

DIGITAL VISIBILITY AND COMPETITIVE EDGE: ANALYZING THE IMPACT OF TERRITORIAL MARKETING ON REGIONAL COMPETITIVENESS

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ABSTRACT

This study explores the relationship between territorial marketing and branding and a country's regional competitiveness and aims to assess the impact of marketing strategies and policies of cities and territories on that regional competitiveness. Two hypotheses are examined. The first hypothesis suggests that improving a city's visibility on the Internet attracts tourists and foreign investors. The second hypothesis highlights the importance of high-quality information content on city websites to enhance competitiveness. The study conducts a comprehensive analysis of European countries to evaluate the impact of territorial marketing on competitiveness. This includes correlation analysis of competitiveness indices, analysis of Google Trends search queries to identify city name search trends, and content analysis of city websites to assess marketing quality. The findings reveal that cities with rich historical and cultural attractions are gaining popularity online, consequently increasing their competitiveness in both the tourism and investment sectors.

Keywords: internet presence; investment activities; place branding; regional competitiveness; territorial marketing

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INTRODUCTION

In the modern world, the issue of national competitiveness is becoming highly relevant to many countries, especially with globalization and increased global competition. Countries must develop and maintain their competitive

advantage to succeed in international markets. In this context, territorial marketing is a strategic tool to create a positive image of cities and regions, attract investments, develop tourism, and increase national economic competitiveness.

Acknowledging the significance of developing regions and cities for a country's growth is vital. These areas contribute to the country's economy and play a crucial role in the global context. Territorial marketing involves a range of measures to manage a region's potential. These measures create a positive reputation and image for cities in various spatial conditions (Anholt, 2010; Anholt, 2016; Govers & Go, 2009; Kavaratzis & Giovanardi, 2017). When discussing city branding and territorial marketing, it is crucial to strike a balance between creating a positive image of the territories for external consumers and taking into account the interests of the local population. Shakirova (2015) suggested that this approach can attract the attention of both groups to the territories. Territorial marketing is a powerful tool that governments and local authorities can use to stimulate economic development by attracting foreign direct investment. In a narrower sense, it is based on managing investment flows and creating an attractive investment climate (Warlina et al., 2023). The concept of territorial marketing is an effective tool that enables more efficient use of financial incentives in the context of territorial development. Additionally, it contributes to creating a promising and attractive image of the city while also encouraging a rethinking of the role and functions of the authorities in these processes (Dang et al., 2023).

Effective territorial marketing results from the harmonious integration of artificially created distinctive characteristics of territories with their natural potential, such as geographic location and natural resources. This approach enhances the attractiveness of territories compared to others, emphasizing their competitive advantages to attract investment and stimulate further development. By adopting this strategy, territories can showcase their strengths and potential, which can lead to increased investment and growth opportunities. Territorial marketing has a significant potential advantage in the context of global competition for business investment, can maintain investors' interest in the territories, and can even contribute to their growth in value over time. This aspect is identified as the most important potential advantage of area marketing in global competition for business investment (Cleave et al., 2016). Place branding helps to maintain

investors' interest in territories and can even contribute to their long-term growth in value.

Each region has its own geographical, economic, social, historical and cultural characteristics that determine its potential and opportunities. Therefore, it is crucial to consider each territory as a unique object for development. Regional marketing is pivotal in increasing territories' efficiency and competitiveness in countries like the Netherlands, the Kingdom of Belgium, the Kingdom of Denmark, the French Republic, and the Federal Republic of Germany (Gardiner et al., 2006). The first attempts to introduce territorial marketing in EU cities were related to tourist zone development, which has become part of the urban planning strategies and state development over the past two centuries. After all, in some European countries, 10-20% of the GDP is created in the tourism industry (Statista, 2023). Over time, territorial marketing has become a link between the regional and urban economy, industrial economy, tourism development and business competitiveness (Eshuis et al., 2014).

Globalization and competition between countries are increasing on an unprecedented scale, and accordingly, the relevance of territorial marketing research is becoming extremely important. The increasing significance of the competitiveness of developing regions and cities in the country is due to the amplifying influence of geographical, economic, social, historical and cultural factors on these particular regions. Hence, creating a positive image and attractive investment for regions and cities is necessary for success in international markets. Exploring the role of territorial marketing within this context could lead to novel avenues for enhancing the competitiveness of the national economy while fostering sustainable development for the country.

THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

In the literature, the study of the impact of territorial marketing, place branding, and city branding on countries' competitiveness includes a variety of approaches. Some researchers emphasized the importance of a robust place brand in attracting investments, tourists, and professionals, contributing significantly to the country's economic development and overall competitiveness. Other researchers focused on territorial marketing as one of the critical

elements of the region's development policy and individual municipalities, touching on aspects such as tourism, infrastructure, and the economy.

Hence, Matwiejczyk (2023), studying the theoretical branding foundations of suburban functional areas, believed that the brand's strength and effectiveness are evaluated by associations that arise among the public. Strong associations indicate a strong brand. However, it is essential to acknowledge that the brand is connected to an entity's climate and social image. Its impact is notable at the local and regional levels, specifically in the context of branding for particular places and territories. Such a brand helps form and maintain a positive place image, contributing to its development and attracting the attention of the local population and investors, tourists and other stakeholders. Therefore, understanding the principles and practices of place branding becomes essential for sustainable development and regions and cities' competitiveness.

Green et al. (2016) raised one of the main problems of territorial marketing – a gap between theoretical studies and the actual practice of city branding. The main focus is on the evolution of approaches to the city branding theory and practice through different phases ranging from the attempts to adjust the meaning of the city for people to the development of formalized marketing branding strategies. By combining the principles of developing territorial marketing strategies with practical implementation, it becomes viable to enhance the effectiveness of marketing plans for regions, ultimately leading to greater competitiveness.

According to de Almeida and Cardoso (2022), the main difference between place branding and territorial marketing is their coverage of different aspects. Place branding encompasses various dimensions, such as cultural aspects, politics and public diplomacy. In comparison, territorial marketing uses branding strategies to redefine places. Despite the differences, both concepts treat the place as a brand and a product, recognizing its importance in catching consumer attention and interest.

Ginesta & de San Eugenio (2021) understood place branding as a tool for managing a complex identity, which allows the combination of all administrative areas into a single organic image. In turn, according to Anholt (2010), branding is a

process that takes place primarily in the mind of the consumer – the accumulation of respect and sympathy for the brand – and cannot be considered as a separate technique or a set of techniques that directly form respect or empathy. Additionally, Anholt (2010) considered a brand as a toponym, historicism, or an artificially created image of a place, the promotion of which in the market or society is only possible with a clear marketing policy of the local or state authorities.

Van Ham (2008) examined place branding through the prism of public diplomacy and believes it plays a vital role in influencing the economy and citizens. Politicians managing their region's brand equity aim to achieve two primary goals. On the one hand, they seek to attract more customers, raise the prices of their products and services, and gain an overall economic and political advantage for their country. On the other hand, they try to make their citizens feel better and more confident, giving them a sense of belonging and a clear understanding of identity. Place branding, therefore, is a tool for increasing internal self-awareness and external competitiveness.

Kavaratzis and Hatch (2013) emphasized the link between place branding and identity, arguing that place branding is a dialogue, a debate between stakeholders, as brands are built from the "raw material" of identity, and identity emerges in the conversation between stakeholders and what unites them. Hence, place branding and territory marketing aim to promote its identity among stakeholders.

Eshuis et al. (2014) understood place marketing as part of local and regional management processes by using tools to promote the place brand and create its positive image nationally and internationally. At the same time, they emphasized that the public sector needs to take an active part in place marketing, which reduces marketing effectiveness due to the insufficient consideration of the citizens' thoughts and emotions regarding a particular place or territory.

Mendes et al. (2023) considered the link between territorial marketing and strategic planning innovative tools. Such tools help to promote and stimulate the socio-economic and ecological development of a specific area, as well as to achieve competitive advantages compared to other cities.

Considering the various approaches discussed earlier concerning branding, place marketing, and territorial marketing, perceiving territorial marketing as a concept involving marketing strategies and tools to promote and position particular territories like cities, regions, or municipalities is suggested. Territorial marketing aims to create a positive image and unique identity for these territories and attract the attention of residents, investors, tourists and other stakeholders. A territorial brand, however, is a crucial element of the territorial marketing concept, emphasizing the importance of creating a solid and recognizable image for a specific territory.

