

Brand Communication in the Digital Context: A Systematic Literature Review (2020-2024)

Comunicación de marca en el contexto digital: una revisión sistemática de la literatura (2020-2024)

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ARTICLE



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Abstract

This study analyses brand communication in a digital context by conducting a systematic review of the literature published between 2020 and 2024. Twenty-five scientific articles were examined using the PRISMA method, employing quantitative and qualitative research to identify trends, methodological approaches, and lines of discourse within the discipline. The results highlight four key areas of brand communication: (1) brand identity construction; (2) the impact of technology; (3) social media engagement; and (4) the growing popularity of purpose-driven brands. The findings reveal that brand identity is a strategic pillar that evolves based on user interactions. Furthermore, the impact of technological advancements is examined.

Key words

brand communication; digital communication; social media; engagement; purpose-driven brands

Resumen

El presente estudio realiza un análisis de la comunicación de marca en el contexto digital mediante una revisión sistemática de la literatura reciente (2020-2024). A través del método PRISMA, se realizó una investigación cuantitativa y cualitativa; se examinaron 25 artículos científicos para identificar tendencias, enfoques metodológicos y líneas discursivas en la disciplina. Los resultados destacan cuatro ejes clave en la comunicación de marca: (1) la construcción de la identidad de marca, (2) el impacto de la tecnología, (3) el engagement en redes sociales y (4) el auge de las marcas con propósito. Se evidencia que la identidad de marca es un elemento estratégico que se transforma en función de las interacciones del usuario. Además, el avance tecnológico ha redefinido las estrategias comunicativas, permitiendo experiencias más personalizadas y omnicanales.

Palabras clave

comunicación de marca; comunicación digital; redes sociales; *engagement*: marcas con propósito

1. INTRODUCTION

In today's digital environment, effective brand management and communication are crucial. In a hyperconnected society with fragmented audiences, brands act as commercial assets and strategic tools that connect organisations with their target markets (Keller, 1993; Kapferer, 2014). The digital age has heightened the importance of branding, driven by the need for differentiation in competitive markets and the increasing significance of experiences and emotions in consumer relationships (Berthon *et al.*, 2009).

Digitalisation has transformed the way we communicate. The rise of social media and user-generated content, coupled with the variety of communication channels available, has changed the way in which brands establish their identity and cultivate relationships. Brand communication has evolved from a controlled, one-way process into an interactive model in which users play an active and influential role (Falls & Deckers, 2012; Moran *et al.*, 2020).

Digital users now have control over how they interact with brands. Instead of passively receiving messages, they co-create content, share opinions, and expect instant replies (Brodie *et al.*, 2013; Voorveld *et al.*, 2018). They decide when, where, and how to engage, thereby shaping their own brand experience (Floreddu *et al.*, 2014). This amplified consumer voice can quickly affect brand reputation. Positive content can enhance a brand's image, whereas negative experiences can trigger a crisis within minutes (Tsimonis & Dimitriadis, 2014; Shahbaznezhad *et al.*, 2020). Consequently, brands must redefine their communication strategies. This involves prioritising active listening and personalised messaging to create meaningful

experiences (Cuevas *et al.*, 2022). Rather than merely promoting products or corporate values, companies should facilitate dialogue, foster digital communities, and act with authenticity in every interaction.

Brand management involves strategies and actions designed to build, position, and maintain a brand's identity, thereby shaping consumer perception (Keller, 2013). Success hinges on competitive strategies that give the brand a competitive edge over its rivals (Palma *et al.*, 2021). Traditionally, brand management has focused on tangible elements such as logos and slogans (Aaker & Joachimsthaler, 2000). However, the field has evolved to adopt a more holistic approach, in which consumer interaction, personalised content, and omnichannel strategies play a crucial role (Kapferer, 2012).

Brand communication is a core component of strategic brand management. It conveys a brand's identity, values, and promises via various channels (Keller, 2020). In today's world, this requires consistent messaging and personalised content to create meaningful consumer experiences (Schultz, 2016). There are three key approaches to understanding brand communication: (1) Brand identity and positioning: Identity reflects a brand's essence, while positioning is critical to communication (Aaker, 2014; Kotler & Keller, 2021). Consistency in both builds consumer trust and loyalty (Paswan *et al.*, 2021); (2) Communication channels and strategies: Brands communicate through traditional and digital media. In the digital era, omnichannel strategies facilitate ongoing, consistent interaction (Lemon & Verhoef, 2016; Mangold & Faulds, 2009); and (3) Consumer engagement and relationships: Engagement refers to consumers' emotional and cognitive involvement with a brand (Brodie *et al.*, 2013).

Two-way communication and active participation foster brand loyalty and advocacy (Dwivedi *et al.*, 2021).

