling and engaging brand narrative that appeals to diverse traveler segments, thereby enhancing the overall brand equity and destination image. Adopting a multifaceted approach that includes comprehensive evaluations, both internal and external, allows for a deeper understanding of how the destination brand is providing actionable insights for both marketing and organizational strategies. While external brand equity is crucial, internal factors, such as engaging employees and aligning their perceptions with the brand's values, are equally important in strengthening the brand and enhancing customer experiences. Managers should focus on increasing visibility and reinforcing positive brand associations to boost consumer loyalty and brand performance. In the tourism industry, particularly in Sicily, managers should use targeted marketing that highlights the island's unique culinary and cultural experiences. They should also adopt authentic, experience-based narratives and multimodal communication strategies to enhance brand visibility and engagement.

Future research should further investigate brand equity, brand awareness, and brand image among organizations, with particular emphasis on participant firms, employees, and guests, to examine how the three main micro-discourses of tourism influence organizations and guests' experiences.

Acknowledgments

This work has received funding from the European Union, within the Erasmus+ program "Cooperation Partnerships in Higher Education" (KA220-HED), as part of the "International Tourism Analytics Group: Enhanced Data and Statistical Literacy for Sustainable Tourism Development" (i-TAG project, CUP B73C23001070001).

The views and opinions expressed in this paper are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the official policy or position of the European Union, the European Commission, or the European Education and Culture Executive Agency (EACEA). Neither the European Union, the European Commission, nor EACEA can be held responsible for any use that may be made of the information contained herein.

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