Understanding the theoretical aspects of territorial marketing and places and city branding, it is also important to study practical approaches to evaluating the activities of local authorities in these spheres. Evaluating local authorities' performance can help determine their measures' effectiveness in improving the place's image, attracting investment, developing tourism and stimulating public development.

The literature analysis reveals two directions of scientific research. One direction involves utilizing interviews and sociological surveys to determine the effectiveness of territorial marketing and its impact on the region's and country's competitiveness. The second is based on the quantitative and qualitative analysis of the municipalities and cities' websites, an essential means of communication worldwide. Website analysis helps determine how effectively municipalities and cities use the Internet to position their brand. It includes site design analysis, information availability on tourism opportunities, investment benefits, cultural events, and Internet searches for a particular city or location analysis.

The study conducted by Silva et al. (2023) provided a comprehensive analysis of territorial marketing mechanisms and strategies. They collected data from the population using questionnaires and interviews to obtain objective information about the residents' perception of municipal practices and current territorial marketing strategies. The study demonstrated that, despite the residents' devotion to their territories, they do not always feel close to local administrations. Such a situation can increase civic participation and

residents' involvement in city and municipality development decision-making.

The in-depth interview method to determine the effectiveness of the city's marketing policy, as well as its impact on elements of competitiveness, was used in the studies of Alperytė and Išoraitė (2019), Florek et al. (2021), Ma et al. (2021) and others.

Boisen et al. (2018) conducted a comprehensive study that compared the organization of place marketing and place branding in Dutch municipalities, making it one of the most detailed studies investigating the effectiveness of territorial marketing through website analysis. In particular, a comprehensive dataset covering all 390 municipalities in the Netherlands as of 1 January 2016 was collected through a simple content analysis of online resources automatically selected from municipalities' websites. This research is important for our topic, but its application across multiple countries is quite challenging due to the extensive amount of information that must be processed, compounded by varying levels of data availability.

Grodach (2009) used a comparative analysis of city homepage images to determine how much local governments use the Internet as a marketing tool. This analysis reveals how cities' homepages reflect different aspects of the urban environment, such as population, geography and the anthropogenic environment.

Florek et al. (2006) believed that a city's website is the first point of contact for stakeholders, especially those from abroad. Therefore, analyzing the city's communication elements via the Internet is essential for developing integrated territorial marketing systems. Such city marketing tools became especially important in the COVID-19 pandemic (Kusumawati et al., 2023) when cities developed various online tours on their websites to maintain tourism competitiveness.

We agree with researchers who use city website analysis to examine the effectiveness of municipal marketing policies. After all, in the 21st century, the Internet serves as the primary source of information for various brands, including place or city branding. An effective tool for analyzing the city's brand promotion on the Internet is the analysis of search query tendencies in Google Trends, which determines how actively users search for information about

the city or region. It may indicate the general interest and popularity of the place among potential visitors, investors, or residents. Gim et al. (2019) followed these methods in particular for internal and external marketing analysis, which considers factors related to the city environment and allows for keyword identification that determines the basis of trends for the city's marketing strategy. Bellanca and Calogero (2023) utilized it to test the hypothesis regarding place branding dependence on geographical levels and names. Also, Dergiades et al. (2018) and Utama et al. (2022) employed such methods to assess the popularity of tourist routes and locations.

Summarizing the literature analysis, we note that despite the extensive study of territorial marketing and place branding problems, the literature does not provide a comprehensive answer to the question about the impact of territorial marketing on regional and country competitiveness. Therefore, in order to expand the results of modern scientific research on determining the impact of places, cities and territory marketing on a country's competitiveness, we test two study hypotheses:

1. Increasing the city and the region's Internet visibility and positioning helps raise the commitment of tourists and foreign investors to this territory, which can positively affect the country's competitiveness.
2. The information quality on the city's website about the development of tourist areas, investment opportunities, the availability and effectiveness of development programs, and cities, places and regions branding positively influence the country's competitiveness.

Thus, our study aims to identify the influence of cities' and territories' marketing strategies and policies on a region's and the country's competitiveness.