Finally, the evolution of digital platforms has changed the way brands communicate (Jenkins, 2006). Social media has increased reach, facilitated personal interactions, and enabled the creation of content tailored to user interests. It has also introduced new, dynamic forms of interaction (Voorveld *et al.*, 2018).

2. OBJECTIVES

In relation to the development of this academic work, it is important to outline the research objectives. The primary objective of this study is to determine the theoretical status of brand communication in the current digital landscape.

To achieve this aim, the following secondary objectives have been proposed: (1) identifying the most relevant academic contributions on brand communication published between 2020 and 2024 using key indexing metrics; (2) analysing publication trends, including authorship patterns, institutional affiliations, and temporal distribution; (3) examining the main thematic areas, keywords, and conceptual approaches present in the selected literature; and (4) identifying the dominant discursive frameworks shaping contemporary brand communication research.

These objectives will be addressed through a systematic literature review (Booth *et al.*, 2016), combining quantitative and qualitative analytical approaches (Codina, 2020). The study is structured in three stages and focuses on the period from 2020 to 2024.

2. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The evolution of brand communication in the last five years is marked by the convergence of narrative, technology, and social responsibility. This section explores the conceptual pillars that support the findings of this systematic review.

2.1. THE DIGITAL PARADIGM AND “TRANSMEDIA” NARRATIVE

The digital transformation of communication has shifted branding from a unidirectional model to an interactive and participatory process (Falls & Deckers, 2012; Moran *et al.*, 2020). In this environment, brands operate as strategic assets that connect organisations with increasingly fragmented audiences (Kapferer, 2014; Keller, 1993).

Within this paradigm, transmedia storytelling has emerged as a key strategy. It involves the coordinated dissemination of brand narratives across multiple platforms, enabling more immersive and coherent consumer experiences. This approach requires the implementation of omnichannel strategies to ensure continuity and consistency in brand communication (Lemon & Verhoef, 2016; Mangold & Faulds, 2009).

2.2. INTERACTIVE IDENTITY AND USER ENGAGEMENT

Brand identity is no longer a static construct but a dynamic system that evolves through continuous interaction with users. It can be understood through three interrelated dimensions: (1) Identity building: Organisational

success depends on the development of competitive strategies that generate differentiation and sustainable advantage (Palma *et al.*, 2021); (2) Engagement: This refers to consumers' emotional and cognitive involvement with the brand, reflecting an active relational process (Brodie *et al.*, 2013); and (3) Co-creation: Consumers actively participate in shaping brand meaning by generating content, sharing experiences, and influencing brand narratives (Brodie *et al.*, 2013; Floredu *et al.*, 2014; Voorveld *et al.*, 2018).

2.3. The Impact of Technology and Visual Language

Technological advancements have redefined brand communication strategies, enabling more personalised, data-driven interactions (Mogaji & Nguyen, 2022). Three key elements illustrate this transformation: (1) Artificial intelligence and automation: AI-driven tools, such as chatbots and predictive analytics systems, optimise customer journey management and enable real-time personalisation (Gandhi *et al.*, 2024); (2) Interactivity: The incorporation of gamification and interactive features enhances user engagement and strengthens brand relationships (Zhang & Mao, 2016); and (3) Visual communication: High-quality visual and multimedia content, combined with concise messaging, plays a crucial role in capturing attention and improving engagement in digital environments (Cuevas *et al.*, 2022; Demmers *et al.*, 2020).

2.4. PURPOSE-DRIVEN BRANDS AND SOCIAL VALUES

In the current digital landscape, brands increasingly adopt purpose-driven strategies aimed at creating value beyond economic performance (Naidoo & Abratt, 2018). This shift can be understood through three key dimensions: (1) Storydoing: Brands must demonstrate their purpose through concrete actions rather than relying solely on narrative construction (Rodríguez & Lázaro, 2023); (2) Authenticity versus greenwashing. Transparency and genuine commitment are essential, particularly when addressing socially conscious consumers, who are highly sensitive to inconsistencies between discourse and practice (Sebastián *et al.*, 2023; Breves *et al.*, 2022); and (3) Social impact. Digital platforms amplify brand messages and enable organisations to generate social value, reinforcing legitimacy and strengthening relationships with stakeholders (Tsimonis & Dimitriadis, 2014).

This conceptual framework highlights the increasing complexity of brand communication in digital environments, where identity, technology, and social values are closely interlinked. The shift towards interactive, co-creative and purpose-driven communication models highlights the need for a systematic examination of recent academic contributions to the field. A structured, methodological approach is therefore necessary to identify, analyse and synthesise the main research trends and conceptual developments that have emerged in recent years.

3. METHODOLOGY

The first stage involved conducting an initial exploratory search on the concept of brand communication. To this end, the Google Scholar and Scopus databases were consulted. This yielded 919,220 publications on Google Scholar and 10,718 on Scopus.