METHODS AND METHODOLOGY

The study of the impact of territorial marketing and place branding on European countries' competitiveness requires formalizing the research objects. Various indicators have been identified in the literature to assess the competitiveness of the country, region, city, or business entity. These indicators include the

quality and cost of products or services, innovation, brand recognition, market strategy, marketing and advertising efforts, logistics and supply chain management, workforce productivity, financial stability, global reach, etc. (Begg, 1999; Gardiner et al., 2006; Kitson et al., 2004; Rogerson, 1999; Turok, 2004; van den Berg & Braun, 1999). Nevertheless, the existing EU Regional Competitiveness Index 2.0 and Global Competitiveness Index are worth using to ensure the comparability of the indicators of different regions and countries. The indexes offer comprehensive details on the various factors that contribute to the competitiveness of a region within an EU member state. These factors include the institution's quality, the macroeconomic environment of the region, the state of infrastructure development, the health and education systems, the progress in the labor market, market size, technological preparedness, business sophistication, and innovation level.

Five EU countries were chosen for analysis to assess the effect of regional marketing policies on competitiveness. This choice was based on the limited scope of the study. In particular, to ensure representativeness, two countries with a high level of competitiveness (the Netherlands and the Kingdom of Belgium), two countries with an average level (the Czech Republic and the Republic of Poland) and one country with a low level (Romania) were selected.

Five regions were selected for each country based on the EU Regional Competitiveness Index 2.0 rating. Their main cities were chosen to evaluate the effectiveness of marketing policies and place branding. For this purpose, marketing policy effectiveness and place branding was evaluated using Google Trends tools. The methodology is substantiated in work by Bellanca and Calogero (2023), Dergiades et al. (2018), Havranek and Zeynalov (2021), Höpken et al. (2019), Onder (2017) and Utama et al. (2022), and is based on selecting keywords and analyzing trends in search queries for these words in Google Trends. In our case, the main city names of five regions of each selected country were chosen as keywords to determine the city's popularity among internal (from the country of city origin) and external (foreign) Internet users. The obtained results are interpreted as averages of the search numbers over the past fifteen years to determine each city's relative popularity. Such an analysis made it possible to evaluate the

policy of regional marketing and place branding and its impact on the perception and interest in regions and cities, which may affect their competitiveness in national and international contexts.

The obtained results value was compared with the EU Regional Competitiveness Index 2.0 indicators using correlation analysis, which allowed us to establish whether there is a statistically significant connection between the city's popularity on the Internet (expressed through search queries) and the competitiveness level of its region or country.

In addition, to assess the qualitative component of territorial marketing and city branding, a website content analysis of the selected cities was conducted following the approach of Boisen et al. (2018), Florek et al.

(2006), and Sáez et al. (2013). To evaluate the city's website and the information promoting its competitive advantages, we analyzed six highly cited scientific works on "city/regional competitiveness" (Begg, 1999; Gardiner et al., 2006; Kitson et al., 2004; Rogerson, 1999; Turok, 2004; van den Berg & Braun, 1999) and six on "city marketing/branding" (Anholt, 2010; Eshuis et al., 2014; Grodach, 2009; Hanna & Rowley, 2008; Kavaratzis & Hatch, 2013; van Ham, 2008) sourced from Google Scholar. These articles had received over 500 and 250 citations, respectively. For this purpose, we leveraged the capabilities of <https://voyant-tools.org/> to analyze the text of the articles mentioned above and pinpoint the keywords that hold the most significance concerning the topics of "city/regional competitiveness" (Figure 1) and "city marketing/branding" (Figure 2).



Figure 1: Keyword map for the topic "city/regional competitiveness"

Source: Built by the author using <https://voyant-tools.org> tools

The keyword map for the topic "city/regional competitiveness" shows that the basis of city competitiveness is economic development, productivity and quality of politics. Interpreting the identified keywords on the websites of the 20 studied cities, it is evident that the city's economic policy and productivity foundations are reflected in the tabs on investments and economic development. Examining the content posted in the tabs on development projects, it becomes feasible to evaluate the caliber of city policy. These tabs typically contain descriptions of existing projects and city strategies, which

reveal the direction of urban development and city policy. Therefore, based on the analysis of the keyword map for the "city/regional competitiveness", criteria such as investment information and development programs were chosen to evaluate city websites.

Regarding the analysis of the keywords on the topic of "city marketing/branding", the keyword map shown in Figure 2 aids in comprehending that the foundation of territorial, place, or city marketing encompasses the brand itself (logo,

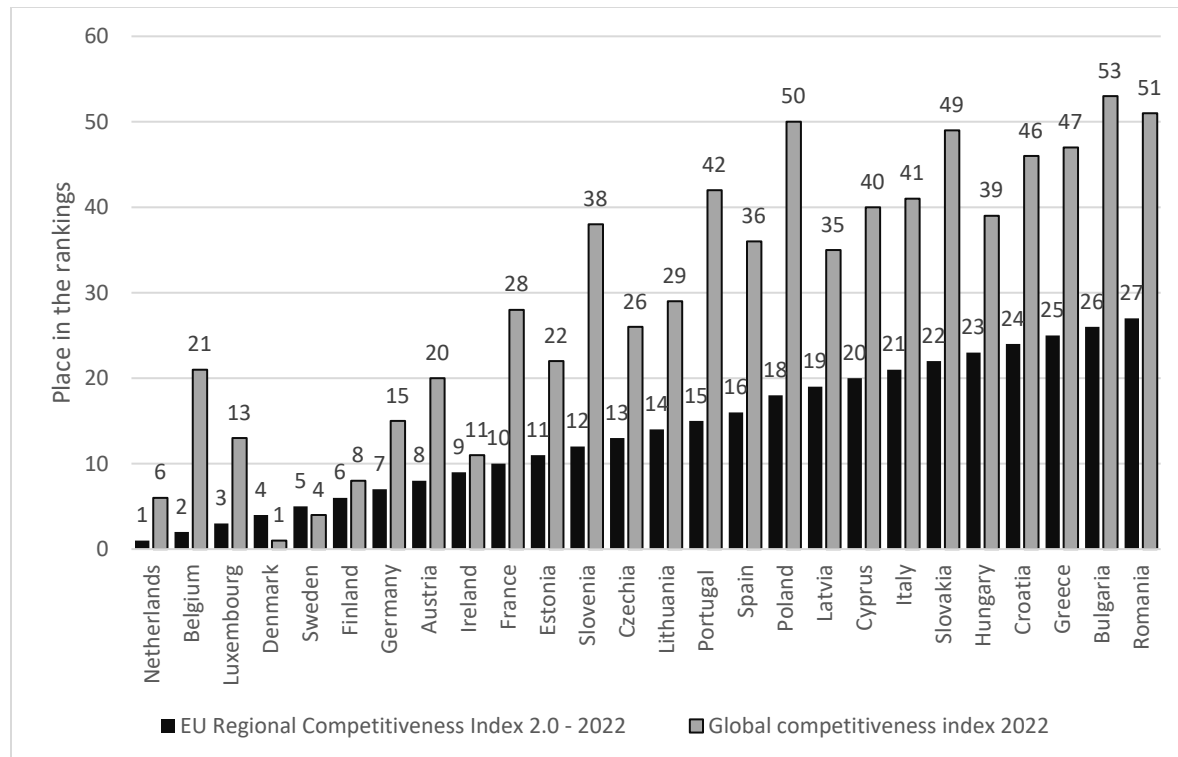


Figure 3: EU member states rankings according to the EU Regional Competitiveness Index and Global Competitiveness Index based on the results of 2022.

Source: Built by the author based on European Commission (2022) and International Institute for Management Development (2022) data.

The correlation coefficient calculated using MS Excel tools indicates a significant correlation ($r=0.8934$) between the EU Regional Competitiveness Index and the Global Competitiveness Index. These, in turn, indicate that the competitiveness of its regions determines the country’s competitiveness on the global stage. Therefore, territorial marketing, as one of the tools for increasing the country’s competitiveness level, needs detailed analysis.

In order to evaluate the brand attractiveness of the main cities around which the regional agglomeration is formed in the Netherlands, the Kingdom of Belgium, the Czech Republic, the Republic of Poland and Romania, the countries with the highest, average and lowest levels of competitiveness were selected. The analysis of brand attractiveness for the main cities in five regions was based on the average number of “City name” search queries from local and global Internet users. The Google Trends functionality was used for this purpose, and the obtained analysis results are presented in Table 1.