There are two reasons for choosing Google Scholar and Scopus. Firstly, Google Scholar enables an extensive web search of academic literature using search engines that identify academic resources. Secondly, Scopus provides broader bibliographic coverage of the social sciences and non-English scientific journals (Pastor *et al.*, 2023). The second step involved conducting eight Boolean searches to narrow down the results. A total of 25 articles matching the search criteria were found.

Table 1

Boolean search terms used in Scopus

Concept	Brand communication
Timeframe	2020 – 2024
Subject areas	Social Sciences; Business, Management and Accounting; Arts and Humanities..
Document type	Scientific article
Keywords	Brand communication
Publication stage	Final (already published).
Language	English and Spanish
Access	Open access

Note. Author's own elaboration.

A qualitative content analysis was conducted at this stage. For this purpose, the titles, abstracts, and keywords or thematic descriptors of each selected article were reviewed. Two general cri-

teria were then chosen and applied to all analysed articles. The first criterion was to avoid duplicate academic works, and the second was to include the concept of brand communication. The third and final stage involved conducting a two-phase bibliographic review using the PRISMA method (Moher *et al.*, 2009). The first phase included all articles that met the general eligibility criteria, while the second phase involved reviewing and synthesising the articles. A systematic record of the articles was also produced at this stage by performing a content analysis on eighteen study variables (fourteen quantitative and four qualitative).

Table 2

Variables of the content analysis of articles in the review and synthesis stage

Tools	Measurement and analysis variables
Quantitative	Year of publication
	Number of authors
	Authors' gender
	Country of authors (by institutional affiliation)
	Number of institutional affiliations (university)
	Public funding of articles
	Primary language of publication
	Impact factor
	Views
	Downloads
	Citations generated
	Number of bibliographic references
	Distribution by thematic area
	Keywords
Qualitative	Concepts related to brand communication.
	Type of research:
	Discursive axes on brand communication
	Framework and characteristics (brand communication in the digital context)

Note. Author's own elaboration based on the work of Marta-Lazo *et al.* (2020).

4. RESULTS

The findings of the systematic review have been organised into two categories: quantitative and qualitative. These are presented in a different order from the steps of the PRISMA method. The results are presented below.

4.1. QUANTITATIVE RESULTS

Table 3

Distribution of articles analysed by year of publication

Year	Articles	Percentage
2024	1	4
2023	8	32
2022	3	12
2021	4	16
2020	9	36

Note. Author's own elaboration

Following the bibliographic review, several quantitative results were obtained. Firstly, only one article was published in 2024, accounting for 4% of the total. Secondly, 32% of the articles, totalling eight, were published in 2023. Thirdly, 12% of the articles were published in 2022, making three in total. Fourteen per cent of the articles were published in 2021, making four in total. Finally, 36% of the articles were published in 2020, making nine in total.

Table 4

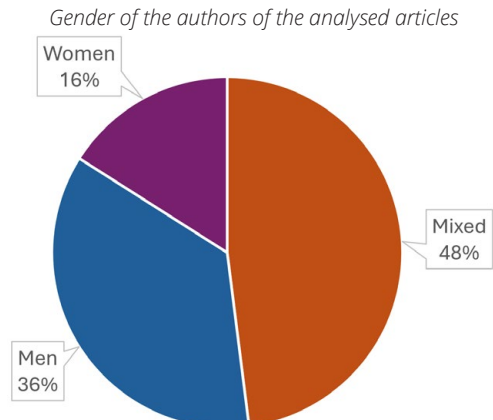
Number of authors of the analysed articles

Authors	Articles	Percentage
1	5	23.8
2	7	33.33
3	7	33.33
4	1	4.76
9	1	4.76

Note. Author's own elaboration

A total of 62 authors are listed across the 25 articles included in the research, equating to an average of 2.48 authors per article. Of the articles reviewed, 90.47% had between one and three authors. 23.8% of the analysed articles were written by a single author, compared to 33% with two authors and 33% with three. Finally, 4.76% of articles were co-authored by four authors. None of the authors listed in the registry published more than one article related to the topic addressed during this period.

Figure 1



Note. Author's own elaboration

Of the articles studied in this research, 48% were co-authored by both men and women, 36% were academic works written solely by men, and 16% were written solely by women.

Table 5

Countries according to the authorship (affiliation of the signing authors) of the analysed articles

Rank	Country	No. of Articles	Percentage (%)
1st	Spain	5	17.24%
2nd	China, Austria, South Africa	3 (each)	10.34%
3rd	USA, UK, Italy, Romania	2 (each)	6.89%
4th	Switzerland, Ireland, Poland, Netherlands, Slovakia, Brazil, Malaysia	1 (each)	3.44%
TO-TAL	15 represented countries	29	100%

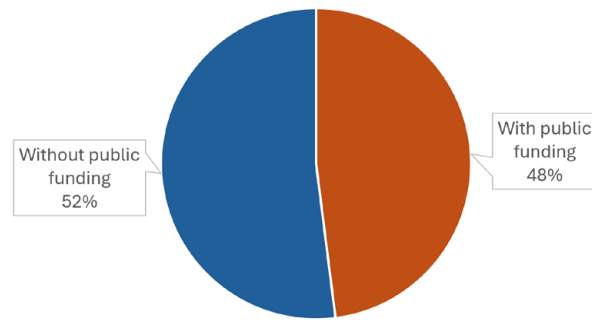
Note. Author's own elaboration.

When articles are analysed by the country of their authors and their institutional affiliation is considered, it becomes clear that Spain has the highest number of publications, at 17.24%. China, Austria, and South Africa follow closely behind with 10.34% each. Meanwhile, the United States, the United Kingdom, Italy, and Romania account for 6.89% each, while Switzerland, Ireland, Poland, the Netherlands, Slovakia, Brazil, and Malaysia account for 3.44% each.

It is also worth noting that the 25 articles have a total of 49 institutional affiliations between them, averaging 1.24 affiliations per article. The institutions with the highest number of affiliations are: The University of the Free State (South Africa), Babeş-Bolyai University (Romania) and the University of Valladolid (Spain).

Figure 2

Public funding of the analysed articles

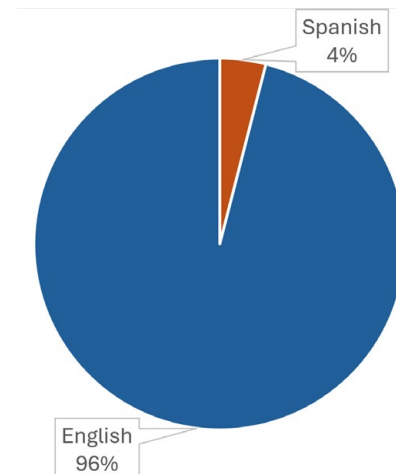


Note. Author's own elaboration.

Of the 25 articles studied, 48% received some form of public funding, such as grants, funds, and sponsorships. The remaining 52% did not receive any public funding. As this graph shows, therefore, many authors published research without receiving any public or state funding.

Figure 3

Main language of the analysed articles



Note. Author's own elaboration.

Of the analysed articles, 96% were written and edited in English by the authors, while the remaining 4% were written in Spanish.

Table 6

Use of bibliographic references in the analysed articles

References	Articles	Percentage
1 – 24	3	12
25 – 49	7	28
50 – 74	10	40
75 – 99	2	8
100 – 149	3	12

Note. Author's own elaboration.

72% of the articles in the study sample have Scopus metrics, compared to 28% that do not appear in the index. Of the articles with Scopus metrics, Scopus indicates that eight (32%) have no data on this subject. The remaining articles have the following impact factors: 36% are between 0.01 and 0.99, 8% are between 1.00 and 1.99, 16% are between 2.00 and 2.99, 4% are between 3.00 and 3.99, and 4% are between 4.00 and 4.99. The range of impact factors was 0.20; the article with the lowest impact factor was 0.20, and the article with the highest was 4.76 (see Table 7).

Table 7

Distribution of study sample articles by Scopus indexing and impact factor ranges

Category	Subcategory	Total Percentage	Additional Notes
Indexing Status	Articles with Scopus metrics	72%	Base for the impact breakdown Do not appear in Scopus
	Articles not in the index	28%	
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Data Status	With metrics, but no subject data	32%	Equivalent to 8 articles.
	With metrics and impact data	68%	Remaining indexed articles.

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Impact Factor	Range 0.01 – 0.99	36%	Lowest recorded value was 0.20.
	Range 1.00 – 1.99	8%	
	Range 2.00 – 2.99	16%	
	Range 3.00 – 3.99	4%	
	Range 4.00 – 4.99	4%	

Note. Author's own elaboration.

In addition, a total of 1,405 visits were recorded for the 25 articles included in the systematic review. These are distributed as follows: (1) 21% have had fewer than 25 visits; (2) 20% have had no visits; (3) 20% have between 25 and 49 visits; (4) 12% have had between 50 and 74 visits; (5) 8% have achieved 100–149 visits; (6) 8% achieved between 200 and 249 visits; (7) 4% have achieved between 75 and 99 visits; and (8) 4% have between 150 and 199 visits (see Table 8).

Table 8

Distribution of Articles by Visit Counts in the Systematic Review Sample

Visit Range	Percentage of Articles	Number of Articles (est.)
0 visits (No visits)	20%	5
Fewer than 25 visits	21%	5.25
25 – 49 visits	20%	5
50 – 74 visits	12%	3
75 – 99 visits	4%	1
100 – 149 visits	8%	2
150 – 199 visits	4%	1
200 – 249 visits	8%	2
Total	97%*	25

Note. Author's own elaboration.