The data presented in Table 1 demonstrates that the average number of “City name” searches of internal users in three out of the five analyzed countries exhibits a significant correlation with the EU Regional Competitiveness Index. Moreover, in the Republic of Poland, a significant correlation of the EU Regional Competitiveness Index is observed with search queries of internal users ($r=0.9985$) and external users ($r=0.8448$). Nonetheless, this connection is not absolute, and some cities can have high popularity even with a low competitiveness rating. That shows that developing a city brand requires a comprehensive approach that includes economic aspects, cultural appeal, and marketing efforts.

Table 1: A consolidated table representing the appeal analysis of some region's leading cities in the Netherlands, the Kingdom of Belgium, the Czech Republic, the Republic of Poland and Romania on the Internet

Region	Main city	Competitiveness and marketing indicators			Value of correlation coefficients		
		RCI 2.0 - 2022	The average value of searches for "City name" by users from all over the world, %	The average value of searches for "City name" by users from all over the world, %	The average value of searches for "City name" by users from all over the world, %	The average value of searches for "City name" by users from all over the world, %	
The Netherlands							
Utrecht	Utrecht	151.1	16	31	-0.0209	0.1406	RCI 2.0 - 2022
Zuid-Holland	Rotterdam	142.5	23	40			
Amsterdam and its commuting zone	Amsterdam	140.6	68	72			
Noord-Brabant	Eindhoven	140.6	12	21			
Gelderland	Arnhem	135.7	7	13			
The Kingdom of Belgium							
Brussels and its commuting zone	Brussels	136.3	28	31	0.6485	0.3493	RCI 2.0 - 2022
Oost-Vlaanderen	Ghent	134.6	34	73			
Antwerpen	Antwerp	133.9	34	76			
Limburg (BE)	Hasselt	125.8	11	27			
West-Vlaanderen	Bruges	121.2	24	47			
The Czech Republic							
Prague and its commuting zone	Prague	114.3	53	21	0.7241	-0.1425	RCI 2.0 - 2022
Jihovýchod	Brno	98.8	51	76			
Moravskoslezsko	Ostrava	96.8	26	38			
Severovýchod	Hradec Králové	95.7	7	11			
Střední Morava	Olomouc	95.5	16	26			
The Republic of Poland							
Warszawski stołeczny	Warsaw	118.8	72	76	0.9985	0.8448	RCI 2.0 - 2022
Śląskie	Katowice	96.9	23	23			
Małopolskie	Kraków	94.3	20	45			
Pomorskie	Gdańsk	90.4	10	24			
Dolnośląskie	Wrocław	89.1	10	39			
Romania							
București-Ilfov	Bucharest	93.7	13	11	-0.5073	-0.0835	RCI 2.0 - 2022
Vest	Timisoara	57.8	39	3			
Nord-Vest	Cluj	56.0	72	71			
Centru	Brașov	52.5	42	3			
Sud-Muntenia	Ploiești	52.1	18	2			

Source: author's work.

At the same time, analyzing the demand in search systems for the city name enables the evaluation of the attractiveness for tourists, businesses and investors and compares the city's popularity with other cities. For example, in the Netherlands, the most popular city among the five main cities of the most competitive regions is Amsterdam (68% and 72% of internal and external inquiries), in the Kingdom of Belgium – Ghent (34% and 73%) and Antwerp (34% and 76%); in the Czech Republic – Prague (53% and 21%) and Brno (51% and 76%); in the Republic of Poland – Warsaw (72% and 76%); in Romania – Cluj (72% and 71%). According to Google Trends data, the most famous cities in the Netherlands, the Czech Republic and the Republic of Poland are the capitals, and accordingly, the capital regions, which, in addition to their popularity on the Internet, have one of the highest levels of competitiveness. The capital cities of the Kingdom of Belgium and Romania are not very popular among online users, both within and outside the countries. This could be due to more substantial marketing efforts by other cities and various factors that make them more appealing than the capital cities. In particular, it is about the historical and cultural value of the city (a critical factor for tourist flows), industry (attracting buyers of industrial products), innovation and business climate (drawing in investors).

The study of search query trends with the help of Google Trends enables us to select cities to qualitatively analyze local administrations' marketing strategies and policies by evaluating their websites as the central information platform for stakeholders. The analysis results are grouped in Table 2. The link to Table 2 is available and provided to the editor to preserve the confidentiality of the author.