A total of 2,607 downloads were recorded for the articles included in the systematic review, with an average of 104.28 views per article. The visit data is broken down as follows: (1) 32% have been downloaded fewer than 25 times; (2) 24% have been downloaded between 25 and 49 times; (3) 16% have been downloaded between 50 and 74 times; (4) 8% have been downloaded between 100 and 149 times; (5) 4% have had between 75 and 99 downloads; (6) 4% have had between 150 and 199 downloads; (7) 4% have been downloaded between 250 and 299 times; (8) 4% have been downloaded between 400 and 499 times; and (9) 4% have had between 800 and 899 downloads (see Table 9).

Table 9

Frequency distribution of article downloads in the systematic review

Download Range	Percentage of Articles	Number of Articles (est.)
Fewer than 25	32%	8
25 – 49	24%	6
50 – 74	16%	4
75 – 99	4%	1
100 – 149	8%	2
150 – 199	4%	1
250 – 299	4%	1
400 – 499	4%	1
800 – 899	4%	1
Total	100%	25

Note. Author's own elaboration.

In total, the articles were cited 160 times, with an average of 12.30 citations per article. Of the analysed articles, 48% received no citations; 32% were cited between one and nine times; 12% were cited between 30 and 39 times; and 8% were cited between 10 and 19 times. The 25 articles contained a total of 1,443 bibliographic

references, indicating an average of 57.72 references per article. The number of references used in each article is distributed as follows: (1) 40% required between 50 and 74 references; (2) 28% required 25–49 references; (3) 12% used between one and 24 bibliographic references; (4) 12% used 100–149 references; and (5) 8% used between 75 and 99 references. Finally, the article with the fewest bibliographic references had 20, while the article with the most had 127 (see Table 10).

Table 10

Citation impact and bibliographic reference distribution of analyzed articles

Citation Range	Percentage of Articles	Number of Articles (est.)
No citations (0)	48%	12
1 – 9 citations	32%	8
10 – 19 citations	8%	2
30 – 39 citations	12%	3
Total	100%	25

Note. Author's own elaboration.

Table 11

Distribution of the articles analyzed by areas of knowledge

Area	Number	Percentage
Social Sciences	14	34.1
Business, Management, and Accounting	11	26.8
Arts and Humanities	7	17.1
Computer Science	3	7.3
Energy	2	4.9
Environmental Science	2	4.9
Decision Sciences	1	2.4
Economics, Econometrics, and Finance	1	2.4

Note. Author's own elaboration.

Scopus's distribution of analysed articles by subject area shows that 34.1% fall under the social sciences, most of which are included. Other fields follow. Business and management account for 26.8%, while arts and humanities account for 17.1%

Table 12

Keywords that occurred most frequently in the analysed articles

Keywords	Number	Percentage
Brand communication	25	17.99%
Marketing communication	5	3.6%
Social media	2	3.6%
Advertising	2	1.43%
Brand engagement	2	1.43%
Twitter	2	1.43%
Sustainability	2	1.43%
Social networks	2	1.43%
Social media marketing	2	1.43%
Perception	2	1.43%
Mobile phone	2	1.43%
Engagement	2	1.43%
Youth trends	2	1.43%
Youth	2	1.43%

Note. Author's own elaboration.

A total of 139 keywords were registered. Analysis of these keywords indicates that the most frequently occurring ones are 'brand communication' (17.99%), 'marketing communication' (3.6%), and 'social media' (3.6%). The remaining keywords appeared in only 1.43% of cases and included 'advertising', 'brand engagement', 'Twitter', 'sustainability', 'social networks', 'social media marketing', 'perception', 'mobile phones', 'engagement', 'youth trends' and 'youth'.

4.2. QUALITATIVE RESULTS

Table 13

List of concepts related to brand communication most used in the study of the keywords of the analysed articles

Related concepts	Number	Percentage
Narrative (emotional, storytelling and symbolic)	5	7.24
Identity (brand and visual)	4	5.79
Marketing: international, digital, communication and content	4	5.79
Authenticity (cultural)	3	4.34
Content (management and user-generated)	3	4.34
Reputation and crisis management (brand, business, and corporate crises)	3	4.34
Technology: emerging technologies, advertising, AI, and AR	3	4.34
Virtual and digital communities	2	2.89
Trust	2	2.89
Brand design	2	2.89
Engagement	2	2.89
Experience (multisensory, flow, user)	2	2.89
Interaction/interactivity	2	2.89
Social media	2	2.89

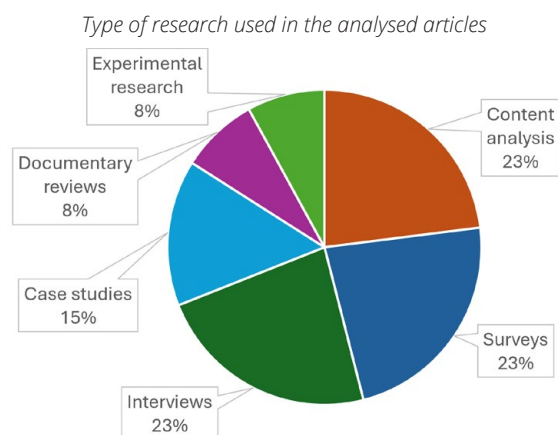
Note. Author's own elaboration.

The second phase of the PRISMA review and synthesis method involves conducting a content analysis of the articles, taking the qualitative study variables into account. 12 of the original 25 articles were excluded at this stage. 13 articles were selected for the final stage because they met the qualitative criteria for pro-

viding information on brand communication. Keyword content analysis revealed a total of 69 concepts related to brand communication. The most frequently used keywords were 'narrative' (emotional, storytelling and symbolic), 'identity' (brand and visual) and 'marketing' (international, digital, communication and content), with five, five and four instances, respectively.

The following keywords each appear four times: 'Authenticity' (cultural), 'Content' (user-generated and management), 'Reputation' and 'Crisis Management' (brand, business, and corporate crisis), and 'Technology' (emerging, advertising, AI, and AR). The concepts of 'communities' (virtual and digital), 'trust', 'brand design', 'engagement', 'multisensory experiences', 'interaction/interactivity', and 'social media' each appear twice. Finally, a total of 50 concepts linked solely to brand communication appear only once.

Figure 4



Note. Author's own elaboration.

The most frequently used research techniques in the analysed articles are as follows: (1) Content analysis, surveys, and interviews, accounting for 23.07% of cases; (2) Case studies, accounting for 15.38% of cases; and (3) Documental reviews and experimental research, accounting for 7.69% of cases.

Table 14

Discursive axes on which brand communication is built in the digital environment

Discursive Axes	Number	Percentage
Brand identity and perception	28	40.57
Projecting a brand through digital communication (social media)	28	40.57
Using technology for brand communication	7	10.14
Purpose-driven brands	6	8.69

Note. Author's own elaboration.

Considering the most frequently used concepts related to brand communication in the analysis of the keywords associated with the articles under study, as well as the discipline's vision presented in the analysed content, the following four main discursive axes on which brand communication is currently built in the digital environment have been identified:

Brand identity and perception

Brand identity is a strategic tool used by companies to increase brand recognition (Fan *et al.*, 2002). Effective development hinges on brand awareness. To establish positive and memorable brand associations, it is necessary to develop clear and well-defined brand images (Erdil, 2015). Smaller businesses tend to adopt a distinctive approach to building their brand identity. Consumers perceive these companies' brands as a combination of formal and informal communication, which strengthens the company's identity and highlights the family's involvement in its management (Binz *et al.*, 2018). The analysed articles also emphasise the vital role of brand communication in establishing and strengthening identity.

Using technology for brand communication

Social media has also transformed marketing from a monologue into a dialogue involving multiple participants (Falls & Deckers, 2012). On the one hand, social media increases the reach of marketing messages and enables personalised communication and the collection of real-time data on brand perception (Floreddu *et al.*, 2014). On the other hand, brands that implement effective social media communication strategies can also generate consumer engagement and foster greater brand loyalty.

Projecting a brand through digital communication (social media)

Companies can strengthen their market presence and build lasting relationships with consumers by engaging with them through social media and interactive formats (Hung, 2014). In addition, scheduling posts, keeping messages concise, and maintaining high-quality visual and multimedia content are all essential for enhancing audience engagement (Cuevas *et al.*, 2022; Demmers *et al.*, 2020).

In line with this, brands are developing various strategies to project their identity in the digital environment. The main strategies include: (1) User-generated content (UGC): Posts created by consumers can strengthen a brand's authenticity and increase its credibility among other users (Voorveld *et al.*, 2018); (2) Influencer marketing: Collaborating with popular social media personalities allows brands to engage with specific demographics (Tsai *et al.*, 2013); (3) Targeted digital advertising: Personalised adverts improve both the relevance of the message and consumer response (Swami *et al.*,

2013); and (4) Interactivity and gamification: Integrating game dynamics into digital communication can encourage user engagement (Zhang & Mao, 2016).

Purpose-driven brands

In a digital context, brands have adopted strategies that focus on creating shared value rather than just economic profit (Naidoo & Abratt, 2018). To attract younger consumers who value a company's commitment to social and environmental issues, communication strategies must reflect purpose-driven branding (Sebastián *et al.*, 2023).