The website's content analysis regarding the marketing policy and branding effectiveness in the context of the impact on the region's competitiveness made it possible to obtain the following results:

1. The capitals of a state (Amsterdam, Prague, Warsaw) or cities with rich historical heritage (Krakow, Brno) have a higher percentage of search queries on the Internet. In addition, all cities with a rich historical heritage have a "Tourism" thematic tab on their websites, information from which is aimed at promoting the city both in the middle of the country and

abroad. Furthermore, cities with a wealth of historical heritage feature a dedicated "Tourism" section on their websites, which provides information to promote the city to domestic and international audiences.

2. A higher level of city competitiveness and more search queries correlate with better website content, information on starting and running a business, investment projects and city development strategies (Utrecht, Amsterdam, Ghent, Brno, Warsaw).
3. The highest quality content of city websites is demonstrated by all the analyzed Polish cities, which describe information on development projects and city strategy in detail for entrepreneurs and investors.
4. Compared to the other analyzed cities, the Romanian cities' websites have the least information on business, investment and project development, and tourism.
5. Only six of the twenty studied cities (Utrecht, Brussels, Bruges, Brno, Warsaw, Kraków) have a comprehensive marketing strategy and city branding. The connection lies in pursuing a clearly defined objective and vision while enhancing the city's brand and logo across internal and external information platforms.

Thus, the complex use of Google Trends tools and high-quality content analysis of city websites makes it possible to form conclusions, proposals and road maps for marketing territories and cities from countries with lower competitiveness. After all, marketing efforts that attract tourists, entrepreneurs, and investors can enhance the competitiveness of not just one city but the entire region.

DISCUSSION

The use of Google Trends tools to study the popularity of the city brand confirms the results of prior scientific studies (Havranek & Zeynalov, 2021; Höpken et al., 2019; Onder, 2017). The evidence suggests that historical heritage, ancient architecture, landscape, and geographical location are among the primary influences on the search popularity of queries related to a specific city or its location on the Internet. That is, cities and regions with a better historical heritage and preservation of cultural monuments have higher chances for successful territorial marketing and competitiveness

implementation in connection with the formed centuries-old tourist traditions. Bellanca & Calogero (2023) and Utama et al. (2022) also noted the effectiveness of Google Trends tools for evaluating tourist demand for specific tourist locations and brands. In our case, trend analysis using Google Trends shows that cities with historical identity and cultural heritage, such as Brno and Warsaw, have the highest level of interest from internal and external Internet users compared to other cities.

Our study, along with previous research (Havranek & Zeynalov, 2021; Höpken et al., 2019; Onder, 2017), confirms the effectiveness of using Google Trends tools. Limitations exist in using them for marketing research, as described in Cebrián and Domenech's (2023) work, which analyzed the primary quality parameters of Google Trends and highlighted the inadequate quality of the data obtained through this tool. This work specifically addressed the issue of data imperfection in terms of accuracy, which arises from the fact that Google Trends reports are based on a sample of search queries made by users, as noted by Choi & Varian (2012). Cebrián & Domenech (2023) also emphasized the significance of accurate data collection, as its absence can introduce bias. In addition, inaccurate data can affect parameter estimates when estimating econometric models, leading to incorrect economic or political decisions. Indeed, these aspects highlight the constraints of our study and underscore the potential for further comprehensive research on the matter, encompassing a range of marketing strategies.

It should also be considered that modern marketing tools, including Google Trends, may reflect other aspects such as advertising, activities and events, and social media activity, influencing interest in specific locations. Therefore, a city's popularity can result from many factors, including modern marketing approaches and internet strategies (Bettencourt, 2022). In the era of digital transformation, digital communication channels are prioritized, which has been confirmed in previous studies (Ahmed et al., 2019). Online advertising in digital media, mobile advertising, email, and social media content have a substantial impact. In some cases, they have a more significant effect than brand promotion through a website. Based on the previous findings, particularly in the context of branding, it cannot always be determined that

website content is the most effective tool for brand representation. This hypothesis highlights the limitations of the study and suggests the need for further research into the role of various communication channels in territorial marketing.