In other words, brands that incorporate these dimensions into their strategy are more likely to stand out from the competition and generate greater consumer loyalty (Naidoo & Abratt, 2018). The rise of social media has also allowed purpose-driven brands to amplify their message and have a positive social impact. Key digital communication strategies for such brands include: (1) 'Storydoing' instead of 'storytelling': Rather than telling stories, brands must demonstrate their commitment through concrete actions that reinforce their purpose (Rodríguez & Lázaro, 2023); (2) Consumer engagement: Brands should encourage their audiences to participate in social initiatives, enabling them to co-create content and support relevant causes (Mayorga *et al.*, 2020); and (3) Avoid greenwashing: To prevent the perception of opportunism or deceptive strategies, communication must be transparent and backed up by concrete facts (Breves *et al.*, 2022).

5. DISCUSSION

It is important to present the two key pieces of evidence that have emerged concerning the development of the discipline. Firstly, there are no theoretical articles. Research indicates that no systematic review articles offering a theoretical approach to defining and delimiting the discipline of brand communication have been published. Secondly, no conceptual standardisation has been found for the term in question. The systematic review also found no clear, uniform standard in the historical approaches adopted by leading experts in the field.

These realities emphasise the need for academic contributions, both theoretical and scientific, to standardise and define multidisciplinary processes, such as brand communication. This reiterates points previously published in other scientific works on the subject, including those by Benavides-Delgado (2017), Clifton (2009), Lynch *et al.* (2004), and Mayorga (2018).

Developing and managing brand identity is one of the most important aspects of brand communication. This has evolved from traditional models to dynamic, interactive schemes within the digital ecosystem (Aaker *et al.*, 2000). The results emphasise the importance of classic techniques.

Another key finding of the systematic review was the impact of digitalisation on brand identity. The constant presence of a digital user base has altered the way in which brands are perceived, with a greater focus now being placed on interaction and collaborative content creation (Floreddu *et al.*, 2014; Voorveld *et al.*, 2018).

This circumstance underscores the significance of brand storytelling on social media for build-

ing brand equity (Rodríguez & Lázaro, 2023). The impact of artificial intelligence, automation, and data analytics on brand communication is a significant issue. As the analysed articles demonstrate, technological transformation is a key factor in optimising communication strategies. The use of artificial intelligence allows brands to personalise communications (Mogaji, E., & Nguyen, 2022).

Automation plays a crucial role in managing the customer journey, from personalising adverts to enhancing the user experience using chatbots (Gandhi *et al.*, 2024). However, some authors have warned of the potential risks of excessive automation, such as creating impersonal experiences that make brands seem inauthentic (Hoffman *et al.*, 2018).

Social media engagement is emerging as a critical factor in brand communication, with a growing dependence on influencer marketing. A review of articles confirms that consumer participation on digital platforms has a significant impact on brand perception (Brodie *et al.*, 2013; Voorveld *et al.*, 2018).

This concept of engagement is a key metric used to evaluate the effectiveness of brand communication. Various publications emphasise the importance of personalisation and interaction in building consumer loyalty (Cuevas *et al.*, 2022). Recent articles have suggested that purpose-driven brands generate engagement and loyalty (Sebastián *et al.*, 2023).

However, qualitative analysis suggests that purpose-driven brands must be both authentic and consistent. Remember that a lack of authenticity can lead to greenwashing - the false support of social causes without active commitment (Breves *et al.*, 2022). These articles allow us to identify the factors that have influenced

the evolution of brand communication in a digital environment: (1) Interaction and co-creation: Brands have transitioned from a one-way communication model to an interactive (Brodie *et al.*, 2013); (2) Personalisation and advanced segmentation: The adoption of technologies such as artificial intelligence and big data allows brands to create personalized experiences for their customers; and (3) Ethical commitment and transparency: Brands must reinforce the authenticity of their communication strategies and avoid deceptive practices that could damage their reputation.

6. CONCLUSIONS

6.1. THEORETICAL IMPLICATIONS

Having conducted the research presented in this academic work, it can be concluded that the study's main objective has been met. The theoretical status of brand communication in the current digital context has been established, and various trends and dynamics in the corporate communication process have been identified.

It is important to emphasise that technological inclusion, the implementation of new tools and techniques, and the convergence of traditional and digital communication channels create a complex brand communication landscape. Therefore, to produce results that meet the needs of brands and users alike, it is necessary to conduct a bibliographic review of this phenomenon.

More specifically, regarding the secondary objectives, it has been confirmed that all of them have been adequately met. Notable milestones

for the first objective include the concentration of publications in the last four years, with 68% of analysed articles being published between 2020 and 2024.

This reflects a growing interest in brand communication as an area of study. Scopus indexing data show that 72% of the analysed articles are registered in this database, indicating a high level of recognition within the scientific community. However, the distribution of the impact factor varies significantly. Only 8% of articles have an impact factor greater than 3.00, demonstrating that few works have achieved significant academic impact. These results are consistent with previous studies indicating that publications in emerging fields take longer to consolidate within citation indices (Stephen, 2016).