According to Bütün and Önce (2019), one of the effective ways to evaluate a city administration's efforts in promoting the city brand or specific locations is through content analysis of websites designed for marketing purposes. In our study, the website content analysis of twenty European cities made it possible to confirm the conclusions regarding the utilization of Internet presence opportunities for promoting the city's brand. According to the content analysis data presented in Table 1, it can be seen that having structured tourist information on a website or having links to specialized tourist portals of cities is strongly associated with high average search query values of the town on the Internet over the past 15 years. This applies to cities such as Amsterdam, Ghent, Antwerp, Brno, Warsaw, and Cluj, where the municipalities adeptly have utilized the city's tourism branding to attract both tourists and investors. Moreover, the website's content analysis also proves that several investment projects related to developing tourist infrastructure are being implemented in cities that are known tourist centers.

Pirnar et al. (2017) argued that traditional marketing research tools remain relevant. Therefore, SWOT analysis can effectively complement content analysis, serving as an essential element in improving the effectiveness of a city's brand planning and management strategy. Although digital marketing research tools have an advantage over traditional ones in the context of digital transformations, it is the latter that emphasizes the city's identity. This is the first step in the branding process (Pirnar et al., 2017) and should be taken into account in future research.

An essential element of regional marketing implemented through municipal websites is promoting the city as a center of entrepreneurship with an effective business climate and ease of business. Particular information for entrepreneurs is available on the Utrecht, Amsterdam, Ghent, Brno, and Warsaw websites, which is an important element of public diplomacy, according to the findings of

Florek et al. (2006), and is a vital element of place branding.

It is important to note that vision and mission statements reflect the focus of a city's marketing policy and provide insight into its overall development concept, as stated by Kavartzis and Hatch (2013) as well as Eshuis et al. (2014). Our website content analysis demonstrates that the city's vision and mission are posted on the home pages of only a few cities (Utrecht, Brussels, Bruges, Brno, Warsaw, Kraków). The aforementioned provides a basis for drawing inferences about the necessity of developing a complex marketing strategy and the concept of territorial marketing.

In the context of territorial marketing and competitiveness, our research reveals a correlation between the competitiveness of city regions and the quality of available information on official city websites. Our analysis of search query trends on Google Trends highlights a tendency for countries with highly competitive city regions to provide more comprehensive and higher-quality information compared to less competitive cities. Additionally, the search volume for these cities tends to be lower. Hence, it is worth agreeing with the opinion of Grodach (2009) that in the 21st century, the city website is the main point of contact between the municipality and stakeholders.

At the same time, a limitation of content analysis or analysis using Google Trends is that researchers need access to specific documents of city and regional administrations regarding marketing policy and its goals, although the proposed tools are particularly effective for external research.

CONCLUSION

This study analyzed search queries in web search and conducted content analysis of city websites, revealing significant correlations between the perceived attractiveness of a location, both on the Internet and in real life, and its level of competitiveness.

The analysis has confirmed the hypothesis that increasing the visibility and positioning of the city on the Internet contributes to an increase in the attachment of tourists and foreign investors to the territory. In particular, cities with more search requests on the Internet have a higher competitiveness rating. That indicates the

importance of effective territorial marketing for attracting tourists and investors. Therefore, cities with a lower competitiveness rating and fewer search queries should use Google Trends tools to analyze the city's online positioning. Based on this, the marketing strategy should be adjusted to improve the quality of information about the city on its information resources.

The research also has confirmed the second hypothesis about the quality of tourist and investment information on the city's website positively affecting its competitiveness. Towns with more valuable and diverse website information have a higher competitiveness rating. Hence, cities lacking tourist information on their websites or presenting it in an unstructured manner should devise tools for promoting tourist destinations on their informational resources. That will make it possible to attract more tourists and invest in infrastructure. At the same time, it is advisable to structure and fill the sections of websites related to investment and entrepreneurship development with information. After all, information about the business climate, investment opportunities and a registry of investment projects will enhance the likelihood of attracting investors.

In addition, the cities' website content analysis and the evaluation of search queries in Google Trends make it possible to conclude that cities' competitiveness and popularity depend on their historical identity and profile.

Consequently, cities that lack capital status, significant historical heritage or a solid online presence should focus on developing marketing strategies that enhance their appeal to diverse audiences. That may include promoting historical attractions, cultural and entertainment infrastructure, and active marketing to attract tourists and investors. Thus, the cities and region's competitiveness can be enhanced by boosting the inflow of tourists and improving the investment climate.

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