Furthermore, an analysis of visits and downloads shows that article visibility can vary significantly. On average, articles received 73.94 visits and 104.28 downloads on Scopus. However, 20% of articles received no visits, while only 8% received between 200 and 249 visits. This suggests that despite growing interest in brand communication, there is still a clear gap in the accessibility of scientific research in this field.

This trend is also evident in the citation variable. Therefore, despite notable growth in academic production in brand communication in recent years, this discipline still faces challenges in terms of impact. The predominance of English-language publications, the high percentage of articles with few citations, and the variability in impact factors all indicate areas where these studies' visibility and accessibility could be improved.

Regarding the second secondary objective, it is interesting to note that the authorship of ar-

ticles suggests academic production in brand communication is predominantly the work of small research teams. With an average of 2.48 authors per article, there appears to be a collaborative dynamic, albeit predominantly within small groups. Indeed, 90.47% of the analysed articles have between one and three authors. This finding is consistent with previous studies indicating that social science research tends to have fewer co-authors than research in fields such as engineering and medicine (Borgman *et al.*, 2002). Analysis of institutional affiliations corroborates this trend, highlighting the active role of certain universities in this area of academic production.

Based on secondary objective 3, the research indicates the thematic areas covered by the analysed articles. Of the analysed cases, 34.1% fall within the social sciences, followed by business management, accounting, and arts and humanities. This demonstrates that brand communication is an interdisciplinary field, combining approaches from communication sciences, marketing, and business management. Despite the challenges surrounding it, brand communication is a globally significant area offering diverse theoretical and methodological approaches that enrich the field of study (Hollebeek *et al.*, 2019).

In terms of keyword usage, 'brand communication' is the most frequently used term, accounting for 17.99% of cases. This is followed by terms such as 'marketing communication' and 'social media', which account for 3.6% each. This highlights the importance of digital platforms in building brand identity and engagement (Guzmán *et al.*, 2020).

Finally, about the fourth and final secondary objective of the research, it is worth bearing in mind that our qualitative analysis of the reviewed articles has enabled us to identify four key themes in brand communication within the digital environment. The first relates to the construction of brand identity. The second relates to the impact of technology on communication. The third focuses on the relationship between brands on social media and consumer engagement. The fourth focuses on the emergence of purpose-driven brands.

6.2. PRACTICAL IMPLICATIONS

The results suggest that developing a strong brand identity is essential for the strategic management of a company. However, brand identity is constantly being redefined in the digital environment. Consumers perceive the brand not only through its messages, but also actively participate in constructing it.

Similarly, technological advancements have transformed brand communication strategies, fostering direct relationships with consumers. Tools such as artificial intelligence, marketing automation, and augmented reality facilitate real-time interaction and the creation of immersive experiences (Mao *et al.*, 2020; Wu *et al.*, 2015).

Furthermore, social media has established a new model of multidirectional communication. In this model, consumers generate and publicly share content about brands while also receiving information (Falls & Deckers, 2012). These platforms have evolved from promo-

tional channels into key spaces for brand engagement. Consequently, the quality of content directly influences engagement on social media. Strategies such as influencer marketing, targeted advertising, and interactive content have been shown to significantly impact brand perception and consumer loyalty.

Finally, the new paradigm of purpose-driven brands reflects consumers' increasing desire for authenticity, sustainability, and corporate social responsibility (Naidoo & Abratt, 2018). Storydoing strategies have become increasingly relevant. Consumers want to see concrete actions that demonstrate a brand's commitment (Rodríguez & Lázaro, 2023). Furthermore, taking part in social impact campaigns and creating content about important issues fosters a sense of community.

This systematic review demonstrates that brand communication has shifted towards a user-centric model in the digital age. To adapt, companies must deliver personalised experiences, encourage interaction, and cultivate long-lasting relationships with their audiences. Current trends suggest that strategic brand management must consider user interaction, technology, digital media, communication channels, and a company's social purpose. Only those that can integrate these elements coherently and effectively will strengthen their position and sustain meaningful connections with consumers.

6.3. LIMITATIONS AND FURTHER RESEARCH

Finally, a series of limitations and future lines of research are presented. Although the aim was to be as innovative as possible, the study was limited to the last five years. Therefore, it would be interesting to expand the scope of the study to analyse whether any previous key studies established relevant theoretical frameworks. Building on the work of Caruana et al. (2015), longitudinal studies could also be conducted from 2024 onwards to observe potential variations over time.

Despite being based on the authors' affiliations, the review did not consider segmentation by region or cultural context. Based on Hooker's (2012) study, it would be interesting to conduct research to identify potential differences in brand communication between countries and regions.

While a systematic review was conducted using qualitative and quantitative techniques, the analysis could be improved by incorporating automated bibliometric analysis (Donthu *et al.*, 2021), co-citation networks (Ji *et al.*, 2022) and text mining (Gaikwad *et al.*, 2014).

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